Well-Poisoning Accusations in Medieval Europe: 1250-1500

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ABSTRACT

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In late medieval Europe, suspicions arose that minority groups wished to destroy the Christian majority by poisoning water sources. These suspicions caused the persecution of different minorities by rulers, nobles and officials in various parts of the continent during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The best-known case of this kind of persecution was attacks perpetrated against Jewish communities in the German Empire between 1348 and 1350. At this time, the Black Death devastated the continent, and Jews were accused of intentionally spreading the disease by poisoning wells. A series of terrifying massacres ensued, destroying many of the major Jewish communities in Europe. This was not, however, the only case in which such charges led to persecution. In 1321, lepers in south-western France were accused of attempting to spread their particular illness by poisoning water sources. These accusations evolved to include the idea that the plot was initiated by Muslim rulers and aided by the Jews of France. As a consequence, both Jews and lepers suffered violent fates, from expulsion or isolation to execution by fire. Similar, albeit less widespread, cases can be traced up until the fifteenth century. Often Jews were the victims, but lepers, Muslims, paupers, mendicants and foreigners also fell victim to persecution justified by allegations of well poisoning.

This dissertation presents a thorough analysis of the subject of well-poisoning accusations and describes why and how they were adopted in the late Middle Ages. The study describes the origins of this phenomenon, how it spread through medieval Europe and its eventual decline. It asserts that in order to explain this process, one must first understand the factors within medieval society, culture and politics that made the idea of a well-poisoning threat convincing. It shows that these accusations were created to justify and drive the persecution and marginalization of

minorities. At the same time, it claims that well-poisoning accusations could not have caused such major political and social shifts unless contemporaries genuinely believed the charges were plausible, convincing and threatening.

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Introduction

During the later Middle Ages, a new idea fueled suspicion of minority groups in Europe: a belief that they might poison wells to cause widespread illness and mortality. Many began to believe that minority groups would try to poison water sources to eliminate the elite and subvert the social order. This would allow one or more of the minority groups to seize control of property or political power. Well poisoning was a particularly intimidating threat. Water is a basic necessity, and if water sources were poisoned, no one would be safe from illness or death. Poison is also usually unnoticeable until a victim falls ill, rendering it an almost unavoidable threat. Given these factors, it may not be surprising that well poisoning struck fear in the hearts of medieval Europeans and sparked rumor and legend. But these fears went beyond mere ideas and turned into actions: several European minorities were persecuted during the later Middle Ages for alleged attempts at well poisoning. The best-known case of this kind of persecution was attacks perpetrated against Jewish communities in the German Empire between 1348 and 1350. At that time, the Black Death devastated the continent, and Jews were accused of intentionally spreading the disease by poisoning wells. A series of terrifying massacres ensued, destroying many of the major Jewish communities of Europe. This was not, however, the only case in which such charges led to persecution. In 1321, lepers in south-western France were accused of attempting to spread their particular illness by poisoning water sources. These accusations evolved to include the idea that the plot was initiated by Muslim rulers and aided by the Jews of France. As a consequence, both Jews and lepers suffered violent fates, from expulsion or isolation to execution by fire. Similar, albeit less widespread, cases can be traced up until the fifteenth century. Often Jews were the victims, but lepers, Muslims, paupers and foreigners also fell victim to persecution justified by allegations of well poisoning.

This study describes how the idea of well poisoning developed over time and explains how it gained popularity. It answers the following series of questions: What were the origins of the fear of well poisoning? How did this notion spread across Europe? How did accusations of well poisoning convince local officials, nobles and rulers to act against minorities? Which particular minority groups were targeted in each case and why, and under what circumstances were the charges transferred from one group to another? And finally, why did well-poisoning accusations decline during the fifteenth century? In order to answer these questions, this study examines the development of well-poisoning accusations during the Middle Ages, from their first emergence through the fifteenth century, and analyzes their various historical contexts. The questions above are answered in the course of six chapters. Chapter One studies the origins of the accusations. It concludes that several historical transitions in the thirteenth century laid the foundations for the development of these charges at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Chatper Two focuses on the first wave of well-poisoning charges, against lepers in Southern France and Aragon in 1321. It shows that local officials promoted the allegations, and in this way deprived lepers of political and economic privileges they had been awarded by the Crown. Chapter Three analyzes the transfer of the accusations from lepers to Jews in 1321, showing how the nobility of central France played a key role in this process. Chapter Four studies the reemergence of well-poisoning accusations during the first outbreak of the Black Death in 1348, in Provence, Languedoc, Aragon, the Dauphiné and Savoy. It shows that the charges were first directed against paupers, vagabonds and mendicants, and only later transferred to Jews, mostly in the Dauphiné and in Savoy. Chapter Five discusses how well-poisoning accusations spread throughout German-speaking lands, and explains the political dynamic which allowed them to flourish. It shows that many indeed found the accusations convincing—that they were more than a mere excuse to act against the Jews. Chapter

Six studies the decline of this idea in the next century, showing that while there were still occasional well-poisoning allegations, they never developed into mass persecution. It characterizes the later cases and proposes reasons why the accusations declined. Overall, then, the study explores the rise and decline of mass well-poisoning accusations in European society during the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

This study proposes several main conclusions regarding well-poisoning accusations. Major cases of such charges did not appear before the beginning of the fourteenth century. This was not coincidental, as many of the social, political and environmental factors that enabled their development appeared only in the course of the thirteenth century. The most significant of these factors were the growing urbanization of Europe, the popularity of criminal poisoning charges and the development of medical literature about poison. To those one should add the growing marginalization of European minorities. With respect to the first major wave of well-poisoning accusations, in France and Aragon in 1321, I show that they started in south-western France and were first aimed only against local lepers, not against Jews. Local authorities, and especially municipal councils, promoted these charges in order to take control over the property of the leprosaria and segregate the lepers. The allegations developed gradually, through a series of investigations and trials, and eventually expanded to describe an international conspiracy organized by Muslim leaders. Only at this point, almost three months after the persecution of lepers began, were the Jews implicated in the plot by some of the nobles of central France. These nobles were attempting to convince the king to act against the Jews, who enjoyed his protection. This initiative was successful, mainly because the king had already acknowledged the existence of a lepers' plot, and the Jews of France were expelled. The accusations disappeared for 27 years, only reemerging with the first outbreak of the Black Death in Europe, in 1348. I demonstrate that when

these accusations reappeared, in the southern areas of Europe, they were initially directed against paupers, vagabonds and foreigners—again, not against Jews. There were significant reasons to believe that members of these groups could spread the plague through mass poisoning, and authorities in southern Europe were occasionally convinced that they had in fact done so. The accusations were only transferred from marginalized Christians to Jews more than two months later, in the territories of the Dauphiné and Savoy. Again, this transference was made possible only through the organized efforts of the officials there, probably directed by the Dauphin himself, and it was not a spontaneous occurrence. A series of arrests, investigations, trials and executions ensued, as officials communicated information about the alleged plot to their peers. Soon, the persecution spread into the German Empire, where it focused on the Jews (though some Christian suspects were still put on trial). I show that despite an existing historiography that generally claims that anti-Jewish violence in the Empire was caused mostly by political and economic interests, well-poisoning accusations actually played a major role in this dynamic. They were convincing enough to shift political alliances and produce anti-Jewish coalitions in many of the cities of the Empire, many of which executed their Jews. Finally, a survey of all known well-poisoning accusations after 1350 shows that there were fewer such cases at this time, and almost none after 1420. I suggest that this decline was mostly due to the nature of the accusations, which originally did not evolve in a manner which allowed them to be a long lasting historical phenomenon, despite their great popularity during the fourteenth century.

Well-poisoning accusations merit close study above all because they led directly to significant episodes of persecution against minorities, which transformed their presence in different parts of Europe. The leprosaria of France never recovered from the persecution of 1321, and neither did the Jewish population in the kingdom. The persecution of Jews in the Empire in

1348-1350 destroyed many of the communities there, which had to be completely rebuilt. Well-poisoning accusations were thus a major historical force which affected the existence of minorities across Europe. Second, study of the accusations allows historians to gain insight into the process by which ideas influence social or political action. When these accusations were presented, many officials or rulers decided to move from defending minority groups to acting against them. Exploring this process allows for a better understanding of the factors that shaped the decision-making of European rulers. Finally, this study contributes to our understanding of the unique society and culture of the latter Middle Ages. Well-poisoning accusations appeared, flourished and declined during a period of about a century. Following this process and explaining why it happened naturally reveals much about the structure of the society in which this particular historical phenomenon existed.

Well-poisoning accusations were also distinct from criminal poisoning charges, and from other types of allegations famously directed against Jews during the Midde Ages, in particular ritual murder. Standard cases of poisoning or ritual murder usually targeted a specific person. By contrast, well poisoning was an attack against the public - in medieval terms, a weapon of mass destruction. Moreover, Christians, Jews and others shared common water sources. Any minority group seeking to poison the Christian majority had to consider the fact that its own members would be at risk from this action. Thus, the only way to guarantee the safety of members of the minority would involve conspiring with all of them to ensure that they did not drink the poisoned water. Hence the belief that, in order to be effective, well poisoning required a widespread conspiracy. In contrast, ritual murder accusations or blood libels often focused on one community or a few suspects. In addition, since well poisoning was by definition an attack against the public, it was seen as a practical attempt to destroy Christianity, or force it into a subjugated state. Other anti-

Jewish accusations, hateful and outrageous as they may have been, never suggested that the very existence of the Christian world was in practical danger. Therefore, the leap from criminal poisoning charges against individuals and more common anti-Jewish allegations to well-poisoning accusations is more significant than may appear at first sight. They were a fundamentally different historical phenomena, and we will see that there were no direct causal connections between the two.

Despite the significance of well-poisoning accusations in late medieval society, they have never been the focus of a specialized study. The lack of such research is somewhat surprising, considering that almost every book about the Black Death mentions the persecution of Jews as one of the consequences of the plague, and studies of Jewish history in the Middle Ages refer to it often. However, in many of these cases the discussion is based on secondary sources alone. In other cases, scholars consider well-poisoning accusations simply as a natural progression of the violent relationships between Christians and Jews in the Middle Ages, and give little attention to the contextual explanation of this historical phenomenon. Many of these studies, for example, merely present a description of the accusations and the persecution, with very little historical analysis. Other historians do offer sophisticated treatments of the subject, but in focusing on particular episodes of persecution related to well-poisoning accusations. Only a few scholars have offers broader analyses of the phenomenon of well-poisoning. Joshua Trachtenberg, in his famous *Devil and the Jews* (1943), dedicated a full chapter to the idea of Jews as poisoners; his work is cited in almost every study on the subject that has appeared in English since it was first published. Trachtenberg suggests that poisoning accusations against Jews were part of their demonization in medieval Christian culture. This explanation is indeed intriguing, and Trachtenberg presents his

case convincingly, but since he wrote his book scholarship on medieval society has evolved tremendously and his interpretations must be revisited. Carlo Ginzburg, in *Ecstasies* (1989), makes an interesting, albeit somewhat speculative, attempt to connect the persecution of 1321 with that of 1348, but never offered a comprehensive explanation of well-poisoning accusations as a historical phenomenon. Other scholars have focused on particular aspects of well-poisoning accusations: Séraphine Guerchberg studies the connections between scientific ideas about the plague and accusations of well poisoning. Françoise Bériac-Lainé explores the history of the lepers in France, identifying their persecution in 1321 as a turning point. David Nirenberg also analyzes the events of 1321, stating that political motives played an important part in the development of the accusations in France and Aragon. Franck Collard writes about poison and poisoning accusations in the Middle Ages generaly, and does not neglect the subject of well poisoning.[1] These works are important sources and inspirations for this study, and are cited often in different contexts.

Several studies focus more narrowly on the persecution of the Jews during the first outbreak of the Black Death. The most extensive of these is František Graus' *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde*, which presents a full history of the events of 1348-1350; he does not offer, however, a general explanation of well-poisoning accusations. Graus did not ignore the subject completely,

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[1] Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jews and its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), 97-108; Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon, 1991), 33-86; Séraphine Guerchberg, "The Controversy over the Alleged Sowers of the Black Death in the Contemporary Treatises on Plague," in *Change in Medieval Society: Europe North of the Alps, 1050 -1500*, ed. Sylvia L. Thrupp (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1962), 208-224; David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 52-56, 93-105, 231-249; Françoise Bériac, "La persécution des lépreux dans la France méridionale en 1321," *Moyen âge* 93 (1987), 204-221; Françoise Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots: recherches sur les sociétés marginales en Aquitaine medieval* (Bordeaux: Fédération Historique du Sud-Ouest, 1990), 119-138; Franck Collard, *The Crime of Poison in the Middle Ages*, trans. Deborah Nelson-Cambell (Westport: Praeger, 2008), 51-53, 104-106, 151-155.

but as we will see, his analysis raises some questions. Alfred Haverkamp published a long article about the persecutions and presented the cultural and religious reasons for it. This is one of the best researched and most coherent studies of these events, but the accusations themselves are hardly explained in it. Similarly, Samuel Cohn discusses the persecution of the Jews in the later Middle Ages, and came to the conclusion that the Black Death was indeed a historical turning point. He suggested that before 1348, the persecution of Jews was mostly driven by cultural and religious causes, and afterwards mostly by economic and social factors. Yet, like Graus and Haverkamp, he gives little weight to the accusations themselves in explaining the events that preceded the Black Death, or those that followed it.[2]

In general, then, historians often mention well-poisoning accusations within broader contexts, but no study has focused solely on the central phenomenon of well poisoning and attempted to provide a comprehensive account of how it developed and why. While taking into account the existing scholarship, this study offers such a comprehensive view of well-poisoning accusations as a unique historical phenomenon.

This historical task is not as simple as it may seem, and some methodological and theoretical aspects of it call for explanation. One such aspect is the nature of the historical analysis presented here. Many of the following pages include a chronological review of the appearance of the accusations, a mapping of their geographical spread, and estimates regarding the scale of each episode. This list of "facts" may create the impression that this study is a positivist attempt to

[2] František Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde: das 14. Jahrhundert als Krisenzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1987), 299-334; Alfred Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes im Gesellschaftsgefüge deutscher Städte," in *Zur Geschichte der Juden im Deutschland des späten Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit,* ed. Alfred Haverkamp (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1981), 27–93; Samuel K. Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," *Past and Present* 196 (2007), 3-36.

reconstruct the historical reality of well-poisoning accusations "as they truly were". That is in no way the goal. The careful review of the details is intended to create a basis for the analysis of the accusations as a force for social change, and for an explanation of the dynamic which allowed them to act in that way.

For William Sewell an "historical event" is "a ramified sequence of occurrences that is recognized as notable by contemporaries, and that results in a durable transformation of structures."[3] He adds that "in spite of the punctualist connotations of the term, historical events are never instantaneous happenings: they always have a duration, a period that elapses between the initial rupture and the subsequent structural transformation."[4] He then proceeds to analyze the taking of the Bastille in July 1789 as an event that caused and symbolized the French Revolution. He notes that the battle itself was a fairly limited affair, which was significant mostly for the attackers, and for the few prisoners who were fortunate enough to be released on 14 July. But how could this minor incident generate a social dynamic which ultimately transformed political structures that had been in place for centuries? To answer this, Sewell studies the days that followed the taking of the Bastille, and explains how this action came to be described as a major symbol of the possibility and the necessity of a deep political change, and as a model for the ways to achieve such a change. This happened only over time; it was the result of a complex social dynamic that caused many to accept this symbol, and drove them to action against the existing order. In this way, Sewell analyzes the manner in which an historical incident was transformed into an historical "event." He points out the importance of following the details of this process, mapping them, and reviewing their chronology: "Careful reconstruction of the narrative is, I

[3] William H. Sewell, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 228.

[4] Ibid, 229.

submit, an intellectual necessity in any analysis of events. But it is also necessary to tack back and forth between narration and theoretical reflection."[5] In other words, the careful description of the "facts" serves the theoretical analysis of the event, while the theoretical framework allows the historian to organize the information.

This same logic applies to the study of well-poisoning accusations. We will see that in 1321, the accusations evolved over time, and details were added to them. When chroniclers reported about the alleged plot at the end of that year, they were already presenting a developed narrative—an agreed version of the event that held that Jews and lepers conspired together, supported by Muslim leaders, to poison all of the wells in the kingdom of France. This event certainly created a structural change, as it led to mass execution of lepers and Jews, while the survivors were segregated (in the case of the lepers) or expelled (in the case of the Jews). Yet in order to understand what made these accusations convincing and powerful enough to bring about this structural change, one has to study the process by which they were created. It is necessary to show where the accusations started, to describe their exact nature at different times and locations, and to explain how and why different political agents decided to adopt them. Naturally, to do so, one has to analyze the existing evidence carefully, giving particular attention to documents created during the process of formation of the allegations. The same can be said about the events of 1348-1350, or about later episodes of well-poisoning accusations. To understand these, one has to explain under what circumstances the allegations reappeared, how were they transferred from one minority group to another, and most of all, why contemporaries found them convincing. The ultimate goal of the mapping, the establishment of the chronology and the thorough analysis of

[5] Ibid, 244.

primary sources, then, is to allow a deep understanding of the dynamic which allowed the accusations to cause major social changes.

This study may provoke another kind of criticism, focusing on its historical perspective rather than on methodological issues. It necessarily discusses mostly the ideas, motives and actions of the accusers, rather than the accused, thus potentially justifying the violence or even validating the accusations. This first point is absolutely correct, as the study indeed focuses mainly on the point of view of the accusers. The second, however, is untrue. In order to understand the social dynamic which made well-poisoning accusations the cause of social change, including violence against minorities, this study acknowledges that contemporaries may have found these accusations convincing. It never claims that the accusers were right, or that their actions were justified. Moreover, it focuses on the perspectives of the persecutors exactly because it claims that the violence erupted due to their ideas, interests and actions, thus assuming that the action of the persecuted minorities had little influence over this process.[6] This is the case also because this study attempts to explain historical medieval perceptions which warrant an explanation: the fact that Christians accepted the accusations should be explained, while the fact that Jews (or other minorities) rejected them is trivial. In addition to the theoretical reasons for a focus on the accusers, there is also a technical reason, namely that the great majority of the surviving documents represent their point of view. It is almost impossible to conclude based on an inquisitorial record what the suspects really thought, did, or even meant to say. These documents represent the views of the people who composed them, that is the investigators, officials or notaries. The same is true for other sources which recorded well-poisoning accusations, mostly chronicles and official letters. These sources again report events through the eyes of the authorities, or of scholars who were

[6] Not at all a necessary assumption, see: Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Tel-Aviv: ‘Alma/‘Am ‘Oved, 2000), 12-14.

usually of a high social standing. They rarely describe reliably the views of the victims, who were usually occupied with more pressing issues than history writing. Even if one wanted to write the history of well-poisoning accusations from the perspective of the persecuted minorities, the task would be almost impossible, and it would in any case do little to explain why things happened as they did.

Alternatively, it is possible to claim that this study blindly adopts the point of view of the victims by assuming that well-poisoning accusations were always false. The idea of mass poisoning of wells seems unlikely, but if so many in medieval Europe considered it real, why should we immediately presume that they were wrong? The answer to this question is based not on theoretical considerations, but on historical analysis. Some chroniclers suggest that the people of medieval Europe suddenly discovered that the wells were poisoned, but a thorough study of the sources shows that this is very unlikely. We will see that the details of the alleged plot were invented and put together over time, additional minority groups were implicated, and political coalitions supporting the charges were formed. In short, the belief that the wells were poisoned originated from a political, social and cultural processes, not from an actual discovery of infected water sources.

This study often refers to the “persecution” of minority groups, and sometimes of individuals; this term calls for some clarification. It is usually used here to indicate the implementation of organized violence against marginalized groups or individuals. The form of the violence may change, as expulsion or confiscation of property can also be considered persecution. Still, in the context of well-poisoning accusations the persecution often included arrests, investigations (sometimes under torture) and organized executions of suspects. Similarly, the agent

(or agents) organizing the violence might vary from officials to groups of attackers from lower classes, but in the context of well-poisoning accusations, nobles, officials, institutions or rulers were the ones who applied the violence, rather than members of the general public. Occasionally, when there a need to clarify who was responsible for the violence, the study uses the terms "execution", "legal violence" or "institutional violence" to suggest that officials organized it. Alternatively, when members of the lower classes were the ones to initiate violent acts, it applies terms like "mob violence", "popular violence", or simply "pogrom". Other terms, such as "attack", "revolt" or "violence" remain neutral (insofar as such terms can be neutral). This is not to suggest that this is the only correct use of the term "persecution", or any of the other terms listed above.[7]

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To conclude, this study presents a thorough analysis of the subject of well-poisoning accusations and describes why and how they were adopted in the late Middle Ages. The study describes the origins of this phenomenon, how it spread through medieval Europe and eventually declined. It asserts that in order to explain this process, we must first understand the factors within medieval society, culture and politics that made possible the idea of a well poisoning. It shows that these accusations were indeed created to justify and drive major social transformations, and in particular the persecution and marginalization of minorities. At the same time, well-poisoning accusations could not have caused such major political and social shifts, unless contemporaries genuinely believed the charges were plausible. And so, this study explores medieval well-

[7] The use of violence, as well as its nature, norms and meaning, developed and transforemed throgh the Middle Ages. Inter alia: Warren Brown, *Violence in Medieval Europe* (Harlow: Longman, 2011), 288-298; Daniel Baraz, *Medieval Cruelty: Changing Perceptions, Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 75-122; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence,* 3-7, 127-230; Robert Ian Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*: *Authority and Deviance in Western Europe 950-1250* (Blackwell, Oxford, 2007), 1-171.

poisoning accusations, explains why they were adopted by the people of Europe, and analyzes the ways in which they sparked social change in the later Middle Ages.

Chapter 1: The Origins of Well-Poisoning Accusations

In order to examine the major events in which well-poisoning accusations led to persecution of minorities, one should first review the environmental, cultural, social and political circumstances in which such accusations evolved. Gavin Langmuir, writing about religious thought in medieval Europe, claimed that "it would be hard to find a clearer example of irrational scapegoating [than well-poisoning accusations against Jews]".[1] From the perspective of a contemporary historian, he is surely right: these ideas are so far from our mentality and social conventions that it seems they could hardly be explained rationally. Yet, what may seem irrational in one situation may seem quite rational under different circumstances. It is easy to understand why mass poisoning would seem more rational to people who witnessed the unprecedented mortality of the Black Death or the great famine of 1315-1317. And so, in examining the development of well-poisoning accusations, it is necessary to first understand their historical context.

This chapter aims to describe a society in which mass well poisoning is considered a real possibility, but not to establish direct causality between social phenomena and the development of well-poisoning accusations. For example, one can imagine that the fear of contamination of urban water sources could have contributed to the development of these claims. However, as we will see, while the fear of water contamination was a reality of life in most late medieval towns, not all of these towns witnessed episodes of well-poisoning accusations. Thus, water contamination could contribute to the emergence of such accusations, but was not enough to cause them. This chapter will review these kinds of contributing factors, rather than the direct causes for particular episodes of well-poisoning accusations.

[1] Gavin I. Langmuir, *History, Religion and Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 301.

In order to establish how these contextual factors contributed to the emergence of well-poisoning accusations, we must first consider when and where these accusations began. This chapter is divided into three major parts. The first includes a review of possible early cases of well-poisoning accusations, based on existing historiography. It claims that despite the historiographical consensus that such accusations were made throughout the High Middle Ages, they were quite rare before the fourteenth century. The second part discusses the circumstances of medieval life which could have contributed to the development of well-poisoning accusations. It studies the environmental factors which put urban water supplies in danger, and then moves to describe the cultural, social and political realities which contributed to belief in well poisoning. Next, it reviews the medical literature regarding the idea of poisoning. The third part discusses the possibility that four different minority groups - Jews, lepers, Muslims and heretics - were perceived as poisoners before the fourteenth century. Finally, the chapter concludes by highlighting the most significant factors for the development of well-poisoning accusations. Overall, this chapter presents the complex circumstances that contributed to the emergence of the accusations rather than insisting on one social factor as their sole cause.

1. Well-poisoning accusations before 1321: a medieval reality or a historiographical fiction?

Before analyzing the factors which could cause well-poisoning accusations, we must determine when exactly they began. The first well-documented cases of such accusations come from France and Aragon in 1321. However, the few historians who have attempted to establish the timeline of this phenomenon believed that Jews, and maybe other minorities, had been charged with well poisoning before that date. Joshua Trachtenberg, who was the first English-language historian to discuss this question, dedicated a chapter in his book *The Devil and the Jews* (1943) to the Christian

belief that Jews were poisoners. He listed several cases of well-poisoning accusations against Jews that took place before 1321.[2] Salo Baron also addressed the subject in his project *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (1967), and mentioned the same cases as Trachtenberg.[3] Other historians who wrote about the subject in English cited either Trachtenberg or Baron for proof that such early accusations existed, and did not reexamine the primary sources.[4] And so, a historiographical tradition was established, and scholars were convinced that well-poisoning accusations against Jews began as early as the twelfth century. We will soon see that this tradition is questionable at best, other than one case, from 1306.

Trachtenberg and Baron were misled by earlier historiography. Both cite a reference book by Hanns Bächtold-Stäubli dealing with German folklore, and a monograph about the history of the Jews in Bohemia, as sources for the existence of early cases of well-poisoning accusations.[5] In turn, these sources are also based entirely on secondary literature, mostly composed by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German historians and Orientalists.[6] All of these scholars appear to have been referring to one of two sources: The first is a sixteenth century chronicle written by

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[2] Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, Ch. 7, 97-108, see especially: p. 237, n. 2 and p. 238, n. 14.

[3] Salo Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 11:160.

[4] Barbara John, "An Examination of the Origins and Development of the Legend of the Jewish Mass Poisoner," in *Honouring the Past and Shaping the Future: Religious and Biblical Studies in Wales; Essays in Honour of Gareth Lloyd Jones*, ed. Robert Pope (Leominster: Gracewing, 2003), 183-184; Mordechai Breuer, "The 'Black Death' and Antisemitism," in *Antisemitism through the Ages*, ed. Shmuel Almog, trans. Nathan H. Reisner (Exeter: Pergamon, 1988), 139; Jeffrey Richards, *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages* (London, New York: Routledge, 1990), 103; James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews: A History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 277; Gabriel Wilensky, *Six Million Crucifixions: How Christian Teachings About Jews Paved the Road to the Holocaust* (San Diego: QWERTY Publishers, 2010), 35.

[5] Hanns Bächtold-Stäubli, *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* (Berlin and Leipzig: W. de Gruyter & Co., 1927-1942), 4:825; František Dvorský and Gottlieb Bondy, *Zur Geschichte der Juden in Böhmen*, *Mähren und Schlesien von 906 bis 1620* (Prague: Bondy, 1906), 1:7-8, no. 14, 2:886, no. 1110.

[6] For early cases of well poisoning, Bächtold-Stäubli cites: Hermann Leberecht Strack, *Das Blut im Glauben und Aberglauben der Menschheit* (München, Beck, 1900), 196-197, n. 3; Johann Gottlieb Kahlo, *Denkwürdigkeiten der königlichen preußischen souverainen Grafschaft Glatz* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1757), 113, n. 35; Colmar Grünhagen, *Breslau unter den Piasten als deutsches Gemeinwesen* (Breslau: J. Max & Komp., 1861), 85; Dvorský and Bondy cite: Joseph von Hormayr, *Archiv für Geographie, Historie, Staats- und Kriegskunst 10* (Vienna: Strauß, 1820), 604; Vojtěch Ruffer, *Historie Vyšehradská* (Prague: Antonín Renn, 1861), 62-63.

Wenceslaus Hájek of Libočan in Bohemia, which describes well-poisoning accusations against Jews in 1161.[7] The second is a history of Wroclaw (Breslau) written by Nikolaus Pol at the beginning of the seventeenth century, which mentions persecution of the Jews there in 1226.[8] These two accounts were written several centuries after the events they describe, and so their reliability should be questioned. This is also true for almost all of the primary sources reporting early well-poisoning. This fact by itself casts doubt on the opinion that early cases indeed occurred, even before examining each source separately.

Of the two cases mentioned above, the one focusing on the persecution of Jews in Wroclaw in 1226 does not actually refer to well poisoning at all. Pol states that in 1219, a great fire struck the city of Wroclaw, followed by three years of hunger and plague. In 1226, the Jews were expelled from the town, possibly with some connection to these previous events. Pol does not mention well poisoning, but Bächtold-Stäubli speculated that this may have been the reason for the expulsion.[9] He probably based this idea on the fact that the expulsion closely followed the plague. This may have led him to hypothesize that Jews were banished as a result of accusations that they poisoned wells and caused the illness. Acknowledging the speculative nature of this argument, he printed a question mark next to this case, which disappeared in the English publications of Trachtenberg

[7] Václav Hájek z Libočan, *Kronika česká*, ed. Václav Flajšhans (Prague: České akademie věd a uměni, 1918-1933), 3:229-231. I thank Irina Denischenko for her help in translating the relevant part of this text into English. The first edition of this text was published in 1541: Václav Hájek z Libočan, *Kronika česká* (Prague: Severýn & Ondřej Kubes, 1541); a German translation was published in 1596: Václav Hájek z Libočan, *Böhmische Chronica VVenceslai Hagecij*, trans. Johannes Sandel (Prague: Nicolaus Straus, 1596); a partial Latin translation with textual criticism was published in 1761: Wenceslai Hagek a Liboczan, *Annales Bohemorum*, trans. Victorinus a Sancta Cruce, ed. Gelasius Dobner, (Pragaue: Kirchner, 1761-1782); Dobner showed that Hájek can rarely be trusted as a source of historical information. For early modern sources which adopted this story, see: GJ (Germania Judaica), 1:48, n. 66.

[8] Nicolaus Pol, *Jahrbücher der Stadt Breslau* (Breslau: Graß and Barth, 1813), 50-51.

[9] Pol, *Jahrbücher der Stadt Breslau*, 50-51; Grünhagen, *Breslau unter den Piasten*, 85; Bächtold-Stäubli, *Handwörterbuch*, 4:825; Dvorský and Bondy, *Zur Geschichte der Juden*, 1:8-9; GJ 1:64.

and Baron.[10] And so, even if we can accept the details of this report, there is no real evidence that Jews were accused of well poisoning in Wroclaw in 1226.

The case of well-poisoning accusations against Jews in Bohemia in 1161 is more complicated. First, some of the secondary sources argue that this event happened in 1161, and others claim that it took place two years later, in 1163. Second, it is not completely clear where the events took place, with Prague, Opava (Troppau) and the County of Kladsko (Glatz) named as possible sites. Finally, some of the sources report that 27 Jews were killed, and others that the number was 86.[11] Because of this discrepancy, some of the secondary sources concluded that these were two separate events.[12] However, since the two dates are quite close, and all the locations are in the territory of medieval Bohemia, it is likely that the sources reflect different versions of the same event. Moreover, the earliest known account of these events, the chronicle of Hájek of Libočan, includes all of the details above. It states that the poisoning happened in Prague, but also in other locations in Bohemia, and that at first, 27 Jews were executed, and later another 86. It also suggests that the events started in 1161, but continued for some time afterward.[13] Therefore, this account is probably the source for all of the other versions of this event in later publications, especially since it is significantly older, dated to the first half of the sixteenth century.[14]

As this story triggered an entire historiographical tradition, it is important to examine it in detail. Hájek reported that a strange disease struck Bohemia in 1161 and killed many, including

[10] Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 238, n. 14; Baron, *A Social and Religious History*, 11:160. Later historians who cited Trachtenberg and Baron similarly did not highlight the purely hypothetical nature of the 1226 episode.

[11] Kahlo suggested that 27 Jews were killed in the County of Glatz in 1163: Kahlo, *Denkwürdigkeiten der königlichen preußischen*, 113, n. 35; Hormayr, based on unknown manuscript, suggested that 27 Jews were killed in Opava in 1163: Hormayr, *Archiv 10, 604;* Ruffer suggested that 86 Jews were killed in Prague in 1161: Ruffer, *Historie Vyšehradská*, 62-63.

[12] Dvorský and Bondy, *Zur Geschichte der Juden*, 1:7-8, no. 14, 2:886, no. 1110; Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 97, 237 n. 2, 238 n. 14; John, "Legend of the Jewish Mass Poisoner," 183-184.

[13] Hájek z Libočan, *Kronika česká*, 3:229-231.

[14] After reviewing early modern historiography, Avneri concludes that Hájek was the source: GJ 1:34-35, nn. 66-67.

prominent local physicians. Several Jews who presented themselves as doctors suddenly appeared in Prague and pretended to take care of the sick. After a short time the disease seemed to pass, but while the Jews recovered, Christians continued to die. Then, two Bohemian doctors returned to the kingdom after studying abroad, and were able to cure many of the sick. They claimed that the sickness was not a known disease, but a certain kind of poisoning, and asked King Vladislav II to forbid Jewish doctors from working in Bohemia. The king did so, but the Jews found secret ways to keep poisoning the Christians. Thus, he summoned a well-known Jewish doctor called Mayer, to investigate him regarding the accusations. Under torture, Mayer gave the names of 27 other Jews, who were questioned and executed. Many of them admitted to poisoning the Christians' medicine and drinks, as well as contaminating the air. They also admitted that they planned to poison the king, but had not had the chance to do so. Allegedly, their motive for these actions was their deep hatred toward the Christians. Thus, the king ordered the execution of 86 other Jews, who were said to have known of the plot. In addition, he issued a law prohibiting Christians from hiring Jewish doctors, or buying food or drinks from Jews.[15]

Unlike Pol's account, this source refers explicitly to a Jewish mass poisoning plot against Christians. This story mostly describes poisoning by Jewish doctors, but the conspirators allegedly also poisoned the air, prolonging the plague. However, it is not very clear on the issue of water poisoning. Allegedly, the Jews poisoned "drinks" consumed by their victims.[16] Still, it is unclear if the chronicler claimed that Jews caused the mortality by contaminating water sources, or simply poisoned caskets of wine or beer. Most historians chose to understand it as reporting about well-poisoning accusations, but this is not the only possible interpretation. Moreover, the details of

[15] Hájek z Libočan, *Kronika česká*, 3:229-231.

[16] The original text refers to "traňkv neb nápojeni", and the German translation to "Träncken", both expressions mean "drinks" or "potions", rather than wells, springs or water sources: Hájek z Libočan, *Kronika česká*, 3:231; Hájek z Libočan, *Böhmische Chronica VVenceslai Hagecij*, 257v.

Hájek's account make his report quite questionable: While the name of the king in the story fits the reality of the twelfth century, most of the other details represent the reality of the later Middle Ages. First, the idea of a mysterious disease caused by corruption of the air and killing many, seems suspiciously similar to descriptions of the Black Death. Second, the Jews allegedly claimed that the disease was caused by certain astronomical constellations, similarly to neo-Galenic explanations of the plague common during the fourteenth century. Third, the idea that many of the European doctors were Jews only became relevant in the thirteenth century, and it is unlikely that there were many such doctors in Bohemia in 1161.[17] Therefore, one must conclude that Hájek's chronicle cannot represent the reality of the twelfth century.

The same can be said for another well-poisoning story presented in Hájek's chronicle, which has not received similar historiographical attention. Supposedly, in 1053, a Jew from Prague kidnaped a Christian boy and killed him in an act of ritual murder. Then, he sent the child's blood to one of his relatives in Italy, so the blood could be used for sorcery against Christians.[18] In return, the Jew from Italy sent the Jews of Prague a poisonous powder, which they used to poison Christian wells and cause a plague in their city and elsewhere.[19] Again, this story is surely not a reflection of eleventh century events. No other source reports persecution against the Jews of Prague in 1053. Moreover, the idea of ritual murder was probably invented in the twelfth century, and it is unlikely

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[17] Laura A. Smoller, "Of Earthquakes, Hail, Frogs, and Geography: Plague and the Investigation of the Apocalypse in the Later Middle Ages," in *Last Things: Death and Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 172-174; Joseph Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine and Medieval Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 2-14, 78-90; Guerchberg, "The Controversy over the Alleged Sowers of the Black Death," 209-211; Rosemary Horrox, ed., *The Black Death* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), 158-194.

[18] Hájek mentioned that the blood was sent to the land of *Vlach*, *Welschland* in the German. This name can indeed refer to Italy, but also to France or other Latin-speaking areas in southern Europe. I followed Dobner on this point: Wenceslai Hagek a Liboczan, *Annales Bohemorum*, 5:317; for the etymology of the term *Vlach*: T. J. Winnifrith, *The Vlachs: The History of a Balkan People* (London: Duckworth, 1987), 1-2.

[19] Hájek z Libočan, *Kronika česká*, 2:316-318; Hájek z Libočan, *Böhmische Chronica VVenceslai Hagecij*, 156r-v. There are similarities between this story and the one about the plot of 1161, but here well poisoning is indeed presented as the major cause for the plague, rather than poisoning by Jewish doctors.

that the Jews of Prague faced such an accusation a century earlier.[20] Therefore, both stories in which Hájek refers to early cases of well poisoning are in all likelihood a literary projection of late medieval ideas onto a much earlier period.[21]

A third alleged case of an early well-poisoning accusation has also drawn the attention of historians: A canon issued by the church council of Vienna in 1267 raised the suspicion that Jews might try to poison Christians. The canon reissued older legislation prohibiting Jews from selling food or drink to Christians, but justified it with the notion that Jews were potential poisoners.[22] However, it clearly discusses the poisoning of foodstuffs rather than water sources. Moreover, church legislators did not accept the idea that Jews were likely to poison Christians, and did not repeat it in later canons issued during the thirteenth century.[23] Also, this council's canons probably did not lead to any persecution against Jews in Vienna or elsewhere. The connection to well poisoning was made by the German historian Georg Caro, who speculated in 1920 about the possible effect of the council on popular ideas regarding the Jews. Caro pointed out that official canons were meant to be disseminated to the public through sermons in churches. If this indeed happened after the council of Vienna, the public would have heard a warning that the Jews might poison foodstuffs. Thus, Caro suspected that this idea could have supported later well-poisoning

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[20] For the history of Jews in Prague: GJ 1:269-281; Langmuir analyzed the development of ritual murder accusations in Norwich in 1144 and their dissemination from there, and showed that this was probably the source of this idea: Gavin I. Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Anti-Semitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 209-236.

[21] For Hájek's views about the Jews: Zdeněk V. David, "Hajek, Dubravius, and the Jews: A Contrast in Sixteenth-Century Czech Historiography," *Sixteenth Century Jornal* 27 (1996), 999-1006.

[22] For a general discussion, below: Ch. 1, pp. 56-68; Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 1:316-317, 332-337, 2:244, 247-249, 251-253, 255-262, 267-271; William C. Jordan, "Problems of the Meat Market of Béziers, 1240-1247," *REJ* (*Revue des études Juives*) 135 (1976), 31-48; John Tolan, "Of Milk and Blood: Innocent III and the Jews, Revisited," in *Jews and Christians in Thirteenth Century Europe*, ed. Elisheva Baumgarten and Judah Galinsky (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 140-143; David M. Freidenreich, *Foreigners and their Food: Constructing Otherness in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 110-128.

[23] Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 2:249-271.

accusations.[24] This argument may seem reasonable, as the fear of poisoning generally was indeed growing in thirteenth century European society, as we will see.[25] Still, Caro never claimed that well-poisoning accusations actually occurred in Vienna in 1267, but only pointed out one of their possible origins. Again, several later historians mistakenly turned his argument into a footnote which stated that Vienna was one of the locations in which such accusations appeared.[26]

This case was not the only instance in which historians recorded general poisoning allegations as well-poisoning accusations. Some suggest that Jews were subjected to such accusations in Eilenburg, not far from Leipzig, Saxony.[27] They all seem to be drawing on the same source, a chronicle of Eilenburg written in the seventeenth century by Jeremais Simon.[28] According to Simon, from 1316 to 1318, a great plague struck Eilenburg and the surrounding areas, and forced many to emigrate to other locations. A major mortality of cattle also occurred, raising suspicions that the cows had been poisoned. And so, twelve men were arrested in Eilenburg for poisoning cattle, as were several more in the nearby towns of Wurzen and Dahlen. Some people, maybe those arrested, claimed that the Jews initiated this act of poisoning. However, Simon does not clarify whether these allegations were believed, or indicate whether local Jews were persecuted as a result.[29] Moreover, the accused (who were apparently Christians) allegedly poisoned cattle

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[24] Georg Caro, *Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte der Juden im Mittelalter und der Neuzeit*, (Leipzig: Gustav Fock, 1908-1920), 2:188-189. There is no evidence that Jews were persecuted in Vienna after the council: GJ 2:886-889.

[25] Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 24-27; the second part of this chapter (pp. 31-65) also supports Collard's conclusions.

[26] Trachtenberg and Graus present this argument properly, but the others use it as an example of well-poisoning accusations: Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 100; Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde*, 301; Bächtold-Stäubli, *Handwörterbuch*, 4:825; Baron, *A Social and Religious History*, 11:160; John, "Legend of the Jewish Mass Poisoner," 184; Richards, *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation*, 103; Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, 277; Wilensky, *Six Million Crucifixions*, 35.

[27] Anna Foa, *The Jews of Europe after the Black Death,* Andrea Grovner, trans. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 21; Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 101; Bächtold-Stäubli, *Handwörterbuch*, 4:825; John, "Legend of the Jewish Mass Poisoner," 184; all mistakenly mention Eulenburg, rather than Eilenburg: GJ 2:194.

[28] Jeremias Simon, *Eilenburgische Chronica* (Leipzig: Lanckisch, 1696), 532; Bächtold-Stäubli cites: Johann Jakob Schudt, *Jüdische merckwürdigkeiten* (Frankfurt: W.C. Multzen, 1718), 4:294-295; Schudt cites Simon.

[29] Simon, *Eilenburgische Chronica*, 532; there is no evidence of persecution of Jews in Eilenburg in 1318: GJ 2:194.

somehow, but not necessarily by poisoning water sources. Still, Simon may have been using earlier sources without listing them, and his report seems plausible. Saxony, like most of Europe, suffered a heavy famine from 1315 to 1318. In addition, plagues attacked farm animals, mostly cattle, making the economic situation even worse. This resulted in mortality of around 10% of the population, and a great social crisis. Social unrest ensued, and minority groups were sometimes blamed for the disaster, and even attacked. Many tried to flee to areas untouched by the hunger, and so large numbers of immigrants and beggars roamed the roads, some turning to theft or other crimes to survive.[30] These details fit well with Simon's report, which describes mortality of people and cattle, and heightened social tension. Still, even if this story is believable, it is not a story about well poisoning. As with the cases of Wroclaw and Vienna, later historians mistakenly assume that the combination of plague, poisoning and accusations against Jews must be understood as well poisoning.

Also in other cases, historiographical references to well-poisoning accusations seem unreliable. For example, several historians have claimed that such accusations were presented against the Jews of Vaud, in western Switzerland, in 1308.[31] All rely, sometimes indirectly, on one footnote in a book by the historian Hermann Strack (1900).[32] Strack did not state which primary source reported this event, and so it is hard to conclude whether he should be trusted. Notably, in

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[30] About the Famine and its social implications: William C. Jordan, *The Great Famine: Northern Europe in the Early Fourteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 7-39, 110-114, 162-166; Jordan, "Famine and Popular Resistance: Northern Europe, 1315-22," in *Power, Violence and Mass Death in Pre-Modern and Modern Times*, ed. Joseph Canning, Hartmut Lehmann and Jay Winter (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 13-24; John Aberth, *An Environmental History of the Middle Ages: The Crucible of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 49-52. About famine, floods and cattle mortality in Saxony: Franz of Prague, *Cronica Aulae regiae*, in *Fontes rerum Austriacarum 1, Scriptores* (Vienna: Karl Gerold's Sohn, 1875), 8:379-380; Timothy P. Newfield, "A Cattle Panzootic in Early Fourteenth-Century Europe," *Agricultural History Review*, 57 (2009), 161-162.

[31] Leon Poliakov, *The History of Antisemitism: From the time of Christ to the Court Jews*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Elek, 1966), 1:317 n. 137; Bächtold-Stäubli, *Handwörterbuch*, 4:825; Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 101; John, "Legend of the Jewish Mass Poisoner," 184; Foa, *The Jews of Europe*, 21 (with 1306 as the date).

[32] Strack, *Das Blut*, 196-197 n. 3.

the same footnote he mentioned that well-poisoning accusations took place in twelfth-century Bohemia, which is highly doubtful, as we have already seen. Moreover, Achille Nordmann's detailed work on the history of the Jews of Vaud has uncovered no evidence that they were accused of poisoning wells before 1348.[33] Therefore, one must conclude that there is little reason to believe that well-poisoning accusations happened in this case.[34]

The same can be said of the claim that the Jews of Franconia were accused of well poisoning in 1319.[35] The only evidence of this incident is a sentence in one of the chronicles of the monastery of Sint-Truiden, in modern day Belgium.[36] This sentence reads: "in the following year, many lepers were burnt throughout France and Hainaut [modern day Belgium]. They, so it was said, infected springs and streams with poison, since they were corrupted by the Jews."[37] Clearly, this is not a reference to the region of Franconia in Germany, but rather to northern France and Hainaut.[38] This fact suggests that this is an account of events that happened in 1321 rather than 1319. Indeed, the sentence opens: "in the following year", and the previous entry refers to 1318, so it may seems that the author suggests that this happened in 1319. However, the next entry reports

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[33] Achille Nordmann, "Histoire des Juifs à Genève de 1281 à 1780," *REJ* 80 (1925), 8-10; Nordmann, "Les Juifs dans le pays de Vaud 1278-1878," *REJ* 81 (1925), 146-155; Nordmann,"Documents relatifs à l'histoire des Juifs à Genève, dans le pays de Vaud et en Savoie," *REJ* 83 (1927), 63-71.

[34] Strack was possibly referring to persecution against the Jews of Alsace in 1309. However, though one source suggests that the persecution was caused by a plague, there were no well-poisoning accusations: Gerd Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß* (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1995), 348-350.

[35] Poliakov, *The History of Antisemitism*, 1:317 n. 137; Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 101; John, "Legend of the Jewish Mass Poisoner," 184; Foa, *The Jews of Europe*, 21; Bächtold-Stäubli, *Handwörterbuch*, 4:825, cites: Otto Stobbe, *Die Juden in Deutschland während des Mittelalters in politischer, sozialer und rechtlicher Beziehung* (Braunschweig: C.A. Schwetschke und Sohn, 1866), 188.

[36] *Gesta abbatum Trudonensium, Continuation tertia, pars II*, M.G.H SS (G. H. Pertz, ed., *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores* (Hanover, Weidmann, 1826-1913)), 10:416. Stobbe and Poliakov list this source as printed in volume 12 of the M.G.H SS: Stobbe, *Die Juden in Deutschland*, 188; Poliakov, *The History of Antisemitism*, 1:317 n. 137.

[37] "Sequenti anno per Franciam et Hanoniam multi leprosy concremantur, qui, ut dicebatur, precio a Iudeis corrupti, fontes et rivos veneno inficiebant." - *Gesta abbatum Trudonensium, Continuation tertia, pars II*, 416.

[38] Stobbe mistakenly translated the word Latin word "Franciam", i.e. France, into the German "Franken", Franconia - Stobbe, *Die Juden in Deutschland*, 188.

on events in 1322, and so the sentence possibly refers to the persecution of lepers and Jews in northern France in 1321.[39] Thus, these two cases cast further doubt on the idea that well-poisoning accusations occurred in the German-speaking lands before 1321.

One early case of possible well-poisoning accusations has escaped the attention of many historians. A Hebrew chronicle by an anonymous author from Mainz, suggests that well-poisoning accusations caused the persecution of Jews in Worms during the First Crusade:

> *It came to pass on the tenth of Iyyar, on Sunday, that they [the Christian residents of Worms] plotted craftily against them [local Jews]. They [the Christians] took a trampled corpse of theirs [a Christian corpse], that had been buried for thirty days previously, and carried it through the city, saying: 'Behold what the Jews have done to our comrade. They took a Christian and boiled him in water. They then poured the water into our wells in order to kill us.' When the Crusaders and townsmen heard this, they cried out and gathered – all who bore and unsheathed [a sword], from great to small – saying: 'Behold the time has come to avenge him who was crucified, whom their ancestors slew. Now let not a remnant or a residue escape, not even an infant or a suckling in the cradle.'*[40]

Harry Bresslau, as well as other modern historians, questioned the credibility of this passage. The only surviving manuscript of the Mainz anonymous chronicle was copied in the second half of the

[39] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 55-56; and Ch. 2 and Ch. 3, pp. 91-242.

[40] Darmstadt, Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek, Cod. Or. 25, fol. 18v; printed in: Eva Anita Haverkamp, ed., *Hebräische Berichte über die Judenverfolgungen während des Ersten Kreuzzugs*, (Hannover: Monumenta Germaniae Historica and Israel Academy of Sciences, 2005), 281-283:

"ויהי ביום עשרה באייר, ביום ראשון, הערימו סוד עליהם. ויקחו פגר מובס שלהם, שהיה נקבר קודם לכן שלשים יום, וישאו אותו בתוך העיר ויאמרו: ראו מה עשו היהודים בעמיתנו. לקחו גוי אחד ושלקוהו במים ושפכו המים בבורות שלנו כדי להמיתנו. ויהי כאשר שמעו התועים והעירונים ויצ[עקו ויאספו] כל חוגר ושולף חרב מגדולם ועד ק[טנם], ויאמרו: הנה הגיע העת והעונ[ה עתה] לנקום נקמת המסומר בעץ, א[שר הרגוהו] אבותיהם. עתה אל ימלט מהם שריד ופליט, אפילו עולל ויונק שבעריסה."

Robert Chazan, "The Anti-Jewish Violence of 1096: Perpetrators and Dynamics," in *Religious Violence between Christians and Jews: Medieval Roots, Modern Perspectives*, Anna Sapir Abulafia, ed. (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002), 26. Another edition: *Abraham M. Habermann, Sefer Gzeirot Ashkenaz ve-Tsarfat* (Jerusalem: Tarshish, 1946), 95.

fourteenth century, after the persecution of the Jews during Black Death.[41] The copier may have been influenced by the fresh trauma that Jewish communities suffered in his own time, and added details from these events to the descriptions of the disaster of the Jews in 1096. The fact that the only manuscript of this chronicle was copied shortly after the most extensive wave of well-poisoning accusations supports this hypothesis. Furthermore, other chronicles of the First Crusade do not mention any well-poisoning accusations against Jews.[42] Still, Robert Chazan and Israel Yuval have claimed that this passage is original, since the image of Jews as poisoners plotting to annihilate Christians fits well with the demonization that triggered the Crusaders' violence. They follow Trachtenberg and Baron, who suggested that the notion of Jews as poisoners was widely accepted in medieval society.[43] Based on the chronicle from Mainz alone, it is difficult to decide which of these hypotheses is more convincing. But as we have just seen, the evidence for well poisoning accusations at this early date, which Chazan and Yuval use to support this interpretation, is very thin.[44] If the Mainz anonymous chronicle is indeed a credible representation of anti-Jewish sentiments which triggered the persecution in Worms in 1096, it must have recorded a very unusual event. Considering the fact that the earlier manuscript was copied in the fourteenth century, it seems more likely that this particular passage was added then.

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[41] Adolf Neubauer and Moritz Stern, eds., *Hebräische Berichte über die Judenverfolgungen während der Kreuzzüge* (Berlin: Simion, 1892), x, xiv-xv. The copier of the Mainz anonymous chronicle did not leave a colophon. However, the dating of other texts in the manuscript and a paleographical analysis show that the manuscript was probably copied in the second half of the fourteenth century, maybe around 1383: Haverkamp, *Hebräische Berichte,* 153-158.

[42] Haverkamp, *Hebräische Berichte,* 159-163, 281-283. Haverkamp accepts Bresslau's position that the text mentioning well poisoning is a later addition. For the Latin sources, see: Albert of Aachen, *Historia Ierosolimitana*, Susan Edgington, ed. and trans. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 50-53; Bernold of Constance, *Bernoldi Chronicon*, M.G.H SS rer. Germ. N.S. 14:529; *Sigebertus Auctarium Aquicinense*, M.G.H SS 6:394; *Gesta Treverorum*, M.G.H SS 8:190-191; *Annales Sancti Disibodi*, M.G.H SS 17:16; Ekkehard of Aura, *Ekkehardi Chronicon Universale*, M.G.H SS 6:208.

[43] Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 97-108; Baron, *A Social and Religious History*, 11:158-164; Robert Chazan, *God, Humanity, and History: The Hebrew First Crusade Narratives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 33; Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 194-195.

[44] See below: Ch. 1, pp. 56-68.

There is a single plausible case of well-poisoning accusations against Jews before 1321, revealed not by chronicles, but by documentary records. According to two official documents of the town court of Manosque, Provence, local Jews were accused of well poisoning there in 1306.[45] The first document states that around 13 September, someone reported to the court that several local Jews tried to throw a body of an infant into a well. The Jews were suspected of having killed the infant, though the court was not convinced that this was true.[46] Allegedly, the Jews carried the body in a basket or coffin, walked toward a well near the northern gate of the town and threw the body into the well. According to the report, they did this in order to infect the water, so that anyone who drank from the well would become sick and die. Based on these allegations, the court of Manosque decided to investigate this charge. The second document records the questioning of a suspect in these acts, a Jew named Mosse de Mana from the nearby town of Forcalquier. Mosse was questioned by the court of Manosque on the same day the investigation was launched, so it seems that local officials were quick to act.[47] After he swore to tell the truth, Mosse presented his version of the events. He said that on the morning in question, he received a body of an infant from the son of a Jew called Isach de Digna, a resident of Forcalquier.[48] He gave Mosse the body because there was no Jewish cemetery in Forcalquier, and he wanted Mosse to bury it in the Jewish cemetery in Manosque. Clearly, Mosse argued that the remains were the body of a Jewish boy, thus rejecting any suspicions that the boy was the victim of ritual murder. He stated instead that while he indeed carried the body to Manosque in a coffin or a basket, when he arrived there he met

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[45] Both documents are printed in: Joseph Shatzmiller, *Recherches sur la Communauté Juive de Manosque au Moyen Age, 1241-1329* (Paris: Mouton, 1973), 133-135.

[46] "quidam infans mortuus seu occisus dicitur fuisse per dictos judeos qui dictum infantem mortuum portabant in quodam coffino" - Shatzmiller, *Recherches sur la Communauté Juive*, 133-134.

[47] The second document, which seems to appear right after the first one in the manuscript according to Shatzmiller, open with the words "Anno et die quibus supra" - Shatzmiller, *Recherches sur la Communauté Juive*, 133-134.

[48] Mosse stated that he received the body "hodie mane", which implies "on the day of the investigation". Yet, this can also mean "on the day in question" - Shatzmiller, *Recherches sur la Communauté Juive*, 134.

a Jewish physician called Master Issac (not to be confused with the son of Isach de Digna, who gave Mosse the body). The physician told Mosse that he must turn back, since he was not allowed to bring a dead body into the town. And so, Mosse went toward the gate, but stopped on his way to drink from the well. He put down the basket near the well, covered it with his hood, and proceeded to drink. He insisted that he never tried to throw the body into the well, and that no other Jews were with him at the time. He also mentioned that a certain old man saw him sitting near the well with the basket and drinking, probably to point out a possible witness to his innocence. It is impossible to know if the court accepted Mosse's story, found the mysterious old man, or arrested any other suspects in this alleged crime. Still, it is clear that in this case, someone in Manosque indeed tried to accuse the Jews of poisoning a well, probably since he saw Mosse walking near it with a dead body.

Unlike in the cases discussed above, here we have reliable, contemporary documentary evidence that records accusations and an investigation in Manosque in 1306. The documents contain the exact dates, locations and names of the people involved. Moreover, they present a reasonable explanation for the development of the accusation: it was a simple case of misunderstanding.[49] This episode is plausibly the first documented case of accusations of intentional well poisoning against Jews in the Middle Ages.

The story of Mosse in Manosque is obviously the exception when it comes to reported early cases of well-poisoning accusations against Jews. All of the other alleged incidents before 1321 have several things in common. First, either they were reported by sources which were

[49] Abandoned wells were often turned into rubbish dumps, and were possibly sometimes used to dispose of bodies of unwanted deceased babies. However, the well in Manosque was active, and thus an unlikely site to hide a body: Isabelle Séguy and Isabelle Rodet-Belarbi, "Babies in Wells: Proof of Abortions and Infanticides in Gallo-roman, Medieval and Modern Times?" a paper given in the 22nd conference of the *Commission International des Sciences Historiques (CISH),* Jinan, China, August 2015. I thank the authors for their sharing their work with me.

written or copied after 1348, or they were not actually clear cases of well-poisoning allegations. Second, all of these early cases allegedly happened in central Europe, and were all said to target Jews. In contrast, the persecution of 1321 happened in France and Aragon, and the victims were mostly lepers.[50] This raises a suspicion that all of these incidents were actually reconstructed by later sources which retrojected ideas that developed after the Black Death onto earlier events.

Thus, despite the rich historiography on the subject that suggests the contrary, major cases of well-poisoning accusations against Jews probably did not occur before 1321. Any cases were probably similar to the story of Mosse, involving one or a few isolated individuals who did something to raise public suspicion. Even if an investigation followed, and the suspects were convicted, there is no reason to think that whole Jewish communities would have been punished.

This conclusion is more than a historiographical footnote. It enables us to determine convincingly, for the first time, that mass well-poisoning accusations probably developed sometime at the beginning of the fourteenth century. We will see that some chroniclers alluded to the idea that Muslims leaders plotted to poison Christianity before then, but until 1321 these stories never led to actual persecution.[51] Therefore, one should look for the historical circumstances which enabled the development of well-poisoning accusations around that period, or a little earlier. Thus, the next part of this chapter will focus on environmental, cultural, political and medical changes which occurred in medieval society before the fourteenth century, and could have contributed to the development of well-poisoning accusations.

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[50] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 52-56, 93-97; Bériac, "La persécution des lépreux," 204-221; Malcolm C. Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems: The Plot to Overthrow Christendom in 1321," *History* 66 (1981), 3-4, 6-9; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 33-34, 39-44.

[51] See below: Ch. 1, pp. 76-79.

2.1. Environmental factors – the fear of water contamination in medieval cities

The accusations against the Jews of Manosque can teach us about the attitudes of medieval townspeople towards their public water sources. Contamination of the water supply, by accident or by malice, was a real threat in medieval towns. To understand this fear, we must examine the mechanisms of urban water supply, their maintenance and the dangers caused by using them. The European population grew continuously during the High Middle Ages, and reached its maximum around 1290. At the same time, the cities became dominant centers of trade and industry, while the lands in the countryside became more expensive and less productive. Thus, many moved to the towns, which became larger and more crowded.[52] This made medieval cities into centers of innovation and power, but also forced administrators to better regulate the use of common resources, water in particular. Smaller towns could allow individuals to use common resources freely, but as the population grew these resources became scarce and towns had to regulate access to them.[53] Municipal water sources were particularly problematic. Clearly, water was a basic necessity for all of the inhabitants of the town. It was used for drinking (for both people and livestock), cooking, laundry and irrigation. In addition, many medieval industries such as

[52] Richard C. Hoffmann, *An Environmental History of Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 116-117, 227-230; Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 12, 16-17, 43-48; Roberta J. Magnusson, *Water Technology in the Middle Ages: Cities, Monasteries, and Waterworks after the Roman Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 24-25; Carole Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies: Communal Health in Late Medieval English Towns and Cities* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013), 1-2.

[53] This is a manifestation of an economic problem known as "the tragedy of the commons". When a common resource is limited, the self-interest of each user is to exploit it as much as possible, to maximize his benefits before the resource is exhausted. Therefore, without external regulation, a common source which in theory can be maintained over time will unavoidably be over-used and destroyed: Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* 162 (1968), 1243-1248. I thank Mark Spiegel for bringing this idea to my attention.

butchering, tanning, dyeing, and linen-making required large amounts of water. Thus, the urbanization of the High Middle Ages significantly increased problems of water supply.[54]

We will see that medieval urban leaders saw it as their responsibility to supply fresh water to the citizens. Yet as the towns were growing, it became increasingly harder to do so based on private wells and local fountains. Thus, it was often necessary to create an infrastructure to allow for maximal use of local water sources and supply additional water from fountains outside of the city. And so, medieval towns dug new public wells, built cisterns that gathered water from surrounding roofs, and even planned aqueducts and pipes to bring water from external sources. These complex building operations became possible due to the technological advances made by medieval craftsmen at this period. Towns that had rivers flowing throw them could postpone the adoption of public water systems, but the larger they became, the more necessary it was to switch to public systems. In general, by the fourteenth century most of the inhabitants of western European cities depended on public water systems rather than private water sources.[55]

Keeping the water clean and available was often an uphill battle, as urban water sources were in constant danger of pollution. Despite attempts to develop an efficient sewage system, human and animal waste sometimes found its way into the drinking water. Only a few cities could afford the expensive and complicated construction of enclosed sewage, and the disposal of human waste was usually based on cesspits rather than flushed drains. Bad weather or local system malfunctions heightened the risk that drinking water would become polluted, and caused a major

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[54] Aberth, *An Environmental History*, 63-66; Michael P. Kucher, *The Water Supply System of Siena, Italy: The Medieval Roots of the Modern Networked City* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 82-96. Other reasons also contributed to the resource development of new water technologies: Magnusson, *Water technology*, 7-8, 22-27.

[55] Richard Holt, "Medieval England's Water-Related Technologies," in *Working with Water in Medieval Europe: Technology and Resource-Use,* ed. Paolo Squatriti (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2000), 99; Hoffmann, *An Environmental History*, 232-233; Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, 180-181. The water system of Siena is one of the most impressive examples: Kucher, *The Water Supply System*, 41-74, 120-124. Rarely, aqueducts or cisterns builtS in the Roman period were used in the Middle Ages: Magnusson, *Water technology*, 3-7, 29-32, 35, 53-115; Klaus Grewe, "Water Technology in Medieval Germany," in *Working with Water in Medieval Europe*, 130-132, 145-155.

concern for urban officials.[56] In 1314, Alice Wade of London was summoned to the mayor, since she used a wooden pipe to connect her indoor latrine to a public gutter. This badly-built apparatus clogged the public drain, and the neighbors soon complained. Wade had to remove the pipe, but others who used similar waste-disposal methods were never caught. People charged with acts that could pollute public water sources were usually punished with a significant fine, or imprisonment in severe cases.[57] Water sources were in danger of pollution not only due to sewage, but also because of laundry and livestock that drank from the water. These were not usually allowed in water sources designated for drinking, and were instead limited to the local river or dedicated basins, but not everyone respected the law.[58]

Urban industries were also known for polluting water. Poisonous materials used for tanning and dyeing, as well as blood and waste from slaughterhouses or fish-cleaning workshops, could end up in the water system. The processing of flax or hemp to make linen and rope required their immersion in water, and often the plant-material rotted in the standing water pools and caused a stench.[59] Interestingly, medieval people knew how to use techniques of water-poisoning to their advantage. They applied piscicides based on poisonous herbs or quicklime in ponds, to stun fish and make them easy to catch. This common technique was safe when used in isolated water sources

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[56] Jean-Pierre Leguay, *La pollution au Moyen Âge dans le royaume de France et dans les grands fiefs* (Paris: Éditions Jean-Paul Gisserot, 1999), 16-24; Leguay, *L'Eau dans la ville au Moyen Âge* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2002), 123-125, 138-141; Martha Bayless, *Sin and Filth in Medieval Culture: The Devil in the Latrine* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 32-42; Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, 35, 127-129, 137-147; Hoffmann, *An Environmental History*, 234-236; Aberth, *An Environmental History*, 63; Magnusson, *Water Technology*, 27, 32-33, 155-160; Holt, "Medieval England's Water-Related Technologies," 99-100. Only the rich cities of north-eastern France developed enclosed sewer systems during the thirteenth century: Jean-Pierre Leguay, *La Rue au Moyen Âge* (Rennes: Éditions Ouest-France, 1984), 84-91; Leguay, *La pollution*, 65-70.

[57] Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, 187; Magnusson, *Water Technology*, 32-33; Bayless, *Sin and Filth*, 33-36.

[58] Kucher, *The Water Supply System*, 92-94; Leguay, *La pollution*, 60; Magnusson, *Water Technology*, 122-123, 145-147; Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, 198-199.

[59] Kucher, *The Water Supply System*, 83, 86-90; Leguay, *L'Eau dans la ville*, 118-119, 125-128, 156-160; Aberth, *An Environmental History*, 63-64; Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, 147-153, 196-210; Magnusson, *Water Technology*, 153-155; Leguay, *La rue*, 56-61; Leguay, *La pollution*, 58-59.

in the countryside, but not when towns adopted it. Pistoia banned this practice at the end of the thirteenth century, and Florence followed in 1322. Considering the prevalence of this method, it seems that urban legislators were not concerned with the quality of the fish caught, but with the danger of water poisoning.[60]

Indeed, urban authorities invested significant resources in developing new water sources and sewage systems. Still, the most effective tool in their struggle to maintain fresh water supplies was regulation. Some Italian cities issued legislation to protect the water supply as early as the twelfth century, but during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries such laws became common throughout Europe.[61] They limited waste disposal and regulated the use of water sources. For example, butchers were not allowed to dispose of blood, animal carcasses or intestines near sources of drinking water, and polluting workshops were moved downriver. In Siena, wool dyers were expected to dig covered drains to dispose of contaminated water, and in Narbonne certain places and times were designated for disposal of polluted water. Some water basins were dedicated for industrial use, and others for everyday public use. To uphold these regulations, towns employed officials responsible for maintaining the water system. Siena dedicated a full chapter of its communal statutes to regulating infrastructure, for water in particular. An urban official, the *giudice sindaco*, regularly inspected the use of wells and reported violations to his superiors. Similar positions were established in London in 1310 and Freiburg in 1333. In addition to enforcing the regulations, these officials initiated cleaning and repairs of the water system. Towns also appointed other officials develop new infrastructure projects.[62]

[60] Aberth, *An Environmental History*, 66; Richard C. Hoffmann, "Medieval Fishing," in *Working with Water in Medieval Europe: Technology and Resource-Use*, Paolo Squatriti, ed. (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2000), 344-346.

[61] Aberth, *An Environmental History*,65-66; Kucher, *The Water Supply System*, 75-98; Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, 34.

[62] Aberth, *An Environmental History*, 63-66; Kucher, *The Water Supply System*, 78-79, 86-90; Magnusson, *Water Technology*, 32-33, 118-125, 160-161; Grewe, "Water Technology in Medieval Germany," 146; Rawcliffe, *Urban*

Medieval townsmen were aware of the connection between urban pollution and infectious diseases, which were indeed more common in the city. Such pollution could supposedly corrupt the air or the water and cause wide-spread mortality, an idea which justified many urban anti-pollution regulations. Several medieval doctors claimed that pollution could cause outbreaks of the plague, and suggested methods to eliminate the danger. Yet, the fear of pollution existed long before the Black Death, and urban administrators left records complaining about the low quality of water and about noxious smells. Some protested that public wells were contaminated by pollution or poor upkeep and posed a danger to the public.[63] Due to this problem, many mixed beer or wine into their water, so the alcohol would purify it. Similarly, water from closed sources like wells or springs was often preferred over water from reservoirs or rivers. Still, avoiding water altogether was impossible, and medieval people drank water regularly. Yet it was important to know which water sources to choose, and foreigners were more likely to drink from poisoned basins or wells.[64] Moreover, not all wells were clearly marked or fenced, and sometimes children or animals fell inside. This was more common in the countryside, as urban wells were usually well-constructed. Still, as the case of the Jews of Manosque shows, some feared that bodies might end up in public wells, even within the city. People sometimes accidentally drowned in a public water basin in town, but this rarely happened and it is likely that the body was quickly removed.

Bodies, 34-35, 129-130, 187, 194-195, 201-204, 208-212, 216-222; Leguay, *La pollution*, 58-59; Leguay, *L'Eau dans la ville*, 136-137.

[63] Aberth, *An Environmental History*, 63-68; Leguay, *La pollution*, 56-57, 62; Leguay, *L'Eau dans la ville*, 119-120, 124, 160-163; Magnusson, *Water Technology*, 27-28; Bayless, *Sin and Filth*, 41; Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, 2-3, 33-35, 62-69, 188-193, 205, 212-215; Leguay, *La rue*, 61-63. Some diseases, like malaria, cholera or typhus, were indeed connected to human mis-management of water sources: Hoffmann, *An Environmental History*, 299-303.

[64] Aberth, *An Environmental History*, 63-66; Magnusson, *Water Technology*, 134-136; Holt, "Medieval England's Water-Related Technologies," 97-98; Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, 195-196; Leguay, *L'Eau dans la ville*, 119. Wine or beer, in particular red wine, can kill some of the bacteria in contaminated water. Still, they do not purify the water completely: Charles Gilman Currier, *The Efficacy of Filters and Other Means Employed to Purify Drinking Water: A Bacteriological Study* (New York: 1889), 9-10.

In any case, medieval townsmen had good reason to fear drinking from public water sources, which were often polluted, but they usually had little choice.[65]

Environmental historians have suggested a connection between the medieval fear of water pollution and the appearance of well-poisoning accusations.[66] And indeed, from a chronological perspective, there is a correlation between these two phenomena. The shift from private to public water infrastructure and the fear of pollution became common during the second half of the thirteenth century, while the first wave of well-poisoning accusations happened in 1321. Thus, the suggested cause appeared shortly (namely, a few decades) before the effect. Moreover, we have seen that poisoned wells were a reality of medieval towns. Many probably knew that water sources got polluted regularly, despite the best efforts of the authorities, and could cause wide-spread disease. Thus, from the perspective of medieval townsmen, there was nothing fantastic or irrational about well-poisoning accusations. People occasionally polluted, or even poisoned, wells by mistake, and it seems reasonable that this could also be done deliberately. However, there are problems with this argument, even if the medieval environmental circumstances made well-poisoning seem more plausible. First, it is difficult to show a correlation between urban water pollution or regulations and well-poisoning accusations. The first wave of well-poisoning accusations started in south-western France, hardly the most urbanized or polluted area of the continent. In contrast, some highly urbanized areas, such as the cities of northern Italy, never experienced well-poisoning accusations. Moreover, while in some cases a major plague preceded such accusations, in others there is no evidence that this happened. As we will see, there is little

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[65] Magnusson, *Water Technology*, 136-137; Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, 212-215; Leguay, *L'Eau dans la ville*, 201-204; Shatzmiller, *Recherches sur la Communauté Juive*, 133-135; Séguy and Rodet-Belarbi, "Babies in Wells," 1-7; Alexander Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1:25-26, 115, 118, 151, 161, 191, 220, 260-261, 302-303, 408.

[66] Aberth, *An Environmental History*, 69-73; Magnusson, *Water Technology*, 28.

reason to think that the lepers of France and Aragon were accused of well poisoning in the context of an environmental crisis. Therefore, the fear of water pollution was a contributing factor to the development of well-poisoning accusations, but probably not a principal one.

2.2 Water poisoning in medieval religious culture

Medieval Christians considered water not only an everyday necessity, but also an important part of their spiritual life. They blessed water to be used in rituals of healing, baptism and holidays.[67] They prayed that God would protect the water from evil spirits, black magic, snakes, dragons and birds.[68] On the day of Saint John the Baptist (24 June), they conducted rites which highlighted the importance of all water sources for the community. The twelfth-century theologian, Jean Beleth, explained that some of the customs performed on the eve of Saint John were intended to protect public water sources. In particular, some believed that dragons appeared on Midsummer Day, and their sperm could fall into wells or springs and poison them. They lit fires to drive the dragons away and protect the water.[69] This popular belief continued in some places after the twelfth

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[67] Bryan D. Spinks, *Early and Medieval Rituals and Theologies of Baptism: From the New Testament to the Council of Trent* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2006), 134-156; Nicholas E. Denysenko, *The Blessing of Waters and Epiphany: The Eastern Liturgical Tradition* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 1-3,182-186.

[68] "Adjuro te per eum, qui omnia creavit, ne contempnas vocem humilitatis meae, sed expellas omnem umbram, omnem satanam, et omnes machinationes diabolicas spirituum immundorum sive biothanatum, sive errantium, sive ex invocatione magicae artis, sive praecantatorum argumenta, sive draconum, sive volucrum et viperarum." – PL (*Patrologia Latina (database)*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Alexandria: Chadwyck-Healey Inc., 1994)), 138:1048. Similar phrases were used in other versions of this prayer (PL, 138:1052), but not in all (PL, 138:1039-1046). It is noteworthy that the standard early-modern version included exorcism against dragons and demons: John Crichton-Stuart Bute, Ernest Alfred Thompson Wallis Budge, eds. *The Blessing of the Waters on the Eve of the Epiphany* (London: H. Frowde, 1901), 30.

[69] "Solent porro hoc tempore ex veteri consuetudine mortuorum animalium ossa comburi, quod hujusmodi habet originem. Sunt enim animalia, quae dracones appellamus, unde in psalmo: *Laudate Dominum, de terra dracones* (Psal. CXLVIII), nos thracones, ut quidam mendose legunt, scilicet terrae meatus. Haec, inquam, animalia in aere volant, in aquis natant, in terra ambulant. Sed quando in aere ad libidinem concitantur (quod fere fit), saepe ipsum sperma vel in puteos, vel in aquas fluviales ejiciunt ex quo lethalis sequitur annus. Adversus haec ergo hujusmodi inventum est remedium, ut videlicet rogus ex ossibus construeretur, et ita fumus hujusmodi animalia fugaret." - Jean Beleth, *Rationale divinorum officiorum*, PL 202: 141-142.

century, and gave rise to different rituals.[70] These traditions prove that medieval people saw water sources as part of their religious and communal life, and acted to protect them from any threat, physical or spiritual. Still, it is doubtful that these water rituals led them to accuse others of poisoning wells. First, water blessing rituals to ward off evil existed throughout the Middle Ages, but well-poisoning accusations did not. Also, we will see that even when preachers and chroniclers depicted minorities as poisoners, usually no actual persecution followed. Similarly, there is no evidence that ties water-protection rituals directly to well-poisoning accusations.[71] I could not find even one case before 1321 in which a sermon given for the day of Saint John inspired persecution against minorities.[72] Despite the importance of water in medieval culture, customs or rituals related to water probably did not cause well-poisoning accusations.

2.3. Well poisoning as a biological weapon?

Considering that medieval people were aware of the dangers of water contamination, one wonders whether they deliberately poisoned water sources as a military tactic. Indeed, medieval warriors often conquered a town or fended off a besieging army by cutting off the enemy's water supply.

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[70] Guillaume Durand cited Jean Beleth, which may indicate a similar tradition in thirteenth-century France: Guillaume Durand, *Guillelmi Duranti Rationale divinorum officiorum,* ed. Anselmus Davril, T. M. Thibodeau and Bertrand G. Guyot (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995-2000, online version), lib 7, cap. 14. A similar ritual is mentioned in thirteenth-century anonymous sermon (London, British Library, Harley MS 2345, fol. 50): John Mitchell Kemble, *The Saxons in England: A History of the English Commonwealth till the Period of the Norman Conquest*, Walter de Gray Birch, ed. (London: Quaritch, 1876), 1:361-362. Petrarch reported in 1333 about a purification ritual performed by the inhabitants of Cologne in the Rhine on the day of Saint John: Alfred F. Johnson, ed. *Francisci Petrarchae epistolae selectae* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1923), 1-4 (Epistolae Familiares, 1:4). Note the similarities to the medieval Jewish ritual of the *tekufah*: Elisheva Baumgarten, ""Remember that Glorious Girl": Jephthah's Daughter in Medieval Jewish Culture," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 97 (2007): 192-205; Israel M. Ta-Shma, "The Danger of Drinking Water during the Tequfa – The History of an Idea," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 17 (1995): 21-32, and p. 28 in particular; Elisheva Carlebach, *Palaces of Time: Jewish Calendar and Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 160-181.

[71] Methodologically, such a direct connection would be established by a detailed study of particular instances of persecution, e.g.: Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence,* 200-230. I used similar methods in chapters 2 and 3.

[72] Yuval suggested such connection, but the evidence is slim: Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 188-198.

Naturally, this technique was much more efficient in areas where water was scarce.[73] For example, during the First Crusade, Muslims took advantage of the harsh summer in the Holy Land to deny the Crusaders fresh water. Raymond D'Aguilers reports that: "Indeed, a little before our [the Crusaders'] arrival, the Saracens had closed the openings of the wells, completely destroyed the cisterns, and blocked the fissures of the springs."[74] This tactic was quite effective, even if it did not prevent the Crusaders from eventually capturing Jerusalem. While we might expect water to be crucial in battle during the Mediterranean summer, even in northern Europe, water dictated the outcome of siege campaigns. During the rebellion of Baldwin of Redvers against King Stephen of England in 1136, wells and springs used by Baldwin's besieged army dried up on two different occasions. In one case, Baldwin's men had to survive without water using wine not only for drinking, but also for cooking and to fight fires. Soon enough, they ran out of both wine and water, and had to surrender. The rebellion was quickly suppressed.[75]

Problems of urban water pollution were common during the later Middle Ages even in times of peace, and they only became more severe in times of war. Towns were sometimes required to support a garrison, and the additional men and animals put pressure on the water infrastructure. This was true even if the attacking army did nothing to disrupt water supply, as the besieged often could not safely dispose of waste or renew their reservoirs. Besieging armies were just as vulnerable to attacks on water sources. These armies contained large numbers of men and animals

[73] Jim Bradbury, *The Medieval Siege* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992), 84, 104-105, 212, 281; Peter Purton, *A History of the Late Medieval Siege, 1200–1500* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010), 47.

[74] "Etenim ad adventum nostrum Sarraceni clauserant ora puteorum, et cisternas dissipaverant, et obstruxerant venas fontium." Raimundi de Aguilers, *Historia Francorum qui Ceperunt Iherusalem*, in *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades, Historiens Occidentaux,* vol. 3 (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1866), 293-294. See also: *Anonymi Gesta Francorum et Aliorum Hierosolymitanorum*, Heinrich Hagenmeyer, ed. (Heidelberg: Winter, 1890), 460; Bradbury, *The Medieval Siege*, 114-116. This was not the only time when Muslim armies used the limited water supply of the Holy Land against the Crusaders: John France, *Hattin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 91-92.

[75] *Gesta Stephani*, tras. and ed. K. R. Potter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 38-41, 44-45; Bradbury, *The Medieval Siege*, 79. For another such example: Purton, *A History of the Late Medieval Siege,* 82.

which were confined to a limited space for long periods of time. Often, the attackers had to deal with similar water management problems as the besieged, but without the necessary urban infrastructure. Thus, besieging armies were especially vulnerable to water pollution and disease, and defenders often benefited from this. In general, problems of pollution and disease during siege warfare were more common during the later Middle Ages, as armies became larger.[76] Besieged armies sometimes attacked the water supply of their enemies camped outside the walls. During the siege led by Jaime I of Aragon against the city of Mallorca in 1229, the besieged Muslims tried to turn the tables using such a tactic. They sent a force to cut off the Christians' water supply, but this attempt ultimately failed.[77]

Giles of Rome highlighted the great importance of water to siege warfare in a military manual he wrote at the end of the thirteenth century. He stressed that every siege should start by discovering what water sources the enemy was relying on, and taking control of them, if possible.[78] Indeed, some commanders did not wait for bad weather to disrupt their enemy's water supply. When the Angevins besieged the citadel of Alençon in Normandy during their rebellion against Henry I in 1118*:* "[The count of Anjou] cut off the water supply of the besieged by tunneling underground and secretly cutting the pipes. This was possible because the townsmen knew the channel by which the builders of the citadel had carried the water from the Sarthe [River] there."[79] Fredrick I, margrave of Meissen, used a similar strategy during his campaign against Erfurt in 1309. Erfurt had a sophisticated system of lead pipes which brought water into the town from

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[76] Leguay, *L'Eau dans la ville*, 155-156; Bert S. Hall, "The Changing Face of Siege Warfare: Technology and Tactics in Transition," in *The Medieval City under Siege*, ed. Ivy A. Corfis and Michael Wolfe (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), 265-267.

[77] Purton, *A History of the Late Medieval Siege,* 47.

[78] Giles wrote a manual for the medieval prince containing a detailed military guide: Egidius (Giles of Rome), *De regimine principum* (Venice: Bernardino Guerralda, 1502), 191; Purton, *A History of the Late Medieval Siege,* 52.

[79] Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, trans. and ed. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969-1980), 208-209; Magnusson, *Water Technology*, 6; Bradbury, *The Medieval Siege*, 84.

faraway springs. Fredrick ordered his men to dig up the pipes and sell them in nearby towns, a tactic which convinced the besieged to quickly surrender.[80] Similarly, during the siege of Carcassonne in 1209, the attackers deliberately cut off the water supply to the castle, and waited for the hot summer to dry the internal wells. The water soon became contaminated and a disease struck the defenders, who had to surrender.[81] Such strategies became even more common during the frequent siege campaigns of the Hundred Years' War.[82]

The sources above refer to obstructing the enemy's water supply, not to water poisoning per se. However, one wonders if medieval warriors actually tried biological warfare. The most well-known possible case was reported by Gabriele de Mussis of Piacenza, who wrote that the Mongols catapulted plague-ridden cadavers into the city of Caffa in Crimea in 1346:

> *[The Tartars] ordered corpses to be placed in catapults and lobbed into the city in the hope that the intolerable stench would kill everyone inside. [...] And soon the rotting corpses tainted the air and poisoned the water supply, and the stench was so overwhelming that hardly one in several thousand was in a position to flee [...]*[83]

This account is often cited as proof of biological warfare in the Middle Ages, but it is not very reliable. De Mussis was probably in Piacenza during these events, and was not necessarily well informed. Moreover, his text is didactic in nature, and portrays the plague as a divine punishment or as part of the apocalypse, so its details should sometimes be understood metaphorically.[84] The same can be said for most other alleged examples of biological warfare in the Middle Ages.

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[80] *Cronica Sancti Petri Erfordensis Moderna*, M.G.H SS, 30:442; Magnusson, *Water Technology*, 164.

[81] William of Tudela, *Song of the Cathar Wars*, trans. Janet Shirley (Burlington: Ashgate, 1996), 23-25.

[82] Leguay, *L'Eau dans la ville*, 156, 433.

[83] Horrox, *The Black Death*, 17.

[84] Horrox, *The Black Death*, 14.

Usually, the sources that describe these events are not completely reliable, or there is doubt whether the attackers deliberately acted to cause disease among their enemies.[85]

We only know of a single case where it is possible to show that water poisoning, rather than disruption of water supply, was used as a medieval siege weapon. Emperor Fredrick Barbarossa used this tactic during his attack against the Italian city of Tortona, in 1155. The city lies near the Scrivia River, but Fredrick prevented the townsmen from using this water source. Instead, the inhabitants had to rely on a small spring on the other side of the town. Though Fredrick's men continuously attacked, they were unable to block the townsmen from obtaining enough water to withstand the siege.[86] Fredrick wanted to finish the campaign quickly, and turned to a different tactic:

> *After this the king […] proceeded to make the aforesaid spring useless for human needs. There were thrown into it the rotting and putrid corpses of men and beasts. But not even thus could the pitiful thirst of the townsmen be restrained. Another device was found. Burning torches, with flames of sulphur and pitch, were cast into the aforesaid spring, and thus the waters themselves were made bitter and useless for human needs.*[87]

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[85] Mark Wheelis, "Biological Warfare before 1914," in *Biological and Toxin Weapons: Research, Development and Use from the Middle Ages to 1945*, ed. Erhard Geissler and John Ellis van Courtland Moon (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), 10-16; Karl-Heinz Leven, "Biological Warfare – Perspectives from Premodern History," *Nova Acta Leopoldina* 92 (2005): 19-25. Corpses were sometimes catapulted into besieged towns, but the goal was mostly psychological: Purton, *A History of the Late Medieval Siege,* 47; Bradbury, *The Medieval Siege*, 213, 258.

[86] Otto von Freising and Rahewin, *Ottonis et Rahewini Gesta Friderici I imperatoris*, M.G.H Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum 46 (Hannover and Leipzig: impensis bibliopolii Hahniani, 1912), 125.

[87] "Post haec rex […] predictum fontem humanis usibus inutilem facere disponit. Iniciuntur ibi hominum, pecorum fetida et putentia cadavera. Sed nec sic repelli poterat misera oppidanorum [hauriendi] aviditas. Aliud itidem invenitur ingenium. Incutiuntur predicto fonti ardentes faculae, sulfureas et piceas flammas ferentes, sicque aquae ipsae humanis usibus deinceps inutiles amaricantur." - Otto von Freising and Rahewin, *Ottonis et Rahewini Gesta Friderici I imperatoris*, 125-126. English: Otto of Freising and his continuator, Rahewin, *The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa*, trans. and ed. Charles Christopher Mierow (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), 136.

This description leaves no doubt that deliberate water poisoning was used as a siege tactic in Tortona, and a successful one: "The townsmen, by reason of the poisoning of the springs, were suffering from an intolerable lack of water, the grievous torment of thirst."[88]

While cutting off the water supply to a besieged castle was a more common military tactic, water poisoning was not, and other than the siege of Tortona, it is hard to find examples where it was used.[89] Given that water poisoning proved so effective for Frederick, one wonders why other commanders did not employ it. The answer is probably that water poisoning was an effective siege weapon only under specific circumstances. The besieged had to rely on one water source, vulnerable to the attackers' poison. If a castle had internal wells or reservoirs, it would have been almost impossible to poison these from the outside (barring an act of treason). We saw that it is doubtful that medieval warriors catapulted sick bodies into besieged towns, let alone poisoned water sources in this way. Moreover, even if the besiegers could poison all water sources available to their enemies, they would still have to ensure enough water for themselves. In the siege of Tortona, attackers had access to the Scrivia River, and could poison the spring without fear of thirst. But even if the environmental conditions supported such a tactic, there may have been other reasons to avoid it. Frederick was eager to finish the siege quickly, but some warriors may have seen poisoning as a dishonest act, replacing combat with indirect means.[90] As Collard notes, poison was often considered the weapon of the weak or even the coward.[91] Whatever the reason, water poisoning was not a common military tactic, and medieval townsmen were much more likely to be poisoned by neglect of the urban water system than by the acts of a besieging army.

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[88] "urgentur aquis amaricatis oppidani, intollerabili potus inedia, gravi sitis molestia." - Otto von Freising and Rahewin, *Gesta Friderici I*, 127; Otto of Freising and Rahewin, *The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa*, 137.

[89] Water poisoning may have been common in antiquity: Adrienne Mayor, *Greek Fire, Poison Arrows, and Scorpion Bombs: Biological and Chemical Warfare in the Ancient World* (London: Duckworth, 2003), 99-107, 111-112.

[90] Otto von Freising and Rahewin, *Gesta Friderici I*, 125.

[91] Collard, *The Crime of Poison in the Middle Ages*, 94-106.

2.4. Poisoning as a political act

Though medieval armies did not often use water poisoning as a tactic, criminal poisoning was common at this period. Collard has found more than four hundred reported cases of poisoning, mostly in legal documents. He shows that at the end of the thirteenth century, there was a significant increase in the frequency of such cases, which remained relatively common during the later Middle Ages. He warns that this estimate is only tentative: First, the crime of poisoning was not always separated from witchcraft, and it is often hard to tell whether the defendants were accused of using poison, or performing magic. Second, poisoning is usually committed in secret, so it is likely that many defendants were falsely accused, and others performed the crime but escaped trial. Thus, it is impossible to compare the frequency of poisoning to other crimes, but Collard tentatively suggests that it was not very common. Moreover, many more documents survive from the later Middle Ages, thus it is plausible that many early cases of poisoning simply left no evidence. Collard attempts to account for these problems using statistical analysis, and concludes that poisoning trials were indeed more common from the second half of the thirteenth century.[92] This estimation, with its limitations, is the most conclusive attempt at a chronological mapping of the development of criminal poisoning. It suggests that well-poisoning accusations apparently developed precisely in the period when criminal poisoning allegations were becoming more common.

Poisoning has several unique characteristics as a crime: It requires knowledge of medicine (or witchcraft) and much planning, but not physical strength. Thus, alleged poisoners were often people who lacked fighting skills, but could learn about poisons, or hire someone with the necessary expertise. Women and clerics were accused of poisoning relatively often, as it allowed

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[92] Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 20-27.

them to exercise deadly force despite their lack of military skills.[93] Moreover, since poisoning was committed in secret, it was particularly useful in political struggles. Many late medieval conspirators allegedly used poison to allow them to kill a ruler without risking a direct attack. And so, the majority of the documented victims were grown men of the higher social classes. Clearly, such "high profile" cases were more likely to leave a record, but it still seems as though poisoning was usually a crime of the nobility.[94]

This broad analysis of medieval poisoning is indeed very useful. Still, it is generally impossible to separate false allegations from true ones, and to decide whether poisoning attempts indeed took place. For example, when the Crusader king Godfrey de Bouillon died in 1100, some chroniclers suggested he was poisoned. Others, however, insisted that he died in battle, succumbed to sickness, or simply perished for an unknown reason.[95] Thus, there was probably no proof that Godfrey was poisoned, but the circumstances convinced some that this was the case. Godfrey was only forty when he died, a strong leader who captured Jerusalem a year earlier. Suddenly, soon after being elected the first king of Jerusalem, he succumbed to an unknown disease. Medieval chroniclers found it reasonable that one of the enemies who could not defeat him on the field of battle chose to poison him. The same can be said about the rumors that Emperor Henry VII was poisoned in 1313. Henry was conducting a military campaign to gain back imperial control over northern Italy, and during a siege of Siena he contracted a disease, probably malaria, and died. The circumstances seem quite similar to the death of Godfrey: a successful and healthy king suddenly dies from a mysterious illness during a military campaign in a strange land. Thus, rumors that

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[93] Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 94-105; Louis Lewin, *Die Gifte in der Weltgeschichte* (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1920), 363-450.

[94] Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 87-93. For specific examples: Lewin, *Die Gifte in der Weltgeschichte*, 223-362.

[95] Franck Collard, "Entre la chronique et la chanson de geste. L'empoisonnement de Godefroi de Bouillon," in *Texte et Contexte. Littérature et Histoire de l'Europe medieval*, ed. Marie-Françoise Alamichel et Robert Braid (Paris: Houdiard, 2011), 138-140.

Henry was poisoned quickly appeared, and remained popular throughout the Middle Ages.[96] Similarly, rumors of poisoning were common during the later Middle Ages whenever a young king or noble died unexpectedly.[97]

Still, medieval rulers truly had reasons to fear political poisoning. We will see that medieval doctors knew how to produce an effective poison, and conspirators knew how to apply it. Similarly to Godfrey de Bouillon and Henry VII, Cangrande della Scala, ruler of Verona, was a young and successful leader, who died only four days after conquering the city of Treviso, in 1328. Again, contemporary reports were inconclusive about the cause of death. Cangrande was sick before he died, but while some assumed that he contracted a disease, others suggested that he drank from an infected spring, or was maliciously poisoned.[98] But uncommonly, the corpse of Cangrande remained well preserved in his tomb in Verona, and so modern archeologists could examine it. They found he was poisoned with digitalis (also known as foxglove) shortly before his death, and probably died as a result.[99] It is unclear if he was maliciously poisoned or was a victim of medical malpractice.[100] Still, Cangrande's death was certainly caused by an effective poison,

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[96] Franck Collard, "L'empereur et le poison: de la rumeur au mythe. À propos du prétendu empoisonnement d'Henri VII en 1313," *Médiévales* 41 (2001), 113-123; Collard, "Entre la chronique et la chanson de geste," 145-146.

[97] Franck Collard, "D'Henri VII à Sigismond de Luxembourg: une dynastie impériale à l'épreuve du poison," in *Emperor Sigismund and the Orthodox World*, ed. Ekaterini Mitsiou, Mihailo Popović, Johannes Preiser-Kapeller and Alexandru Simon (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010), 9-16; Alan Friedlander, *The Hammer of the Inquisitors: Brother Bernard Delicieux and the Struggle against the Inquisition in Fourteenth-Century France* (Boston: Brill, 1999), 273-275; Richard Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials: Their Foundations in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300-1500* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 108-114; Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 90-93, 181-183.

[98] For a review of the primary sources: Gian Maria Varanini, "La morte di Cangrande della Scala: Strategie di comunicazione intorno al cadaver," in *Cangrande Della Scala: La Morte e il corredo funebre di un principe nel medioevo*, ed. Paula Marini, Ettore Napione, Gian Maria Varanini (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2004), 14-16.

[99] Gino Fornaciari et al., "A Medieval Case of Digitalis Poisoning: The Sudden Death of Cangrande della Scala, Lord of Verona (1291-1329)," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 54 (2015), 162-167.

[100] For rulers mistakenly poisoned: Luke Demaitre, *Medieval Medicine: The Art of Healing, from Head to Toe* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2013), 68; Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine and Medieval Society,* 78-85.

and even if this was an accident, in other cases poison was probably used to kill deliberately. Thus, medieval rulers were right to consider poisoning a real danger.

Unfortunately, in most alleged cases of political poisoning there is no physical evidence like the body of Cangrande, and modern historians can only guess if the rumors about poisoning were justified or not. Presumably, some rulers were poisoned, while others died a natural unexpected death, leading to unsubstantiated rumors about poisoning. However, the distinction between real and imaginary political poisoning is not very significant for the discussion about the origins of well-poisoning accusations. Clearly, many heard claims that even kings and great warriors were not immune to poisoning. These claims presented poisoning as a real possibility, and suggested that evil people might use it to gain power unlawfully. The fact that medieval courts occasionally found suspects guilty of poisoning further supported the idea that this crime was a reality of life, much like theft or murder. It is likely that people who lived under these circumstances would be more willing to accept well-poisoning accusations against minorities. Still, stories about political poisoning were not a direct cause for well-poisoning accusations. For example, political poisoning accusations were common in Italy, and still well-poisoning accusations never appeared there.[101] Thus, such allegations probably made people more likely to accept well-poisoning accusations, but did not insure that such accusations would develop.

2.5. Poison in Medical Literature

Perhaps due to the growing frequency of poisoning trials, doctors began to pay more attention to the subject of poison. During the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth, important

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[101] Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, 108-114; Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 91-93; Robert Michel, "Le procès de Matteo et de Galeazzo Visconti. L'accusation de sorcellerie et d'hérésie. Dante et l'affire de l'envoûtement (1320)," *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* 29 (1909), 269-327; Frans van Liere, "Witchcraft as Political Tool? John XXII, Hugues Géraud, and Matteo Visconti," *Medieval Perspectives* 16 (2001), 168-170.

medical treatises on the subject were published and distributed. These works usually attempted to supply remedies against different poisons or ways to avoid being poisoned all together. The fact that they became more common is a good indication that the fear of poisoning became more prevalent in European society. While these treatises provided some means to deal with the danger of poisoning, they also made clear that this was a medical reality.

The thirteenth century was a period of great developments in European medicine, as the intellectual study of the human body flourished in new universities. More of the writings of Galen, the most significant authority on medicine in the ancient world, became available to European doctors. These writings, like those of other Greek and Roman scholars, were usually translated from Arabic into Latin. With them were translated the works of generations of Muslim and Jewish doctors who commented on the classic medical literature and developed it. Among these scholars were some brilliant medical experts, such as Ibn-Sīnā, Maimonides and Ibn-Rushd.[102] Within these works, Christian doctors found several important references to poison and the ways to avoid it. For example, Maimonides' treatise on poisons was written in Arabic toward the end of the twelfth century, translated into Hebrew twice during the thirteenth century, and into Latin around 1307.[103] Other works that discussed poison and were originally written in Arabic were available in Latin even earlier. The writings of Isaac Israeli, a tenth-century physician, included a section about antidotes, and were translated toward the end of the twelfth century. The sixth book of the great *Canon of Medicine* by Ibn-Sīnā contains several tractates about poison, and was translated into Latin during the thirteenth century, or earlier. Al-Rāzī, in his *Kitāb al-ḥāwī*, which was translated

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[102] Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1923), 2:305-306; Demaitre, *Medieval Medicine*, 4-12.

[103] Maimonides (Moshe ben Maimon), *Treatises on Poisons, Hemorrhoids, Cohabitation*, trans. and ed. Fred Rosner (Haifa: Maimonides Research Institute, 1984), 21-22; Thorndike, *A History of Magic*, 2:207; Martin Levey, *Medieval Arabic Toxicology: The Book on Poisons of ibn Waḥshīya and Its Relation to Early Indian and Greek Texts* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1966), 9.

into Latin in 1279, presented the views of several Greek doctors on poison, and added his own observations. These works included only a small portion of the Arabic and classic literature about the subject, but they supplied European doctors with much new information, which influenced them tremendously.[104]

Soon, Christian doctors started writing their own treatises on poisons and antidotes in Latin. The first of these was the *Antidotarium Nicolai*, which was probably written at the end of the twelfth century. It refers mostly to poisoning by venomous animals or rabid dogs, but also to man-made poisons. The suggested antidotes include plants such as poppy, henbane and mandrake, known for their medicinal (and potentially poisonous) qualities. This text was inspired by the basic concepts of Galenic medicine, but was not a direct translation of an Arabic text. It grew in popularity throughout the thirteenth century, until it became accepted as a major authority by the faculty of medicine in Paris around 1270.[105] Similarly, William of Saliceto dedicated a section of his work *Summa Practica* to the subject of poison. In this work, which was written sometime between 1268 and 1275, William referred mostly to venomous animals or other natural poisons. However, he also wrote about "occult poison", namely, malicious attempts to secretly poison a victim. He simply noted that it is possible to poison a victim by hiding venom in food or drink. Notably, the section about poison was occasionally copied separately from the rest of the *Summa*, which shows that some found a special interest in this information.[106] Other thirteenth-century

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[104] Levey, *Medieval Arabic Toxicology, 8-9;* Thorndike, *A History of Magic*, 1:746-747; 2:313-314, 408, 756-757; Demaitre, *Medieval Medicine*, 11-12. There are only few brief references poisoning in European medical literature before the thirteenth century: Franck Collard, "Poison et empoisonnement dans quelques ceuvres médicales latines antérieures à l'essor des Tractatus de venenis," in *Terapie e guarigioni: convegno internazionale, Ariano Irpino, 5-7 ottobre 2008*, Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, ed. (Firenze: SISMEL, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2010), 366-371, 378-383.

[105] Dietlinde Goltz, *Mittelalterliche Pharmazie und Medizin: dargestellt an Geschichte und Inhalt des Antidotarium Nicolai, mit einem Nachdruck der Druckfassung von 1471* (Stuttgart; Wissenschaftliche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1976), 61-67, 134-135.

[106] Franck Collard, "Un traité des poisons factice rendu à son auteur, Guillaume de Saliceto: Notes sur deux manuscrits médicaux du xve siècle," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 78 (2011), 247-257; Collard, "Poison et empoisonnement," 374-375, 384-385, 388. Another copy of the section about poison (without the full text

doctors were more reluctant to write about intentional poisoning. For example, Gilbert the Englishman, who wrote his *Compendium Medicinae* around the middle of the thirteenth century, focused only on natural poisons. When it came to "secret poisons" he preferred to stay silent, since he wished "not to seem to be teaching something pernicious." Still, he often suggested the use of poisonous animals and plants for medical purposes, and described cases of poisoning.[107] Overall, toward the end of the thirteenth century, several doctors decided to refer to poisons and antidotes in their general medical guides, even if some of them avoided discussing intentional poisoning.

It took longer before treatises and books dedicated solely to poison appeared. Juan Gil of Zamora, a Franciscan from Castile, wrote such a book, titled *Liber contra venena et animalia venenosa*, around 1280. Most of the book, which was heavily influenced by Ibn-Sīnā, is dedicated to describing different poisons and suggested antidotes for each one. It discusses close to a hundred different types of poison, including herbal and mineral poisons, but mostly the venom of different animals. However, intentional poisoning is not explicitly mentioned, even if this work could have been useful in avoiding or causing it.[108] Bernard de Gordon, from the University of Montpellier, published around 1306 his own treatise on poisons and antidotes, titled *De Tyriaca*. In this text, he mostly summarized Greek and Arabic literature about the subject. He warned fellow doctors against the use of poison in medical practice, and thought that a doctor should not be involved in producing such substances. Thus, he discussed poisoning more as a theoretical issue than a

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of the *Summa Practica*) appears in an early fifteenth-century manuscript, which Collard does not mention: Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 243, 52r-69r.

[107] Demaitre, *Medieval Medicine*, 69-70; Thorndike, *A History of Magic*, 2:477-485; Collard, "Poison et empoisonnement," 372-373, 384. John of Toledo, in his *Liber de conservanda sanitate,* and William of Varigana in his *Secreta sublimia ad varios curandos morbos*, also mentioned intentional poisoning, but preferred not to go into details: Collard, "Poison et empoisonnement," 373-374, 376-377, 386.

[108] Juan Gil of Zamora, *Iohannis Aegidii Zamorensis - Liber contra venena et animalia venenosa: estudio preliminar, edición crítica y traducción,* ed. Cándida Ferrero Hernández, (PhD dissertation, Universitat autònoma de Barcelona, 2002), 8-17, 91-255.

practical one, and did not explicitly mention intentional poisoning.[109] Also the famous polymath Arnald de Villanova wrote a treatise about poisoning around the beginning of the fourteenth century. But in this case, the title indicates that the text was written with intentional poisoning in mind: *Tractatus magistri Arnaldi de Villa Nova de arte cognoscendi venena cum quis timet sibi ea ministrari* (A treatise by Master Arnald de Villanova about the art of recognizing poison in case one fears that it has been administered to him). This short text focuses on practical ways to detect poison and counteract its effects. Unlike Juan Gil and Bernard, Arnald did not bother to classify each poison according to the principles discussed by Ibn-Sīnā. Instead, he presented guidelines for detecting poisoning quickly, and suggested a few antidotes which should work against common poisons, mostly those extracted from venomous animals.[110] Arnald preferred to dedicate a different text, the *Antidotarium*, to the more theoretical aspects of poisoning; this work hewed closer to Ibn-Sīnā.[111]

The most influential text about poison written around this period was a treatise by Pietro de Abano, titled simply *De venenis*. This work seems to be unfinished, which may suggest that Pietro wrote it shortly before his death, in 1316. The content seems like an attempt to balance the theoretical discussion presented by Juan Gil of Zamora with the practical approach preferred by Arnald de Villanova. The treatise contains six parts: The first classifies poisons according to their origin, from venomous animals, poisonous herbs or toxic minerals. The second describes the effects of each poison, dividing the poisons into those that heat the body or cool it, and to ones that

[109] Luke Demaitre, *Doctor Bernard de Gordon: Professor and Practitioner* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980), 71-77; Demaitre, *Medieval Medicine*, 69-70; Collard, "Poison et empoisonnement," 375-376, 385.

[110] Arnoldus de Villa Nova, *De Arte Cognoscendi Venena* (Mantua: Johannes Vurster, 1473), 4-10; Collard, "Poison et empoisonnement," 377-378. About Arnald de Villanova in general: Thorndike, *A History of Magic*, 2:841-861.

[111] It is difficult to date these two texts, and several historians doubted their attribution to Arnald de Villanova. Still, they represent the medical views of the early fourteenth century on poisoning: Sebastià Giralt Soler, "El Antidotario de Arnau de Vilanova: a vuelta con la autenticidad," *Arxiu de Textos Catalans Antics* 30 (2014), 239-251.

influenced the body externally (like a snake bite) or internally (like poisons consumed in food or drink). The third part presents ways to avoid poisoning, and the fourth includes a list of cures for particular poisons. The fifth part suggests some antidotes useful against most poisons, and the last one turns to a theoretical discussion of the effects of poison on the body. The text probably became popular since it includes both theoretical explanations of poisoning and practical advice on how to avoid it. Forty-four medieval manuscripts survived, and sixteen printed editions were published, the first one in 1472.[112] The great popularity of this text, and some of the other texts above, show the growing theoretical and practical interest in poison during the latter Middle Ages. Several other doctors discussed the subject during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and medical knowledge about it continued to develop.[113] However, the works published before 1321 are of particular interest for studying the origins of well-poisoning accusations. They prove that a growing interest in poison (and fear of poisoning) developed independently of well-poisoning accusations, and could have contributed to their emergence.

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[112] Full text: Petrus de Abano, *Conciliator* (Venice: Luceantonii de Giunta, 1520), 256v-263r; the first part was printed: Petrus de Abano, *De Venenis*, Alberico Benedicenti, ed. (Florence: Leo S. Olschski, 1949). For description: Thorndike, *A History of Magic*, 2:905-910, 935-938. For distribution: Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 38, n. 226.

[113] Demaitre, *Medieval Medicine*, 66-76; Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 25-26; Thorndike, *A History of Magic*, 3:525-545; Collard, "Poison et empoisonnement," 387-392.

Medical writings on poison available in Latin before 1321

Auther	**Title**	**Written / translated into Latin**
Anonymous	*Antidotarium Nicolai*	Twelfth century
Issac Israeli	*Kitab fi al-Tiryaḳ*	Late twelfth century
Ibn-Sīnā	*Canon of Medicine*	Thirteenth century
Gilbert the Englishman	*Compendium Medicinae*	Middle of the thirteenth century
John of Toledo	*Liber de conservanda sanitate*	Middle of the thirteenth century
William of Saliceto	*Summa Practica*	1268-1275
Al-Rāzī	*Kitāb al-ḥāwī*	1279
Juan Gil of Zamora	*Liber contra venena et animalia venenosa*	1280
Bernard de Gordon	*De Tyriaca*	~ 1306
Maimonides	*Treatise on Poisons and Their Antidotes*	1307
Arnald de Villanova	*Tractatus magistri Arnaldi de Villa Nova de arte cognoscendi venena cum quis timet sibi ea ministrari*	Before 1311
Arnald de Villanova	*Antidotarium*	Before 1311
William of Varigana	*Secreta sublimia ad varios curandos morbos*	1313
Pietro de Abano	*De venenis*	1316 ?

This growth in the medical literature about poisoning can be partially explained by the general development of European medicine. New translations from Arabic and the growing interest in medical theory made new medical literature available on almost any subject. However, the popularity of short treatises focusing on practical antidotes, like the ones by Arnald de Villanova and Pietro de Abano, is arguably connected to a growing medieval concern with poison.

For example, Maimonides' treatise about poison was translated twice at the beginning of the fourteenth century, once for Pope Boniface VIII and again for Clement V. Similarly, Pietro de Abano dedicated his text to a pope, probably John XXII, who accused political rivals of attempted poisoning quite often. Arnald de Villanova was also accused after his death of involvement in a poisoning plot against Pope Benedict XI.[114] Thus, popes seemed to have had a special interest in poison, maybe because clerics were assumed to use it more often, as we have seen. Yet, anti-poisoning guides were also written for several secular rulers. Italian doctors were known for their expertise in poisons and antidotes, and produced most of these works. In general, the interest of European rulers and doctors in the subject of poison continued to grow over the later Middle Ages, and so did the distribution of the medical texts on this issue.[115]

These texts can teach us not only about the growing fear of poison among European rulers, but also about the available practical knowledge on the subject. And indeed, European doctors knew many effective poisons, even if some of the materials they considered poisonous would be deemed harmless by a modern doctor. Pietro de Abano suggested that a magnetic stone, *Lapis Lazuli* or cat brains could be used as poisons, and also warned against coriander juice, which Juan Gil actually recommended as antidote.[116] Yet, other discussed materials are indeed very toxic, and

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[114] Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 26; Thorndike, *A History of Magic*, 2:905-910, 935-938, 3:18-38. The frequency of alleged sorcery and poisoning plots around the court of John XXII is extraordinary: Abel Rigault, *Le procès de Guichard, évêque de Troyes (1308-1313)* (Paris: A. Picard, 1896), 180-191, 270-291; Guillaume Mollat, "Guichard de Troyes et les révélations de la sorcière de Bourdenay," *Moyen Age* 21 (1908), 310-316; Alan Friedlander, ed., *Processus Bernardi Delitiosi: The Trial of Fr. Bernard Délicieux, 3 September - 8 December 1319* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1996), 39-47, 99, 103, 107; Edmond Albe, *Autour de Jean XXII. Hugues Géraud, évêque de Cahors. L'affaire des poisons et des envoûtements en 1317* (Cahors: J. Girma, 1904), especially 40-67; Friedlander, *The Hammer of the Inquisitors*, 273-292; Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, 108-109; Michel, "Le procès de Matteo et de Galeazzo Visconti," 269-327; Van Liere, "Witchcraft as Political Tool?," 165-173; Friedlander, *Processus Bernardi Delitiosi*, 39-47, 99, 103, 107.

[115] Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 25-27; Thorndike, *A History of Magic*, 3:525-545; Demaitre, *Medieval Medicine*, 66-76.

[116] Petrus de Abano, *De Venenis*, 24-25, 37, 80; Juan Gil of Zamora, *Iohannis Aegidii Zamorensis - Liber contra venena et animalia venenosa*, 107, 128, 149, 244.

could be used for intentional poisoning. Pietro mentiones arsenic and several poisonous plants, such as hemlock, oleander and hellebore. We have already seen that Cangrande della Scala was administered a lethal dose of digitalis.[117] Despite some misinformation, medieval doctors knew several potent poisons. The medical knowledge needed for criminal poisoning was available to their readers, which included not only doctors, but also clerics and nobles.

Yet, one wonders whether these texts had a direct influence over the development of well-poisoning accusations. It is difficult to find any reference to water poisoning in this literature, at least until after the Black Death. The only exception is a line written by Arnald de Villanova stating that "water [from water sources] near which live venomous animals or reptiles should be very much avoided."[118] It seems that Arnald believed the venom of animals can infect water sources. However, I have found no other such warnings in other texts, and surely not references to intentional water poisoning. Thus, there was probably no direct link between the development of medical literature about poison and the first appearance of well-poisoning accusations. This literature was likely created in response to the growing fear of poisoning in medieval society, and probably made well-poisoning accusations seem more plausible. Still, there is little evidence that medieval doctors who worked before the Black Death suggested that well poisoning took place, or that it was even a likely scenario.

2.6. Conclusion

This section has focused on the possible factors behind of poisoning in medieval society: urban pollution, water protection rituals, siege warfare, political rivalry and medical practices. In the case

[117] Petrus de Abano, *De Venenis*, 26, 33, 48, 50, 65; Fornaciari et al., "A Medieval Case of Digitalis Poisoning," 162-167.

[118] "Aqua etiam iuxta quam inhabitant animalia seu reptilia venenosa est multum vitanda." - Arnoldus de Villa Nova, *De Arte Cognoscendi Venena*, 4.

of siege warfare, we saw that intentional water poisoning was quite rare, as medieval warriors were unable or unwilling to use it regularly. It was also difficult to establish a connection between water rituals and poisoning allegations. Thus, it is unlikely that these phenomena were significant causes for the development of well-poisoning accusations. However, when it comes to urban pollution, political or criminal poisoning charges, and the medical study of poison, the opposite is true. All of these aspects of medieval society changed considerably during the thirteenth century, in a way that made well-poisoning accusations seem more plausible. Urban water supply was often contaminated as cities became larger and more crowded, and municipal administrators had to act decisively to prevent this. Accusations against poisoners, real or imagined, were now more common in medieval political and public life. Treatises about poison became more available in Latin, and found interested readers. Thus, it is clear why people were more likely to believe well-poisoning accusations at the beginning of the fourteenth century than in earlier periods. None of these factors directly caused well-poisoning accusations to emerge. Still, these new developments surely made many residents of medieval towns more aware of the threat of poisoning, and probably raised concern that one day they might be the victims of such crime.

3. Minorities as poisoners

The inhabitants of late medieval Europe had thus circumstantial reasons to consider well poisoning possible. However, for well-poisoning accusations to be truly convincing, they had to include plausible perpetrators. The Christian majority had to believe that it had enemies so fierce that they would not hesitate to poison the entire Christian world. That is, it was not enough to believe that someone (or a group of people) had the opportunity to commit well-poisoning, they had to have a strong motive to do so. As already mentioned, well-poisoning accusations were usually described

as a wide-scale conspiracy to destroy Christianity, and so the likely perpetrators would have been the enemies of Christianity, from within or from without. The most famous alleged enemy was the Jews of Europe, who were often seen as the "ultimate other" by the Christian majority. Another such enemy was the lepers, who were further marginalized during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Officially, the lepers were a legitimate, and even valued, part of Christian society, but their sickness gradually came to be seen as dangerous to the public. The obvious external enemy was the Muslims, especially in a period in which Crusades were still a frequent occurrence. And last, but not least, groups of Christian heretics were perceived as threatening religious orthodoxy, and therefore as risking the well-being of the whole society. Each of these groups had an alleged motive to poison Christians, thus we must analyze ideas and representations created by the majority and depicting these groups as perpetrators of such crime. Then, we should consider how significant these representations were in causing the appearance of well-poisoning accusations, or in creating the circumstances that supported them.

3.1. Jews as Poisoners

Let us start with the Jews. We have already seen that Trachtenberg suggested that they were perceived as poisoners in medieval society, but also that his reading of the primary sources was not always careful.[119] Still, we should not dismiss his argument without further discussion, mostly because several historians have found it quite convincing.[120] He claimed that Jewish doctors were suspected of poisoning Christians, and gradually this accusation was ascribed to Jews in general. This section re-examines this argument, and aims to determine whether there are enough sources

[119] Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 97-108.

[120] Katelyn Nicole Mesler, "Legends of Jewish Sorcery: Reputations and Representations in Late Antiquity and Medieval Europe" (PhD dissertation, Northwestern University, 2012) 11-15; John, "Legend of the Jewish Mass Poisoner," 181-183.

showing that Jews were perceived as poisoners. We will see that there are few such sources, and most historians who accepted this theory based their conclusions mostly on circumstantial evidence. This evidence can, and probably should, be interpreted as representing general marginalization of medieval Jews, rather than particular poisoning allegations.

Trachtenberg had good reasons to focus his attention on Jewish doctors. During the late twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, more Jewish doctors appeared throughout Europe, mostly in Italy, southern France and the Iberian Peninsula, but also in the German Empire.[121] These doctors treated Jews and gentiles alike, but some Christians distrusted them. All doctors clearly had the medical knowledge and the means to poison their patients, and some Christians were unwilling to commit their health to the hands of a Jewish physician. In particular, Jewish doctors who worked in courts raised deep suspicions, as they treated Christian leaders.[122] These circumstances convinced Trachtenberg, and others, that Jewish doctors were perceived as poisoners. To examine this idea, we will study the limitations set on the practice of medicine by Jews.

Legal sources are the main indicator of Christian suspicion against Jewish doctors. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Jews were often legally prevented from working as doctors, or Christians were not allowed to use their services. Most of this legislation appears in canon law, but secular rulers also issued similar regulations. The earliest example of such legislation is a canon from the church council of Constantinople in 692, which was cited by medieval canonists, most

[121] Joseph Shatzmiller, "Doctors and Medical Practices in Germany around the Year 1200: The Evidence of *Sefer Asaph*," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 50 (1983), 149-164; Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine and Medieval Society,* 57-59, 107-108; John M. Efron, *Medicine and the German Jews: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 13-17, 34-37.

[122] Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 44-46, 101-106; Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine and Medieval Society,* 57-59, 78-90; Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 74-75, 155, no. 42; Michael R. McVaugh, *Medicine Before the Plague: Practitioners and their Patients in the Crown of Aragon, 1285-1345* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 59-60; Michael Nevins, *The Jewish Doctor: A Narrative History* (New Jersey: Aronson, 1996), 31-36; Lewin, *Die Gifte in der Weltgeschichte*, 79-90, 159-166; Irven Resnick, *Marks of Distinction: Christian Perceptions of Jews in the High Middle Ages* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 136-140; Efron, *Medicine and the German Jews*, 24-27, 36-37; John, "Legend of the Jewish Mass Poisoner," 181-184.

notably in Gratian's *Decretum*.[123] Later, in 1227, The council of Trier stated: "Likewise, we order the lords of the land to compel their Jews […] not to occupy themselves with medicine, nor to give any kind of potion to Christians."[124] This prohibition quickly became standard, and such laws were reissued in the councils of Tarragona in 1243 and of Beziers in 1246, and repeatedly during the second half of the thirteenth century.[125] Similar regulations also found their way into secular legislation. The *Siete Partidas*, a legal code issued by King Alfonso X of Castile around 1265, states that Christians should not accept any medicine from Jews.[126] A statute issued in 1271 by the faculty of medicine in Paris stresses that "no Jewish man or woman may perform chirurgical or medical procedures on any person of the Catholic faith."[127] Around 1312 the Jews of Aragon were prohibited from selling drugs, but this law did not prevent Jewish doctors from working in the kingdom. In contrast, contemporary laws issued in Provence and Sicily stated that Jews could not practice medicine at all.[128] Thus, rules against Jews practicing medicine were common in both religious and secular law.

The fear of Jewish doctors was not limited to legal codes, and some of them were indeed accused of poisoning. When Charles the Bald died in 877, a rumor appeared that he was poisoned by his doctor, a Jew named Zedekiah. Two contemporary chroniclers reported this, and their

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[123] Gratian, *Decretum Gratiani*, ed. Emil Friedberg (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1959), 1087 (C. 28, q. 1, c. 13). Gratian cited this canon from Yvo of Chartres' collection.

[124] "Item dominis terre precipimus, aut Judeis suis, ut eos cogant sub aliqua poena ut non intromittant se de aliqua medicina, nec aliquam potionem dent Christianis" - Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 1:318-319; Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine and Medieval Society,* 91.

[125] Albi at 1254, Beziers at 1255, Clermont in 1268, Trier at 1277, Pictavia at 1280, Nîmes at 1284, Exeter at 1287, and in papal bulls by Alexander IV: Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 1:332-337, 2:68-69, 249, 252-258, 270; McVaugh, *Medicine Before the Plague*, 59.

[126] "Otrosi defendemos que ningunt Cristiano non reciba melecinamento nin purga que sea fecha por mano de Judio." - *Las siete partidas del rey Don Alfonso el Sabio* (Madrid: Imprenta real, 1807), 673 (partida 7, titulo 24, ley 8).

[127] "ne aliquis Judeus vel Judea in aliquam personam fidei catholice cyrurgice seu medicinaliter operari presumat." - Heinrich Denifle, ed., *Chartularium universitatis parisiensis* (Paris: Delalain, 1889), 1:489.

[128] McVaugh, *Medicine Before the Plague*, 60-61, especially n. 90; Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 45; Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine and Medieval Society,* 91-93.

accounts were copied by later writers.[129] This story was probably well-known, and it may have inspired other medieval chroniclers. Richer possibly reported that Hugh Capet, who died in 996, was poisoned by Jews, but this is not at all certain.[130] Things are clearer in the writings of Guibert of Nogent, an abbot from early-twelfth century Picardy. He describes a monk who was foolish enough to trust a Jewish doctor and allow him to enter his cell, treat him, and eventually to become his friend. The Jew was skilled in black magic, and became a mediator between the monk and the devil, who tempted the monk to further sin.[131] The message is clear: one should prefer to remain sick rather than trust a Jewish doctor. Guibert also reports that a noble woman from Soissons used the help of a certain Jew to poison her brother. The plot was successful, but the Jew paid the price and was executed.[132] While the chronicler does not state that the Jew was a doctor, it seems that he believed that Jews in general had the necessary medical knowledge to commit poisoning. Despite these stories, there was no legislation on the subject until much later, nor additional information about similar allegations in contemporary chronicles. Only at the beginning of the fourteenth century, in France, can one find legal documents accusing specific Jewish doctors of poisoning their patients. Sometime before 1306, King Philip VI ordered the *bailli* of Rouen to punish two Jews who practiced medicine and allegedly killed some of their patients. The king was

[129] *Annales Bertiniani*, in *Annales de Saint-Bertin,* ed. Félix Grat, Jeanne Vielliard and Suzanne Clémencet (Paris: Klincksieck, 1964), 216-217. The part in question, towards the end of the annals may have been wrriten by Hincmar of Reims. Regino of Prüm, *Chronicon*, M.G.H SS, 1:589. For later accounts see: Mesler, "Legends of Jewish Sorcery," 271, nn. 10-11.

[130] "Hugo rex papulis toto corpore confectus, in oppido Hugonis Iudeis extinctus est." – Richer of Saint-Remi, *Historiae*, M.G.H SS, 38:308. Blumenkranz noted that this sentence is unclear, and suggested that the phrase "oppido Hugonis Iudeis" is a name of a location, rather than a claim that the Jews killed Hugh: Bernard Blumenkranz, "Où est mort Hugues Capet ?" *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 115 (1957), 168-171.

[131] Guibert de Nogent, *Histoire de sa vie (1053-1124)*, Georges Bourgin, ed. (Paris: Picard et fils, 1907), 172. About the problematic provenance of this text, and Guibert's dispute with the Jews, see: Jay Rubenstein, *Guibert of Nogent: Portrait of a Medieval Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 61-63, 111-124. English translation: *Guibert of Nogent, Monodies and On the Relics of Saints: The Autobiography of a French Monk from the Time of the Crusades,* trans. Jay Rubenstein and Joseph McAlhany (New York: Penguin Classics, 2011).

[132] Guibert de Nogent, *Histoire de sa vie*, 208.

informed that "Josse and Samuel, Jews who were staying at Rouen, gave both Christians and Jews many potions under the guise of medicines, from which, so it is said, they passed away. They did so after and despite the general prohibition made by us [the Crown]."[133] This letter raises a few important points. First, one can understand that King Philip had already issued a general royal prohibition on Jews practicing medicine. Yet, while limitations on Jewish physicians did exist, there seems to have been no general decree preventing all Jews from practicing medicine.[134] The issue may have been that Josse and Samuel were strangers in Rouen, and while local Jewish doctors were sometimes considered trustworthy, foreigners were not. Thus, the king may have alluded to a decree forbidding unauthorized people from practicing medicine. The second point is that Josse and Samuel were probably accused of medical malpractice rather than deliberate poisoning, as some Jews also died as a result of their actions.[135] Still, this letter is evidence that some Christians indeed accepted the warnings against hiring Jewish doctors. The records of the *Parlement* of Paris from 1317 present another example of poisoning accusations against a Jewish doctor. David, a doctor from Saint-Quentin in Picardy, was accused of poisoning "many Christians", but the only victim mentioned specifically was a priest to whom David owed a large sum.[136] The allegations were probably contrived to force David to pay his debt, or punish him for not doing so. The accusers probably chose poisoning as the main charge since they believed that

[133] "Intelleximus quod Josses et Samuel, Judei apud Rothomagensi commorantes, post et contra prohibitionem nostram generaliter factam, plures potations sub colore medicinarum quibusdam christianis et Judeis dederunt qui ex eo decessisse dicuntur." - Charles Victor Langlois, "Formulaires de lettres du XIIe, du XIIIe, et du XIVe siècle," *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque nationale et autres bibliothèques* 34 (1891), 19.

[134] William C. Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews from Philip Augustus to the Last Capetians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 185; Norman Golb, *The Jews in Medieval Normandy: A Social and Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 535, n. 123.

[135] About medical malpractice in the Middle Ages, see: Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine and Medieval Society,* 78-85.

[136] Edgard M. Boutaric, ed. *Actes du Parlement de Paris* (Paris: Plon, 1867), 201, no. 5023; Caro, *Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte der Juden*, 104; Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine and Medieval Society,* 78-90.

the *Parlement* would accept such accusation against a Jewish doctor. Thus, it is clear that some Jewish doctors were actually accused of poisoning before 1321.

Yet these cases may not be enough to prove Trachtenberg's hypothesis. Even if some Jewish doctors were accused of poisoning, can we conclude that poisoning was indeed a crime associated with all Jewish physicians? When one looks beyond particular examples, the answer seems negative. According to Collard, only in less than three percent of the documented poisoning cases was a foreign apothecary accused of supplying the required medical knowledge, or of being the perpetrator. Some of these apothecaries were not Jewish at all, as Italian doctors were poplar suspects.[137] Thus, it seems unlikely that the few cases in which Jewish doctors were involved could have made poisoning be perceived as a "Jewish crime". Moreover, most of the relevant cases happened after 1321, and even 1348, so they were probably influenced by well-poisoning accusations rather than caused them.[138] Mesler criticizes Trachtenberg's argument from a different angle, and argues that while Jews were considered capable sorcerers, they were not necessarily seen as potential poisoners. In a few cases, sorcery and poisoning accusations against Jews appeared together, but this seems to be unusual. Some Jews were accused of sorcery, others of poisoning, but the connection between the two accusations is questionable. Trachtenberg tended to collapse the images of the Jewish doctor, the Jewish sorcerer and the Jewish poisoner into one, yet Mesler questions this approach.[139] This argument fits well with Collard's findings, which assert that the number of cases in which a Jewish doctor was accused of poisoning is relatively small. Thus, even if Christians indeed mistrusted Jewish doctors, as the legal evidence shows, the reason

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[137] Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 44-45. For some cases: Lewin, *Die Gifte in der Weltgeschichte*, 79-90, 159-166.

[138] Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine and Medieval Society,* 86-88; McVaugh, *Medicine Before the Plague*, 98-99; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 121, n. 77; Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 97-98; Efron, *Medicine and the German Jews*, 24-27; Resnick, *Marks of Distinction*, 136-140. We have already seen that the alleged case of poisoning accusations in 1161 represent the ideas of the sixteenth century.

[139] Mesler, "Legends of Jewish Sorcery," 269-324.

was probably not fear of poisoning. Trachtenberg's argument is clearly based on limited sources, which were considered outside of the whole body of evidence.

The legal sources show that Christians feared using potions made by Jews, but at the same time, there is very little direct evidence that Jewish doctors were perceived as poisoners. To explain this seeming contradiction, we should examine legislation that prohibited Christians from consuming Jewish food or drink.[140] Supervision over food was an important subject in canon law, and Christians were forbidden from buying it from Jewish merchants, bakers and butchers. The first case of such legislation can again be found in the canons of the council held in Constantinople in 692, made availabe to medieval scholars through Gratian's *Decretum*.[141] Later, in 1197, the council of Gerona prohibited Jewish butchers from cutting meat for Christians, unless the butcher made sure that none of it was sold back to other Christians.[142] The council of Narbonne in 1227 prohibited Jews from selling meat during holy days when Christians abstained from eating it. The council of Beziers in 1246 banned Jews from selling meat at the markets at all, and two years later, the council of Paris forbid them from selling any food in public places. This legislation became common in the second half of the thirteenth century, as church councils simply reissued eariler canons. Eating food prepared or handled by Jews or even dining in their company was now

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[140] Shatzmiller suggests that Christians feared that Jewish doctors would prevent their patients from receiving the last sacraments: Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine and Medieval Society,* 91-92. However, some laws prohibited Christians from receiving medicine from Jewish doctors, but not from hiring them: *Las siete partidas del rey Don Alfonso el Sabio*, 673 (partida 7, titulo 24, ley 8); Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 2:249, 253, 257-258, 270; McVaugh, *Medicine Before the Plague*, 59-60, 98. Efron showed that canon law sometimes depicted Jews as sorcerers, and suggested that this cause them to be perceived as poisoners: Efron, *Medicine and the German Jews*, 23-27, 36-37; Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 1:328-331, 336-337, 2:68-69. However, Mesler shows that the connection between sorcery and poisoning allegations is doubtful: Mesler, "Legends of Jewish Sorcery," 269-324.

[141] Gratian, *Decretum Gratiani*, 1087 (C. 28, q. 1, c. 13). Gratian cited this canon from Yvo of Chartres' collection.

[142] Odo of Paris, *Conventus Episcoporum apud Gerundam*, in *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova, et Amplissima Collectio,* ed. Giovan Domenico Mansi, vol. 22 (Venice: Antonius Zatta, 1782), coll. 683. Christians in Late Antiquity emphasized the symbolic aspects of avoiding "Jewish food", but clear legislation which prohibited buying food from Jews became wide-spread only much later: Freidenreich, *Foreigners and their Food*, 110-128.

completely prohibited.[143] Within about fifty years, Jews were barred from the food markets and denied access to any food or drink Christians might consume.

As in the case of Jewish medicine, it is not completely clear what the purpose of this decisive legislation was, as it was usually presented without any explanation. Pope Innocent III, in a letter from 1208, shed light on the issue.[144] Secular rulers allowed Jews to slaughter animals according to their religious law, but Innocent spoke out against this privilege since he knew that Jews sold to Christians the meat forbidden to them. He claimed that Jews saw non-Kosher meat as "unclean",[145] and sold it to Christians while keeping the good meat for themselves. The problem was probably not that Christians feared being poisoned by Jews, but rather that adherence to Jewish law represented disrespect for Christianity. Christians inferred that the Halacha stated that while "clean" Jews were obligated to eat "clean food", "dirty" Christians could do with "dirty food". The council of Albi made this clear: "since, in disdain of us, Jews do not use any of our food or drink, we strictly forbid any Christian to use theirs."[146] Similarly, Innocent was horrified to discover that wine which Jews rejected as un-Kosher was sold to Christians to be used in the Mass. Wine that the Jews rejected as "abominable"[147] for everyday use was good enough for the most sacred ritual of Christianity. This perception also caused Innocent to protest against the employment of Christian wet nurses in Jewish households. Allegedly, for three days after Easter, Jews forced wet

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143 Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 1:316-317, 332-337, 2:244, 247-249, 251-253, 255-262, 267-271; Jordan, "Problems of the Meat Market of Béziers," 31-34; Noël Coulet, "'Juif intouchable' et interdits alimentaires," in *Exclus et systèmes d'exclusion dans la littérature et la civilisation médiévales = Senefiance* 5 (1978): 209-216.

144 Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 1:126-128; also see: Tolan, "Of Milk and Blood," 140-142.

145 "immundis" - Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 1:126.

146 "quia in contemptum nostrum Judei aliquibus cibis nostris et potibus non utuntur, firmiter inhibemus, ne aliqui Christiani audeant uti suis." - Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 1:334-337. Later sources make this argument more explicitly: Freidenreich, *Foreigners and their Food*, 191-196.

147 "foedatum" - Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 1:128.

nurses to pour their milk into the latrine, since they just received the host.[148] Obviously, this kind of disrespect for the Christian faith could not be abided. Soon, Christians were admonished to avoid any food that Jews had access to.[149]

The idea that it was disrespectful towards Christianity to accept food or drink from Jews can also explain the prohibition on accepting potions, and sometimes other medical services, from them. Usually, these two restrictions appear side by side in legal sources, as they were provided with similar justifications, namely concerns about disrespect for the Christian faith rather than actual fear of poisoning.[150] Accepting medicine or medical services from a Jew required the Christian patient to acknowledge the intellectual capabilities of his physician, and to trust his judgment. This kind of acknowledgment stood in contrast to the teaching that the Jews were inherently irrational, as they rejected Christian law, a clear divine truth from Christian perspective.[151] Christians who accepted medical advice or even foodstuffs or potions from Jews denied this by showing that they acknowledged their authority, judgment, and reasoning. Indeed, when Pope Alexander IV prohibited Christians from hiring Muslim or Jewish physicians he justified his decision as protecting the honor of Christianity: "For due to this [hiring non-Christian doctors] it happens that they [the Christians] are allowing their faith to be disrespected. Because

[148] Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 1:114-117, 126-129. This canon was first issued in 1179, and was intended to prevent Jews from converting their servants: Winfried Frey, "Jews and Christians at the Lord's Table?" in *Food in the Middle Ages*, Melitta Weiss Adamson, ed. (New York: Garland, 1995), 118-119. Tolan claims that the change represent a new policy designed to protect Christian purity: Tolan, "Of Milk and Blood," 140-148. For wet nurses of different religions: Rebecca Lynn Winer, *Women, Wealth, and Community in Perpignan, c. 1250-1300: Christians, Jews, and Enslaved Muslims in a Medieval Mediterranean Town* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 149-156.

[149] About the cultural importance of avoiding "Jewish food": Jordan, "Problems of the Meat Market," 34-35; Frey, "Jews and Christians at the Lord's Table?" 113-139; Resnick, *Marks of Distinction*, 158-168. Jews also legislated against dining with Christians to prevent conversion: Jacob Katz, *Bein Iehudim le-Goim* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1961), 38-56; Freidenreich, *Foreigners and their Food,* 216-223; Resnick, *Marks of Distinction*, 168-172.

[150] Gratian, *Decretum Gratiani*, 1087 (C. 28, q. 1, c. 13); Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 1:332-333, 2: 253, 256-262, 271; *Las siete partidas del rey Don Alfonso el Sabio*, 673 (partida 7, titulo 24, ley 8).

[151] Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, 14-18, 51-52; Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 124-127, 144-153, 231-234; Tolan, "Of Milk and Blood," 143-146.

these Jews or Saracens who are enjoying employment by Christians in this way, are rejecting, and wish to offend in this manner, their [the Christians' religious] law."[152] Thus, accepting such services from Jews was a sign of disrespect towards Christianity, and was therefore banned.

Laws preventing Jews from handling any food for general consumption were not easy to uphold, but Christians, especially in southern France, pushed to implement them. In the beginning, this demand was explained by practical reasons and addressed mostly to secular rulers.[153] However, as these laws became commonplace, some Christians began to believe that there was something impure or threatening about Jews, which justified them.[154] In the council of Vienna in 1267, these laws were presented again, but with a slight alteration: "Christians may not buy meat or other foodstuffs sold by Jews, lest the Jews use Christians, whom they view as enemies, to commit poisoning deceitfully."[155] For the first time, poisoning was presented as the main reason to protect food and water from Jews. Another account from this council repeats the law verbatim and also claims that due to connections with Jews many Christians "infect the purity of the Catholic sanctity".[156] However, these statements do not necessarily represent the common belief of Christian legislators at the time. In later church councils there is no mention of Jews as poisoners, even though the legal requirement to prevent them from touching food meant for consumption by

[152] "ex hoc contingit, nostram fidem haberi despectui, cum ipsi Judaei vel Saraceni in huiusmodi christianorum uti ministerio dedignerentur et reputent propter hoc offendere suam legem." - Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 2:69.

[153] Jordan, "Problems of the Meat Market," 42-48.

[154] Coulet, "'Juif Intouchable'", 209-218. Tolan claims that legislators meant to suggest that there was something impure in physical contact with Jews: Tolan, "Of Milk and Blood," 140-148.

[155] "nec Christiani carnes venales, seu alia cibaria a Judaeis emant, ne forte Judaei per hoc Christianos, quos hostes reputant, fraudulenta machinatione venenent." - Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 2:248.

[156] "infici puritas catholice sanctitatis" - *Continuatio Vindobonensis*, M.G.H SS 9, 702. Ass we have seen, Caro suggested that these statements could have cause poisoning accusations: Caro, *Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte der Juden*, 2:188-189.

Christians persisted.[157] Thus, while it seems that some Christians feared that Jews might try to poison their foodstuffs, it is difficult to show that this opinion was prevalent.

Still, in at least one case, a Jew was accused of poisoning Christians through food. In August 1313, in Manosque, a Jewish baker named Haquinus Callot was charged with poisoning bread baked for Christians. Allegedly, he used the fact that Christians bought bread from him, ignoring canon law, and poisoned it during the baking process. It possible that the accusation resulted from a symbolic act on the part of Haquinus. He admitted to throwing a certain piece of wood into the fire of the oven, but claimed that he threw a similar object into every oven where he baked bread for Jews.[158] It is likely that Christians simply witnessed the Jewish ritual of *Hafrashat Halah*, or dough offering, which included burning of a small portion of the bread's dough. Somehow, the accusers mistakenly recognized this portion of dough as a piece of wood, and the bread baked for Jews as baked for Christians.[159] These accusations may have also been inspired by the well-poisoning plot charged against the Jews of Manosque only seven years earlier.[160] These two cases may have created a precedent which influenced the persecution of 1321. One of the sources describing these events accused lepers and Jews not only of poisoning the water sources, but also of poisoning bread and wine.[161] However, we will see that this source is the only one presenting such allegations in the context of the persecution of 1321. Moreover, it ascribes poisoning of foodstuffs mostly to the lepers, possibly with Jewish encouragement. Therefore, it

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[157] Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 2:251-253, 257-262, 267-272.

[158] Shatzmiller, *Recherches sur la communauté juive*, 131-133.

[159] See: Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Seder Zeraim, Masechet Bikkurim, ch. 5; Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 148, 244-245.

[160] Shatzmiller, *Recherches sur la communauté juive*, 133-135.

[161] *Chronique Parisienne Anonyme de 1316 à 1339*, In Memoires de la Société 1'Histoire de Paris et de l'Île-de-France, vol. 11 (Paris: H. Champion, 1885), 57-59. See below: Ch. 2, p. 111.

seems that poisoning of food by Jews was no more than a marginal element in the accusations of 1321, and not their major cause.

We can now reevaluate the notion that Jews were perceived as poisoners in medieval Europe. We examined laws prohibiting Christians from accepting food or medicine from Jews, and actual poisoning accusations against them. Overall, these sources do not justify the idea that Jews were perceived as poisoners in medieval culture before 1321. True, the sources depict the growing marginalization of European Jews during the thirteenth century, and that a few Jews were indeed blamed for poisoning Christians. Still, the overall number of poisoning cases was growing during this period, and it is not surprising that Jews were involved in a handful of these, out of hundreds.[162] Despite the great hostility towards Jews during this period, we found only a few sources which explicitly accuse them of mass poisoning. The statement from canons of the council of Vienna, the two trials of Jews from Manosque and the charges against the doctor from Picardy stand as the only examples. In none of these cases do we know of persecution or violence against the local Jewish community.[163] Still, if one can suggest tentative conclusions based on these few examples, it seems that Jews were accused of mass poisoning mostly in the kingdom of France or around it, at the beginning of the fourteenth century. This is one of the indicators of the difficult political situation of the Jews there, which (as I will argue) was a major reason for their persecution

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[162] Overall, we reviewed four cases of poisoning accusations against Jewish doctors, one of food poisoning, and one of well poisoning, all before 1321: *Annales Bertiniani*, 216-217; Regino of Prüm, *Chronicon*, 589; Guibert de Nogent, *Histoire de sa vie*, 172, 208; Langlois, "Formulaires de lettres," 19; Boutaric, *Actes du Parlement de Paris*, 201, no. 5023; Shatzmiller, *Recherches sur la Communauté Juive*, 131-135. Collard found 420 documented cases of alleged poisoning between 500 and 1500. 25% of these, i.e. about 105, took place before 1200. Another 15%, or 63 cases, happened during the thirteenth century, and another 60%, or 252, happened in the last two centuries of the Middle Ages. Thus, around 193 alleged poisoning cases took place before 1321 (adding to the 168 cases which happened before 1300 another 25, to account for the first 21 years of the fourteenth century), out of which Jews were involved in only six, that is about 3%. Thus, there is no evidence that Jews were accused of poisoning more than their share of the population: Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 21-26.

[163] Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 2:248; *Continuatio Vindobonensis*, M.G.H SS 9, 702; Caro, *Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte der Juden*, 2:188-189; Shatzmiller, *Recherches sur la Communauté Juive*, 131-134; Boutaric, *Actes du Parlement de Paris*, 201, no. 5023.

in 1321.[164] However, stating that European Jews in general were perceived as poisoners during the high Middle Ages would be a gross exaggeration.

This is not to suggest that Christians wished to protect Jews from poisoning accusations. After all, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries saw a major increase in anti-Jewish allegations, from blood libels to host desecration accusations. Anti-Jewish rhetoric became sharper, and violence against Jews became more frequent and severe, most notably with the Rintflisch massacres in 1298.[165] But despite these expressions of hatred, it seems that it simply did not occur to most Christians before 1321 to blame all Jews for mass poisoning. Some unfortunate individuals were indeed accused of poisoning, mostly around France, but these accusations never extended to include whole communities, nor did they result in a rhetoric presenting all Jews as poisoners. And so, the theory that medieval Christians generally believed that the Jews were habitual poisoners seems weak. Yet, mass-poisoning accusations against Jews did appear around France at the beginning of the fourteenth century, and possibly contributed to the development of well-poisoning accusations there.

3.2. Lepers as Poisoners

The conclusion that Jews were not usually perceived as poisoners in European culture is important from a methodological standpoint. Jews were one of the minorities targeted in 1321, so it seems reasonable to look for precedents for poisoning accusations against them. However, the same logic dictates that early poisoning accusations would be directed mostly against lepers.[166] After all, the

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[164] See below: Ch. 3, pp. 225-239.

[165] Tolan, "Of Milk and Blood," 139-148; Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, 26-37; Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 242-264; Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Anti-Semitism*, 237-281; Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 40-52.

[166] Most historians have ignored the possibility that lepers were accused of poisoning before the Jews: Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 97-108; John, "Legend of the Jewish Mass Poisoner," 175-191; Baron, *A Social and Religious*

lepers of France and Aragon were the first target of well-poisoning accusations, and were attacked much more often than Jews in 1321. Since lepers were the major victims of the first wave of well-poisoning accusations, one would expect that they would have been the major minority to be depicted as prone to commit poisoning during the previous century. The next section will show that leprosy was sometimes indeed associated with water poisoning in medieval culture, but also that actual poisoning charges against lepers are hard to find.

The perception of lepers in medieval culture was ambiguous: on the one hand, they were entitled to protection and charity, and on the other hand, their disease was described as particularly vile, impure and resulting from sin. This ambiguity stemmed from the perception that leprosy was not an ordinary disease, but one that carried symbolic, and even religious, meanings.[167] The Hebrew Bible presents multiple descriptions of leprosy as an illness evolving from sin. Usually, it is seen as a divine punishment for immoral or irreverent behavior, and thus can only be cured by religious acts of purification. It is considered as highly infectious, and the leper is described as an impure person, who should be separated from his family and community. In contrast, the New Testament depicts lepers as honest people who accept Christ, and so their belief leads to their cure.[168] Based on this model, medieval legends described several saints as caring for lepers and even curing them.[169] This idea, however, carried a significant subtext: if the lepers were cured due

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History, 11:160. Others consider this issue, but do not show that lepers were depicted as poisoners or accused of poisoning before 1321: Resnick, *Marks of Distinction,* 93-143; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence,* 56-63.

[167] Susan Zimmerman, "Leprosy in the Medieval Imaginary," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38 (2008), 559-561; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 109-126, 187-246, 702-708.

[168] Leviticus, 13, 14:32-34,44; Exodus, 4:6-7; Numbers, 12; Kings 2, 5, 15:5; Chronicles 2, 26:16-23; Matthew, 8:2, 10:8, 11:5, 26:6; Mark, 1:40, 14:3; Luke, 7:22, 17:12-19; Luke Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine: A Malady of the Whole Body* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 77, 80-84; Saul Nathaniel Brody, *The Disease of the Soul: Leprosy in Mediaeval Literature* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1974), 108-123; Françoise Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux au Moyen Âge: une société d'exclus* (Paris: Imago, 1988), 88-94; Richard Palmer, "The Church, Leprosy and Plague in Medieval and Early Modern Europe," in *The Church and Healing*, ed. William J. Sheils (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 84-85.

[169] The "Golden Legend" contains many such examples: Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend, or, Lives of the Saints*, ed. and trans. Frederick S. Ellis (London: Dent & Sons, 1900-1931), 2:250-251, 3:199, 4:93, 5:216, 6:75, 148,

to their belief, their disease may have originally been result of heresy or sin.[170] Several scholars have noted that there are striking similarities between the descriptions of lepers and heretics in medieval culture. Like leprosy, heresy was considered to spread quickly, and to pose a threat not only to the one infected, but to the whole community. Thus, the segregation of lepers developed in parallel with the persecution of heretics.[171] In addition, many sources describe leprosy as the resulting from excessive sexual desire or promiscuity, as the disease was considered to be sexually transmitted. Lepers were regarded as unclean or impure, terms that carry physical as well as spiritual meaning. Thus, the corrupted leper's body allegedly represented moral corruption, and leprosy became a powerful symbol in Christian culture.[172]

Medieval hagiography and moral *exempla* can provide some insight into the cultural meaning of leprosy. According to a legend, Emperor Constantine was a leper, and was told that the only cure for his illness was to bathe in human blood. He rejected this solution, and so was cured by Pope Sylvester I. Of course, Constantine is known as the first emperor to accept

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7:61, 166, 188, 209. Also see: François-Olivier Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Âge: La lèpre, les lépreux et les léproseries dans la province ecclésiastique de Sens jusqu'au milieu du XIVe siècle* (Brussels: De Boeck Université, 1998), 201-228; Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux*, 106-111. In some stories the lepers represent Christ himself: ibid, 128-134. These stories were represented also in visual art: Christine M. Boeckl, *Images of Leprosy: Disease, Religion, and Politics in European Art* (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2011), 78-130, 191-194.

[170] This interpretation is deeply rooted in the writings of church fathers and early biblical glosses: Brody, *The Disease of the Soul*, 121-140; Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux*, 94-97.

[171] Mary Douglas, "Witchcraft and Leprosy: Two Strategies of Exclusion," *Man* 26 (1991), 724, 732-734; Friedlander, *The Hammer of the Inquisitors*, 52-53; Bériac, "La persécution des lépreux," 203-204; Palmer, "The Church, Leprosy and Plague," 80-81; Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*, 57-75; Moore, "Heresy as Disease," in *The Concept of Heresy in the Middle Ages* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1983), 3-5; Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, 79; Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux*, 97-100; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 102-109; Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems," 13-17; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 38-39.

[172] Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, 38, 95-98, 101-102, 171-174, 268-269; Douglas, "Witchcraft and Leprosy," 724, 731-734; Palmer, "The Church, Leprosy and Plague," 80-83; Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*, 47-61; Geneviève Pichon, "Quelques réflexions sur l'affaire des lépreux de 1321," *Sources, Travaux Historiques* 13 (1988), 27; Gabriela Tanase, "Corps 'enferm' et démarche de la parole poétique dans les Congés des poètes lépreux," *French Studies* 68 (2014), 150-153; Zimmerman, "Leprosy in the Medieval Imaginary," 559-563; Brody, *The Disease of the Soul*, 105-146; Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux*, 100-105, 115-121; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 102-126, 702-708; Bénédicte Bauchau, "Science et racism: Les Juifs, la lèpre et la Peste," *Stanford French Review* 13 (1989), 21-22; Mark Gregory Pegg, "Le corps et l'autorité: la lèpre de Baudouin IV," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 45 (1990), 265-287.

Christianity, and so the allegorical message of the story is revealed. Constantine could not avoid leprosy, a divine punishment for a heretic who rejects Christ, despite his power as an emperor. The cure could not be found in using his power to bathe in human blood, but only in accepting the true faith.[173] Similar ideas appear in other tales of the thirteenth and fourteenth century. The *Golden Legend* tells about a group of men who used the name of Saint Simeon to hunt a deer. As the animal went by them, they prayed in the name of the saint that it would stop, and then killed it. However, after they ate the deer's meat, they all contracted leprosy, and were only cured after spending two years with the saint.[174] The connection between sin and leprosy is clear: the men disrespected Simeon by using his name for a mundane act like hunting. Thus, they were punished by a disease which lasted until they learned about the great powers of the saint. A story from an *exempla* collection by Jacques de Vitry, also presents leprosy as a metaphor for sin. A man who refused to accept the sacraments from unworthy priests had a dream that taught him his error. In his dream, he saw a leper drawing clear water from a well using a golden vessel. He, and others who were thirsty, approached the leper so he would let them drink. Then the leper admonished them for being willing to accept water from him, but unwilling to accept sacraments from unworthy

[173] Bauchau, "Science et racism," 22; Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux*, 111-114; Zimmerman, "Leprosy in the Medieval Imaginary," 268; Resnick, *Marks of Distinction*, 95-97; Boeckl, *Images of Leprosy*, 81-82. Also see: Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 2:250-251; Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*, 44-45. This legend is described in a document known as "the donation of Constantine", which was used repeatedly to justify the secular rights of the papacy during the Middle Ages. For the tradition of curing leprosy by blood: Andrew C. Gow, "'Sanguis Naturalis' and 'Sanc de Miracle': Ancient Medicine, 'Superstition' and the Metaphysics of Mediaeval Healing Miracles," *Sudhoffs Archiv* 87 (2003), 139-144. Interestingly, a parallel story (regarding Pharaoh) exists in Jewish exegetical tradition: Exodus Rabbah, 1:34; Targum Yerushalmi (Jonathan) of Exodus 2: 23; Rashi on Exodus 2:23.

[174] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 7:143.

priests.[175] In this story, the leper represents unworthy priests, who offer valid sacraments even if they are sinners, and his disease is a symbol of their sins.[176]

Leprosy was only one of the ways to represent sin in these *exempla*. As we will see, the metaphor of poison was often used in medieval literature to describe the spread of heresy or sin.[177] In contrast, water often represented the Holy Spirit or the teachings of the church, as in the example above.[178] Some moral stories used these symbols together, and created a narrative of well poisoning as a metaphor for the spread of sin. Such stories can be found in the *Gesta Romanorum*, a collection of moral stories compiled around the end of the thirteenth century.[179] One of them tells about a king who appoints a guardian for his only daughter, and warns him that he should not let the girl drink from a certain fountain, because its water causes leprosy. Still, the daughter drinks from the fountain and indeed contracts the disease. She is finally cured by the advice of a hermit, who guides her to hit a certain stone with a rod, so moisture will come out of it. After she applies the moisture to her body, the leprosy disappears. The moral of the story is that the world, represented by the fountain, infects the soul, represented by the girl, with sin, represented by leprosy. The cure can only come from penitence and tears, represented by the rod and the moisture.[180] Another story, which appears in some of the English versions of the *Gesta Romanorum*, depicts a clear case of well poisoning. It describes how the wife of a noble knight

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[175] Jacques de Vitry, *The Exempla or Illustrative Stories from the Sermones Vulgares of Jacques de Vitry*, ed. Thomas F. Crane (New York: Franklin, 1971), 68, 198; Compare: *Gesta Romanorum*, ed. Hermann Oesterley (Berlin: Weidmann, 1872), 289-291.

[176] *Gesta Romanorum*, 420-421, 486-487, 507-509; Brody, *The Disease of the Soul*, 105-146; Tanase, "Corps 'enferm'," 149-153; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 695-702; Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems," 14-15.

[177] Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 10; Florence Chave-Mahir, *"Venenum sub melle latet*: L'image du poison dans le discours anti-hérétique au Moyen Âge,*" Cahiers de recherches médiévales* 17 (2009), 161-172; Ch. 1, pp. 70-86.

[178] As in biblical language: Isaiah, 55:1, John, 4:10-14; 1 Corinthians, 10:4, 12:13; Revelation, 21:6, 22:17.

[179] *Gesta Romanorum*, 256-257; Sidney J. H. Herrtage, ed., *The Early English Versions of the Gesta Romanorum* (London: Trübner , 1879), ix-x.

[180] *Gesta Romanorum*, 420-421; Brody, *The Disease of the Soul*, 141; Compare: Exodus, 17: 1-8; Numbers, 20:1-13.

named Iosias left their gate unlocked while he was asleep. A bear enters and bathes in their well, infecting it with poison. Later, Iosias, his wife and their men drink from the well and become infected with leprosy. The moral of the story is that the flesh of a good Christian (the wife) can leave the door open for the devil (the bear). He may put the venom of sin into the well of mercy, causing the flesh and the reason (the knight) to be infected.[181] Other stories in this collection use similar metaphors.[182] Thus, moral examples of the later Middle Ages occasionally presented leprosy as caused by drinking poisoned water. These stories did so as a metaphor for sin, but at the same time provided vivid images of such scenario.

These stories demonstrate a possible connection between leprosy and well poisoning in medieval culture. Still, one wonders how common these ideas were, and the likelihood that they encouraged well-poisoning accusations against lepers. First, it is noteworthy that these stories were meant and designed to be spread, as they were written as the basis for sermons given by priests and friars. They were intentionally short, simple and easy to remember, so they could be transmitted orally. For every person who read them, there were probably dozens, if not hundreds, who heard them told by a preacher.[183] Moreover, the manuscripts themselves are far from rare, as collections of such stories were very popular in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Some compilers invented stories themselves, but more often copied them from other contemporary collections. This method insured that the stories were reproduced and spread very quickly

[181] Herrtage, *The Early English Versions*, 263-268; Brody, *The Disease of the Soul*, 140-141.

[182] *Gesta Romanorum*, 456-457, 493-494, 505-506, 507-509. For similar examples: Tanase, “Corps ‘enferm’,” 149.

[183] Herrtage, *The Early English Versions*, vii-ix; Jacques de Vitry*, The Exempla*, xix-xxi. However, the stories were often used only as a model for the sermon, and not always transmitted as they were written: Sherry L. Reames, *The Legenda Aurea: A Reexamination of Its Paradoxical History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 101-103. Jacques Le Goff points out that during the fourteenth century the *exempla* became a literary genre which existed independently from public sermons. However, he agrees that there are strong connections between the *Exempla* and medieval folklore: Jacques Le Goff, “L’"exemplum" medieval,” in Claude Bremond, Jacques Le Goff and Jean-Claude Schmitt, *L’"Exemplum"* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1982), 63-66, 82-83, 85-107.

throughout Europe. For example, by the middle of the fourteenth century the *Gesta Romanorum* was so popular that it circulated in several versions in England, and several other versions in the German Empire. The *Golden Legend* was the medieval equivalent of a bestseller, and survives in hundreds of manuscripts.[184] Thus, these hagiographical and moral collections influenced popular culture and shaped public opinion more than any other literature.

Indeed, images of lepers similar to those represented in the *exempla* collections can be found in contemporary secular literature. Leprosy was seen as symbolic of different kinds of sinful behavior, including treachery, corruption and heresy. Authors linked the external afflictions of the sick with internal decay, and thus described people who acted against the common good as lepers. Sinful behavior was often referred to as "poison", "disease" or "leprosy", a metaphor which the readers clearly understood.[185]

The negative ideas associated with lepers may have contributed to the development of well-poisoning accusations against them in 1321. However, it is hard to show that lepers were a target for such accusations in preceding decades. Many historians have noted the growing marginalization of lepers during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and suggested that the persecution of 1321 was the culmination of this process. Indeed, in an effort to prevent infection, contact between lepers and the general population was often limited. Lepers were usually banned from public places, forced to wear distinctive closing, or forbidden from sharing food or drink with the healthy.[186] Yet, several historians have pointed out the over-simplification in the idea that

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[184] Jacques de Vitry*, The Exempla*, liii-cxvi; Herrtage, *The Early English Versions*, xiv-xviii; Reames, *The Legenda Aurea*, 3-5, 197-212.

[185] Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux*, 135-140; Tanase, "Corps 'enferm'," 149-153; Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 104; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence,* 56-63.

[186] Among others: Françoise Bériac, 67-138; Douglas, "Witchcraft and Leprosy," 731-734; Palmer, "The Church, Leprosy and Plague," 81-83; Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*, 57-75; Pegg, "Le corps et l'autorité," 272-274; Demaitre, Leprosy in Premodern Medicine, 34-74, 98-102, 143-147; Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux,* 192, 215-227; Zimmerman, "Leprosy in the Medieval Imaginary," 560-578. See more below: Ch. 2, pp. 129-135.

lepers were a distinct minority isolated from European society. Different means of separation, some less severe, were used in different communities, and in many places the social status of lepers did not deteriorate during the later Middle Ages. Moreover, lepers were not often completely separated from their previous life once they entered the leprosarium, as some of the older historiography claimed. They were indeed limited in their interactions with the healthy, but were usually still a functioning part of medieval society.[187] Therefore, general statements regarding the social status of lepers cannot explain why they were accused of well-poisoning in 1321. To some degree, lepers were marginalized throughout the continent, but in most communities they were never persecuted, but were rather protected by law.

Thus, it is not surprising that there is little evidence that lepers were accused of mass poisoning before 1321. The most often cited case is the alleged burning of Jews and lepers in Metz in 1269.[188] All of the references to this event are based, sometimes indirectly, on one footnote by Bernard Blumenkranz. Blumenkranz can usually be considered reliable, yet in this particular case he did not cite his primary evidence, nor did he mention the reason for the execution.[189] Thus, even if Jews and lepers were indeed accused of a similar crime, one cannot assume that this crime was poisoning, let alone well poisoning. Without further evidence, we cannot conclude that the fact that lepers and Jews were executed at the same time was more than a coincidence. In other cases, lepers were accused of spreading their disease by ignoring the limitations intended to segregate

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[187] Guy Geltner, "Social Deviancy: A Medieval Approach," in *Why the Middle Ages Matter: Medieval Light on Modern Injustice*, ed. Celia Chazelle, Simon Doubleday, Felice Lifshitz, Amy G. Remensnyder (New York: Routledge, 2012), 29-34; Carole Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), 13-43, 302-322; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 27-52.

[188] Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 219; Susan L. Einbinder, *Beautiful Death: Jewish Poetry and Martyrdom in Medieval France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 100; Kirsten A. Fudeman, *Vernacular Voices: Language and Identity in Medieval French Jewish Communities* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 148; Sara Offenberg, "Mirroring Samson the Martyr: Reflections of Jewish-Christian Relations in the North French Hebrew Illuminated Miscellany," in *Jews and Christians in Thirteenth Century Europe*, ed. Elisheva Baumgarten and Judah Galinsky (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 206.

[189] Bernard Blumenkranz, "En 1306: Chemins d'un exil," *Evidences* 13 (1962), 20.

them. In particular, many feared that lepers might have intercourse with healthy women, thus infecting them, and their potential future partners, with leprosy. Lepers who did so faced criminal charges and punishment.[190] Still, there is little evidence that lepers were accused of intentionally spreading their illness before 1321.

Therefore, the argument that lepers were perceived as poisoners before 1321 does not seem convincing. Like the Jews, lepers were often isolated in European society of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. They were portrayed as sinners in contemporary culture, and sometimes suspected of infecting the public with their illness. Yet, I find no reason to assume that they were accused of intentional poisoning before 1321. As we will see, only a particular set of political and social circumstances allowed such accusations to appear, and in most of medieval Europe lepers were never systematically persecuted. The negative connotations that lepers indeed carried in medieval culture were rarely expressed as actual poisoning accusations, let alone as violence.

3.3. Muslims as poisoners

During the events of 1321, lepers and Jews were accused of conspiring with the support of Muslim leaders, who supplied them with poison and money. The next chapter will follow this development, and the third chapter will discuss Muslims who were accused of poisoning wells in the kingdom of Aragon.[191] Unlike the cases of Jews and lepers, there are strong precedents in European culture for poisoning allegations against Muslims. Before examining these allegations, we should note that in most of Europe, Muslims were not a minority group in the same way Jews and lepers were.

[190] Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 274-276, 284-285.
[191] See below: Ch. 2, pp. 119-129; Ch. 3, pp. 214-219.

Only in the Iberian Peninsula and southern Italy could actual Muslim communities be found.[192] But stories which described Muslims as poisoners usually did not refer to these communities, but rather to unknown Muslims across the Mediterranean. In the age when Crusades were still a reality, Christian armies indeed fought against Ayyubids, Turks and Mamelukes. Unlike Jews or lepers, Muslims had the military force to challenge Christianity, and they often did so in the East. Therefore, the Muslim kingdoms of the East were a much more feared enemy than the Muslim minorities who still lived in the outskirts of Europe.[193] And so, the Muslims of the East were often portrayed as a dreaded, all-powerful enemy plotting to destroy Christianity, and played a central role in stories of well poisoning.

The fear that Muslims might use mass poisoning as an anti-Christian weapon started soon after the first Crusade. Ekkehard of Aura mentions allegations of water poisoning in the Kingdom of Jerusalem:[194]

> *Since it was becoming hotter after this summer [of 1100], the air throughout Palestine was corrupted with the stench of cadavers. It was also said that the springs were infected with poison by the barbarians [the Muslims], or that the cisterns [were poisoned] with the blood of the dead; the plague which started by this killed many of us, that is, among the circle of the warrior-pilgrims [the Crusaders].*[195]

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[192] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 21-26; Alex A. Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 112-159, 275-294; Brian A. Catlos, *Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom, c. 1050-1614* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 49-127.

[193] Jonathan R.S. Phillips, *Holy Warriors: A Modern History of the Crusades* (London: Random House, 2009), 3-272; Catlos, *Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom,* 128-162, 313-340.

[194] Ekkehard was the abbot of Aura, in Franconia. He continued a previous chronicle, and published it in several redactions from 1106 to 1125: Irene Schmale-Ott, "Untersuchungen zu Ekkehard von Aura und zur Kaiserchronik," *Zeitschrift für Bayerische Landesgeschichte,* 34 (1971), 403–461.

[195] "Incalescente post haec aestate, corrumpiturper Palaestinam aer cadaverum foetore. Sunt etiam qui dicant fontes a barbaris infectos veneno, vel cisternas occisorum sanie; unde exorta pestilentia multos ex nostris, utpote sub aere peregrino militantes, occidit;" - Ekkehard of Aura, *Ekkehardi Chronicon Universale*, M.G.H SS 6:219.

Ekkehard, who travelled to the Kingdom of Jerusalem himself, can be considered a reliable witness.[196] During the eleventh century, the climate of the Eastern Mediterranean was unusually dry, and water sources evaporated throughout the kingdom. The lack of fresh drinking water caused widespread illness, as may have also happened in the summer of 1100.[197] Also, despite the recent Christian occupation, many Muslims still lived in the land, and the Crusaders suspected the illness was a result of their actions. These conditions may also explain the rumor that King Godfrey de Bouillon was poisoned in the same summer.[198] Ekkehard reported these rumors in his chronicle, and other Crusaders may have also mentioned them in their homelands.

Stories of Muslim attempts to incite European minorities to spread poison in Christian lands resurfaced in the thirteenth century. The Pastoureaux (shepherds), a popular movement which aspired to assist the Seventh Crusade, was associated with such accusations. This movement was created in northern France in 1251 to aid King Louis IX, who had been defeated in Egypt about a year earlier. However, after its members' efforts were rejected by the authorities, they turned to acts of anti-clerical and anti-Jewish violence. Some chroniclers saw this movement as heretical and suggested that it was established with Muslim inspiration.[199] A few of them added that the Pastoureaux used potions or black magic to spread their heresy and put the whole public

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[196] Ekkehard travelled to the East in 1101: Schmale-Ott, "Untersuchungen zu Ekkehard von Aura," 404-406.

[197] Ronnie Ellenblum, *The Collapse of the Eastern Mediterranean: Climate Change and the Decline of the East, 950–1072* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 37-40, 100-102, 196-227.

[198] Collard, "Entre la chronique et la chanson de geste," 138-139; Ch. 1, pp. 45-46.

[199] For more about the movement and the sources: Peter Jackson, ed. *The Seventh Crusade, 1244-1254: Sources and Documents* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 179-193; Malcolm Barber, "The Crusade of the Shepherds in 1251," in *Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Meeting of the Western Society of French History, 14-16 October 1982, Winnipeg*, John F. Sweets, ed. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1984), 1-17. For heresy and Muslim inspiration: *Extraits des Chroniques de Saint-Denis*, R.H.G. (Léopold V. Delisle, ed. *Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de la France* (Farnborough: Gregg, 1967)) 21:115-116; Richer, *Gesta Senoniensis Ecclesiae*, M.G.H SS, 25:310-311; Balduinus of Ninove, *Chronicon*, M.G.H SS, 25:544; Roger Bacon, *Opus Majus*, John Henry Bridges, ed., vol. 1 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1897), 401; *Actus Pontificum Cenomannis in Urbe Degentium [1255-72]*, ed. G. Busson and A. Ledru, vol. 2 (Le Mans: Archives Historiques du Maine, 1901), 500-501.

in danger.[200] Matthew of Paris even claimed that when one of their leaders was caught: "a significant sum of money, many letters written in Arabic and Aramaic with exceptional characters and poisonous powders, intended to make many kinds of potions, were found in his pack-saddle."[201] This report claims that the Pastoureaux were in possession of all of the elements required to perform mass poisoning: orders from the Muslim enemies, the money to bribe men to commit the crime, and the necessary ingredients to make the poison. None of the chroniclers, including Matthew, actually reported that these resources were put to use in a mass-poisoning attempt, but the fear of such scenario already existed in the thirteenth century.

Matthew of Paris' preoccupation with the danger of Muslim poisoning was not limited to the Pastoureaux. He reports that in 1245, a rumor circulated in France and England that Muslims used pepper imported from the East to poison Christianity. Allegedly, many Christians died all over France after consuming poisoned pepper. Later, a rumor spread that if one was cautious, he could safely avoid the infected pepper. Matthew explained that merchants spread the poisoning rumors to convince people to avoid the newly imported pepper and force them to buy the older supply.[202] This story can help us to better understand the development of the fear of poisoning. First, unlike in the case of the Pastoureaux, Matthew doubted the veracity of the rumor. He probably accused the Shepherds of poisoning because he was adverse to their ideas, and thus his

[200]*Annales Monasterii de Burton,* in *Annales Monastici*, Henry Richards Luard, ed. (London: Longman, 1864-1869), 1:401; *Extraits des Chroniques de Saint-Denis*, 21:115.

[201] Matthæi Parisiensis, *Chronica Majora*, Henry Richard Luard, ed. (London: Longman and Co., 1877), 5:252: "Inventa autem sunt in clitellis suis cum pecunia non minima plures cartae inscriptae literis Arabicis et Caldaeis cum prodigiosis caracteribus et pulveribus intoxicates, ad conficiendum potions multiformes."

[202] Haec autem audientes Sarraceni sese muniunt multiformiter, et argumenta malitiae excogitantes, piper, quod noverant in partes Christianorum intoxicant deferendum, unde multi in partibus Franciae, hujus ignari malitiae, perierunt. Sed postquam compertum est, acclamatum est voce praeconia in civitatibus sollempnibus, tam in Anglia quam Francia, ut hujusmodi periculum cautious vitaretur. Haec fecerunt mercatores, ut vetus piper, diu reservatum, melius venderetur. - Matthæi Parisiensis, *Chronica Majora*, 4:490. For more about the medieval spice trade and its economic, social and cultural implications, see: Paul Freedman, *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 104-163.

account is unreliable. In contrast, since he declared the pepper-poisoning plot false, he was apparently recording an existing rumor, rather than creating one. Moreover, Matthew explained that European merchants had an interest in spreading the fear of poisoning, thus admitting that in this case the fear originated from within European society rather than due to Muslim attacks.

These stories show that some Europeans were indeed concerned about Muslim mass-poisoning attempts. As we will see, such concerns supported poisoning accusations brought against lepers, Jews and Muslims in 1321.[203] Still, it is difficult to find additional evidence that Muslims were accused of mass poisoning before the fourteenth century, and even the existing evidence originates from only a few chronicles. There is a vast difference between a tale in a chronicle and a popular belief strong enough to incite persecution. In 1321, some Aragonese Muslims were indeed investigated and punished for well poisoning, but this was a result of confessions and official reports which pointed a finger at them.[204] Such social dynamics probably did not take place before the fourteenth century, despite the European fear of the Muslim enemy.

3.4. Heretics as poisoners

We have already noted that in the medieval *exempla*, sin was often allegorically represented as poison. Lepers were associated with poison, and thus with sin, due to their disease, an association which could have marked them as potential poisoners. However, we also concluded that there is no evidence that lepers were accused of mass poisoning before 1321, nor systematically persecuted. Like lepers, heretics were often associated with sin and poison, but unlike them, heretics faced organized propaganda presenting them as enemies of the orthodox majority. Even

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[203] See below: Ch. 2, pp. 119-129; Ch. 3, pp. 214-219.
[204] Ch. 3, pp. 214-219.

Jews and Muslims did not face such severe verbal attacks. Like Matthew of Paris, who implied that the Pastoureaux were plotting to spread poison in France, many medieval authorities suggested that heretics were poisoning the public.

The association of heresy with poison can be traced back to the Bible and the writings of Church Fathers. The New Testament describes Jesus and John the Baptist using the term "brood of vipers" to describe a group of sinners, usually Pharisees. It was probably inspired by the famous biblical scene in which the serpent convinces Eve and Adam to sin, thus causing their exile from the Garden of Eden.[205] This association between the poisonous animal and the "original sin" led Christian thinkers to describe every sin as poison, and groups of sinners as poisoners. And so, heretics were described as spreading poison, or more commonly as snakes, by some influential Christian scholars, such as Irenaeus of Lyon, Justin Martyr, and Eusebius of Caesarea.[206] Therefore, it may not be surprising that when the struggle against alleged heretics reemerged in the eleventh century, church leaders turned to similar rhetoric.

Some of the first reports of anti-heretical action in medieval Europe include imagery which ties heresy to poisoning. A chronicle by the French monk Raoul Glaber tells about an alleged heretic called Leutard of Vertus, who lived in Champagne around the year 1000. Leutard fell asleep in a field one day, and a swarm of bees entered his body and forced him to perform heretical acts, such as smashing the crucifix of a local church. When Leutard was investigated by the local bishop, Raoul writes, he "began to hide the poison (*venenum*) of his wickedness".[207] It is noteworthy that Leutard was said to commit suicide by drowning himself in a well.[208] The association between

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[205] Matthew, 3:7, 12:34, 23:33, Luke, 3:7; Genesis, 3:1-14.

[206] Chave-Mahir, *"Venenum sub melle latet," 166-167.*

[207] "coepit venenum suae nequitiae occultare" - Rodulfus Glaber, *Rodulfi Glabri Historiarum libri quinque*, John France, trans. and ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 88-91.

[208] Frassetto suggested that Raoul chose this manner of suicide for Leutard since it represented "an antisocial act which parallels the Jews' alleged poisoning of the wells later in the Middle Ages". However, the text itself does not support

heresy and poison is even clearer in descriptions of a movement of alleged heretics persecuted in Orléans in 1022. Raoul noted the popularity of the movement, and stated that "the poison of [the heretics'] wickedness infected many".[209] Another contemporary chronicler, Adémar of Chabannes, claimed that the heresy was spread by a certain farmer, who used a powder made of the ashes of dead boys to turn people into heretics instantly. A monk named Paul of St. Père de Chartres added details about the gruesome ritual in which the mysterious powder was produced.[210] The ancient rhetoric which associated heresy with poison had clearly re-emerged in eleventh-century Europe.

Christian scholars who wrote against heresy during the twelfth century used similar terms. Peter the Venerable, the powerful abbot of Cluny, was concerned with a heretical movement established by Peter of Bruys in Provence around 1120. On several occasions, Peter the Venerable compared the teachings of Peter of Bruys to a deadly poison, and the preaching of the movement to intentional poisoning. Other churchmen tended to agree.[211] Gratian, in his *Decretum*, cited

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this idea, and stories about suicide by drowning in a well are not uncommon in medieval sources: Michael Frassetto, *Heretic Lives: Medieval Heresy from Bogomil and the Cathars to Wyclif and Hus* (London: Profile, 2007), 27; Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages*, 1:25-26, 115, 118, 151, 161, 191, 220, 260-261, 302-303, 408.

[209] "veneno sue nequitie plures infecit" - Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum libri quinque*, 138-139.

[210] "Nam ipsi decepti a quodam rustico Petragoricensi, qui se dicebat facere virtutes, et pulverem ex mortuis pueris secum ferebat, de quo si quem posset communicare, mox manicheum faciebat." - Adémar de Chabannes, *Chronicon,* ed. Pascale Bourgin (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 180; "Ex quo spurcissimo concubitu infans generatus, octava die, in medio eorum copioso igne accenso, piebatur per ignem more antiquorum paganorum, et sic in igne cremabatur. Cujus cinis tanta veneratione colligebatur atque custodiebatur, ut Christiana religiositas Corpus Christi custodire solet aegris dandum de hoc solo exituris ad viaticum. Inerat enim tanta vis diabolicae fraudis in ipso cinere ut quicumque de praefata haeresi imbutus fuisset, et de eodem cinere quamvis sumendo parum praelibavisset, vix umquam postea de eadem haeresi gressum mentis ad viam veritatis dirigere valeret." - Paul of St. Père of Chartres, *Gesta synodi Aurelianensis*, R.H.G., 10:537. Based on the expression "more antiquorum paganorum", and additional details, it is clear that these descriptions were inspired by texts written in Late Antiquity: Stephen Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 54-78, 84-86, 125-127; Moore, "Heresy as Disease," 10; for more about this movement: Frassetto, *Heretic Lives*, 27-46; Robert Ian Moore, *The War on Heresy* (Cambridge: University of Harvard Press, 2012), 16-29.

[211] Petrus Venerabilis, *Contra Petrobrusianos Hereticos*, James Fearns, ed. (Turnhout: Brepols,1968), 3, 10, 68, 87, 154; also see: Chave-Mahir, *"Venenum sub melle latet,"* 164; Moore, "Heresy as Disease," 2-4. The canons of the council of Liège in 1145 stated in a letter to the pope that: "omnes Gallici regni atque nostri civitates hujus erroris veneno ex parte magna infectae sunt." - *Epistola Ecclesiae Leodiensis ad Lucium papam, PL*, 179:938. Also see: Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*, 23-24.

legislation by Gennadius, exarch of Africa (591), describing heresy as a poison spreading throughout the body of Christianity.[212] Bernard of Clairvaux, the influential reformer of the Cistercian order, feared that like poison, the doctrine of heretics could seem harmless, but actually cause much damage. He compared it to an animal with the head of an innocent dove, but the tail of a venomous scorpion, or to poisoned honey.[213] Some Cistercian preachers who tried to suppress popular religious movements followed Bernard's rhetoric.[214] Eckbert, the abbot of Schönau, wrote sermons against the newly discovered (or invented) Cathar heresy. He warned that "[the heretics] multiplied in all of the lands, so that the Church suffers great peril by the most evil poison which they emit against it everywhere."[215] Clearly, the clerical elite of Europe adopted the image of heresy as poison.

The war against alleged heretics became even more central to church policy during the early thirteenth century, under Pope Innocent III. He tried to ensure that religious and secular rulers would act to suppress heresy in their territories and wrote extensively about this subject. Naturally, he referred to heresy in harsh terms, and compared it to poison on several occasions. For example, he warned the town council of Faenza that the heretics "give the unlearned to drink the poison of error."[216] Since the great leaders of the Church, like Pope Innocent and Bernard of Clairvaux, adopted this rhetoric, some less known clerics did so as well. The thirteenth-century Dominican

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[212] Gratian, *Decretum Gratiani*, 925 (C. 23, q. 4, c. 48).

[213] "Arnaldus de Brixia, cuius conversasio mel et doctrina venenum, cui caput columbae, cauda scorpionis est" - Chave-Mahir, "Venenum sub melle latet," 165, n. 17; "Ipsi sunt qui, induentes sibi formam pietatis et virtutem eius penitus abnegantes, profanas novitates vocum et sensuum, tamquam melli venenum, verbis ccelestibus intermiscent." - Beverly Mayne Kienzle, *Cistercians, Heresy and Crusade in Occitania, 1145-1229: Preaching in the Lord's Vineyard* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press in association with Boydell Press, 2001), 96-97, n. 70.

[214] Kienzle, *Cistercians, Heresy and Crusade*, 14, 125-126;

[215] "ita per omnes terras multiplicati sunt, ut grande periculum patiatur Ecclesia Dei a veneno pessimo, quod undique adversus eam effundunt." – Eckbertus Schonaugiensis, *Sermones adversus pestiferos foedissimosque Catharorum, qui Manichaeorum haeresim innovarunt, damnatos errores ac haereses,* PL, 195:13; also note: "doctrina maledicta erat et tota venenosa" – coll. 16.

[216] "venenum erroris propinantes indoctis" – Innocent III, *Epistola potestati et consilio Faventino*, PL, 215:819; for additional examples, see in the same volume, colls. 95, 1050, 1312.

Raniero Sacconi, who conducted an inquisition against the Cathars in Lombardy, referred to heretics who "drink the poison of error from the mouth of the ancient serpent."[217] This kind of language was popular enough to allow the Franciscan friar Malachy of Limerick to write a long treatise based on the metaphor of sin as poison. This work, written around the end of the century, was titled "a treatise on poison", or "about the poison of the seven deadly sins". Malachy opened by explaining why all sins should be comparable to poison, and then described each of the seven capital sins as toxic and offered an "antidote" for each of them.[218] Malachy internalized the language of sin as poison so deeply that he organized his whole text like the medical books of antidotes reviewed above. Although he adopted this language probably more than any other contemporary writer, his text was not popular. Yet, similar imagery also appeared in a widely distributed text like the *Gesta Romanorum*, so many must have known this metaphor.[219]

Heretics were also described as spreading diseases, another form of attack on the public.[220] Such language was promoted by the highest Church officials, and was spread through letters and sermons. Neither Jews, nor lepers or Muslims suffered such a verbal attack, even when they were marginalized or persecuted. If medieval culture targeted any group as prone to commit mass poisoning before the fourteenth century, heretics must be it. But yet again, one wonders whether rhetoric actually led to action: No doubt, heretics were often persecuted, but were they accused of mass poisoning?

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[217] "erroris [...] venenum quod ex ore antiqui serpentis biberunt" – Renierus Sacconus, *Summa de Catharis*, in *Un traité Néo-Manichéen du XIIIe siècle le Liber de duobus principiis, suivi d'un fragment de rituel Cathare*, ed. Antoine Dondaine (Roma, Istituto storico Domenicano S. Sabina, 1939), 66.

[218] Malachy of Ireland, *Libellus septem peccatorum mortalium venena* (Paris: Henricus Stephanus, 1518). The text, also titled "De veneno", was often ascribed by mistake to Robert Grosseteste. For authorship and manuscripts, see: Mario Esposito, "Friar Malachy of Ireland," *English Historical Review* 33 (1918), 359-366.

[219] *Gesta Romanorum*, 505-506.

[220] Moore, "Heresy as Disease," 1-12.

To answer this question, we should examine records of anti-heretical inquisition in search of mass-poisoning accusations. The best place to look for these is the accounts of two major inquisitors of the early fourteenth century, Bernard Gui and Jacques Fournier, who questioned hundreds of alleged heretics in south-western France.[221] The first wave of well-poisoning accusations developed in the very same area in 1321, around the time when Gui and Fournier completed their anti-heretical campaigns. Fournier even investigated (at least) one of the lepers who were accused of poisoning, and convicted him.[222] The records of these investigations are ideal evidence with which to examine the hypothesis that the rhetoric which depicted heretics as poisoners led to actual poisoning charges. If any such charges were indeed presented, one would expect to find them in the very time and place in which mass well-poisoning accusations started.

Yet, poisoning accusations against heretics are almost nonexistent in the extensive inquisitorial records left by Gui and Fournier. The subject of poison camesS up only on three occasions in Gui's register of over six hundred interrogations, always in the context of a Cathar ritual which the inquisitors called *endura*.[223] According to Cathar tradition, when a person was on his deathbed, he or she would recive the *consolamentum*, the central ritual of Cathar faith, which was perceived as baptism of the Holy Spirit. This was meant to purify Cathar believers, so they

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[221] Bernard Gui, a famous Dominican inquisitor, published a guide for other investigators. In addition, he was a prolific historian: Paul Amargier, "Éléments pour un portrait de Bernard Gui", in *Bernard Gui et son monde*, ed. Édouard Privat (Toulouse: Privat, 1981), 19-37. Jacques Fournier, a Cistercian, was a most important political figure, and in 1334 was appointed Pope Benedict XII - Yves Renouard, *Avignon Papacy, 1305-1403*, trans. Denis Bethell (London: Faber, 1970), 38-39. For the activity of Fournier as the bishop of Pamiers: René Weis, *The Yellow Cross: The Story of the Last Cathars, 1290-1329* (London: Viking, 2000), 254-270.

[222] Jacques Fournier, *Le Registre d'Inquisition de Jacques Fournier, 1318-25,* ed. Jean Duvernoy (Toulouse: Privat Edition, 1965), 2:135-147; Ch. 2, pp. 121-124.

[223] For a review of the records, see: Bernard Gui, *Le livre des sentences de l'inquisiteur Bernard Gui: 1308-1323*, Annette Pales-Gobilliard, ed. (Paris: CNRS, 2002), 28-54; James Buchanan Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society: Power, Discipline, and Resistance in Languedoc* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1997), 27. For the *endura*: Bernard Gui, *Le livre des sentences*, 308-311, 456-461, 478-483. Note that Gui was the inquisitor in the trial of Bernard Délicieux who was accused of trying to poison Pope Benedict XI: ibid. 1184-1185. This charge is more relevant to political poisoning accusations than to mass-poisoning accusations against heretics: Ch. 2, pp. 165-166.

would die free of sin. To prevent dying people who received the *consolamentum* from sinning again before their death, in particular by eating unclean foods, they were put in *endura*, that is denied any food or drink other than water. Naturally, a person who was put in *endura* rarely recovered, and simply had to wait for death to end his suffering.[224] According to some alleged Cathars who were investigated by Gui, the relatives of the person in *endura* would sometimes use poison to hasten his or her death. Thus while these heretics were said to use poison, they were clearly not accused of doing so in order to harm the Catholic public.

A more relevant example of poisoning accusations against heretics can be found in the investigations conducted by Jacques Fournier; we have records for 95 witnesses between 1318 and 1325, 93 of which related to heresy.[225] Not all of the witnesses were suspects themselves, but records usually include accusations against more than one person, and so the number of alleged heretics was in the hundreds. Of the 47 testimonies collected before the accusations wave of 1321 none mention poisoning, and only in two testimonies given after 1321 was this issue addressed. Both depositions, by Arnaud Sicre and Pierre Maury, stated that a group of heretics who fled to Aragon plotted to poison one of their members, a woman named Jeanne Marty. Jeanne's mother and husband were devoted Cathars, but she turned against their religion and came into violent conflict with them. The Cathar exiles feared that Jeanne would betray them to the inquisitors and decided to poison her. However, they were unable to obtain any poison, and Jeanne was not murdered.[226] In this case, heretics confessed an attempt to poison one of their religious rivals, but the crime never took place, and there was no plot of mass poisoning.

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[224] For more about this ritual: Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, 10-11, 184.

[225] Jacques Fournier, *Le Registre d'Inquisition de Jacques Fournier*; Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, 28; Fournier investigated a converted Jew who was accused of returning to his former faith, and a leper who was accused of well poisoning, as mentioned above. The other testimonies are related to the inquisition against heretics.

[226] Ibid. 2:55-57, 3:172-178, 247; Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, 183-184.

Based on these inquisitorial records, the hypothesis that the rhetoric which depicted heretics as poisoners led to actual poisoning charges against them seems weak. This evidence does not represent all of the surviving inquisition records from the period prior to the persecution of 1321.[227] Still, the data are quite extensive, and originated from the same time and place in which well-poisoning accusations began. The fact that heretics were not suspected of mass poisoning shows that there was a great difference between allegorically depicting them as poisoners and actually charging them with poisoning. Though heretics were often described as poisoners in clerical letters and sermons, they were not actually accused of poisoning the public, even by inquisitors.

3.5. Conclusions regarding minorities depicted as poisoners

The study of poisoning accusations against minorities reveals the major difference between imagery and practice in medieval society. It is true that all the examined minority groups were depicted as poisoners in sermons, polemical writings or chronicles. Yet, finding actual cases of poisoning accusations against their members, let alone charges of mass poisoning, has proven quite difficult. It seems that medieval people knew well the difference between a metaphor and an accusation, at least in our case. When heretics were accused of "spreading poison", it was usually clear that they should be prevented access to the local church, not the local well.

Conclusion

The study of the factors which could have contributed to the development of well-poisoning accusations presents a complex picture. Some of the social, cultural and environmental changes of

[227] Yves Dossat, *Les crises de l'Inquisition toulousaine au XIIIe siècle, 1233-1273* (Bordeaux, Imprimerie Bière, 1959), 29-55; Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, 26-28.

the thirteenth and early fourteenth century certainly supported the emergence of the idea of well poisoning. Cities became larger and more crowded, so the fear that someone might contaminate public water sources was more common, and probably justified. Thus, this period produced more urban regulations intended to protect water sources, and more legal action against those who disregarded these regulations. At the same time, political rivals used poisoning accusations more often to undermine their opponents, and in some cases, these accusations were not false. In addition, and probably in connection with this political development, criminal poisoning accusations became much more common from the second half of the thirteenth century. The medical literature developed alongside the new public interest in poisoning, and many more texts discussing this issue were available in comparison to earlier periods. All these factors support the idea that the intensification of public life and communication during the thirteenth century contributed to the development of well-poisoning accusations. Urban water supply was indeed in danger, the medical knowledge required to perform successful poisoning was more available, and more people were convicted of committing such crime.

On the other hand, particular poisoning accusations against minorities are hard to find. True, occasionally a Jewish doctor was accused of malpractice, or a leper of spreading his illness by negligence. Preachers described heretics as poisoners, and chroniclers told about the evil plots of the Muslims across the sea. However, as far as the surviving records reveal, members of these groups were rarely charged with mass-poisoning before 1321: three cases of French Jews in Manosque and Saint-Quentin are the exceptions.[228] Even in these cases, the accusations were directed against one individual, with no apparent implication for the local Jewish community.

[228] See above: Ch.1, pp. 74-75.

Despite the existing historiography which suggests otherwise, and despite the possible contributing factors listed above, well-poisoning accusations were very rare before 1321.

The statements that one can find contributing factors for the development of well-poisoning accusations before 1321 and at the same time that few such cases actually occurred seem contradictory, but they are not. It is likely that the environmental, political and cultural developments described here were not sufficient to cause such accusations, but they could confirm an existing rumor. For example, if a person noticed that the water in his well suddenly became undrinkable, he was unlikely to blame it on his Jewish neighbor (unless he saw him walking around with a dead body). However, if the same person heard that all water sources in his county were poisoned by lepers, he was likely to blame the inhabitants of the local leprosarium for infecting his well, even if he knew that urban pollution could cause this. In this case, environmental pollution of water is a necessary condition for the development of well poisoning accusations, not a sufficient one.

Therefore, we can conclude that some of the cultural, environmental and political changes in European society were significant in supporting the development of well-poisoning accusations. Such accusations could not have emerged in a society in which all water sources were safe to use, minorities were not seen as hostile, or the medical knowledge required to commit poisoning was not available. Yet even when these necessary factors were already in existence, well-poisoning accusations did not appear immediately, and did not happen everywhere. Thus, we must analyze the first wave of such accusations, and look for the triggers which led people to believe that such scenario was not an abstract possibility, but a clear reality. The next chapter will focus on this first wave, the persecution against the lepers of south-western France in the spring of 1321, in order to do so.

Chapter 2: The First Wave of Well-Poisoning Accusations: The Persecution of Lepers in 1321

As the first chapter shows, there were precedents for the idea of well poisoning in European culture by the beginning of the fourteenth century. A medieval person may have heard about the possibility of intentional poisoning in religious sermons, in local courts, or in a stories about historical events. Water sources in his neighborhood may have been contaminated, and local doctors and officials may have warned him that this could cause a major plague. Clearly, not all people heard such warnings or believed them, but some did. This conclusion can help us contextualize the first widespread outbreak of well-poisoning accusations in France in 1321.[1] Without the notion that well poisoning is a realistic possibility, poisoning allegations could not persuade the public, and the persecution of possible poisoners could not spread.[2] Indeed, we will see that many in France sincerely believed these accusations in 1321, and acted to punish the alleged poisoners. But this development is far from trivial. There is a major difference between ideas and action, between sinister thoughts and persecution, as we have noted. Indeed, fear, hatred and desire for revenge can certainly drive people to act violently, but these actions will still be limited by political, economic and religious factors. Attacks, even against minorities like lepers and Jews, could influence alliances in the community, eliminate or create monetary obligations or be considered as a good deed or a sin. When persecutors decided to act against lepers and Jews, they most likely considered these matters as well as their general ideas about minorities and the probability of well poisoning. The two following chapters present an analysis of the events of 1321 based on this premise: The cultural notions regarding minorities and well poisoning were a precondition for the attack to take place, and it is important to show how this could happen. At the same time, the actions themselves

[1] Resnick presents the cultural background for the persecution of 1321, but does not address local social factors which contributed to this persecution: Resnick, *Marks of Distinction*, 93-143.

[2] Douglas, "Witchcraft and Leprosy," 723-731; Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 234-237.

were also an outcome of other social factors, and sometime developed in ways that few could predict or control. Thus, cultural study cannot be separated from social analysis if one wants to understand how well poisoning caused persecution of minorities in 1321, or on other occasions. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the ways in which general cultural factors led to persecution of lepers within the limitation of local social factors. The question is not so much why people in France and Aragon accepted the idea of well poisoning in 1321, but why they chose to put it into action. What was unique about the circumstances of this time and place that made people first see well poisoning as reason for widespread violence, while people in other times and places did not?

As a first step to answer this question, one should understand that the events of 1321 actually consisted of two waves of persecution. The first one focused on lepers, started in April around Gascony and spread to the south and into the kingdom of Aragon. Only in June did King Philip V of France address these events, issuing an order to arrest the lepers in parts of the North.[3] The persecution of Jews started only around mid-June, probably around Tours, and spread in the northern and eastern parts of France. Simultaneously, well-poisoning accusations against Muslims and other minorities appeared in Aragon.[4] There is no evidence that any Jewish communities, or minorities other than lepers, were persecuted in the south at this time, with perhaps Avignon as the only exception.[5] This chapter discusses the persecution of lepers, and the next focuses on the persecution of Jews, Muslims and other minorities. The chapter is divided into three major parts:

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[3] Géraud Lavergne, "La persecution et la spoliation des lépreux à Périguex en 1321," in *Recueil de Travaux Offert à M. Clovis Brunel* (Paris: Société de l'École des Chartes, 1955), 2:107-112; Bériac, "La Persécution des Lépreux," 205-206; Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems," 2; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 36-37, 39-41, 49; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 52-55. For the decree of 21 June, see: Duplès-Agier, "Ordonnance de Philippe le Long contre les lépreux," 270-272.

[4] William C. Jordan, "Home Again: The Jews in the Kingdom of France, 1315-1322," in *The Stranger in Medieval Society,* ed., F.R.P. Akehurst and Stephanie Cain Van D'Elden (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 37-38; Elizabeth A. R. Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews of France: The Alleged Expulsion of 1322," *Speculum* 66 (1991), 311-313; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 64-67; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 35-38, 40; Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems," 5-6.

[5] Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 40, 45-47.

The first maps the persecution of lepers in 1321 geographically and chronologically. In addition, it reviews in detail records of investigations of several lepers, in order to better understand the development of the accusations. Some of these records have been studied before, but no attempt to organize them chronologically and explain their development has been made. The second part focuses on the possible reasons for the persecution of lepers, in particular the political circumstances that marked them as a target for accusations. This subject was studied carefully by Françoise Bériac-Lainé, and this part of the chapter follows largely her research.[6] However, her general conclusions require some contextualization to clarify the events of 1321 in particular. The third part suggests an explanation for the fact that the lepers were accused of well poisoning, and not of some other offense. It studies three social factors which may clarify this fact: the cultural notions regarding lepers and leprosy, the change in medical understanding of leprosy and its spread in this period, and the political use of poisoning accusations in southern France. These three parts together are designed to provide a complex explanation for the persecution of lepers in 1321 as a unique event, separate from other cases of well-poisoning accusations which followed it.

While the issue of well poisoning has not been treated as a major historiographical subject, several historians have presented valuable studies of the events of 1321. The first was Paul Lehugeur, who in 1897 described these events as part of his comprehensive work about the reign of King Philip V. Malcolm Barber published a first general article on the subject in English, and Françoise Bériac-Lainé added an article which focused on the reasons for the persecution of the lepers. Elizabeth Brown and William Jordan discussed the attacks against the Jews and their implications for French Jewry. Carlo Ginzburg analyzed the persecutions of 1321 and concluded that they evolved as a result of popular culture which depicted Jews and lepers as agents of the

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[6] Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots.*

devil. In contrast, David Nirenberg claimed that well-poisoning accusations were driven mainly by local political and economic interests.[7] His impressive knowledge of the primary sources and the sophisticated methodological tools he applies to interpret them have convinced many scholars of the validity of his theory. In general, I tend to accept his conclusions regarding the political tensions that surrounded the persecution, but also to give more importance to social and cultural factors that contributed to its development. My work is not intended to replace the existing literature on the subject, but rather to add to it a detailed analysis of the development of the accusations and an explanation of the social and cultural factors that enabled them.

Lepers accused of poisoning wells – mapping and chronology

Before addressing the reasons for the persecution of lepers and the role well-poisoning accusations played in it, we should map the events as clearly as possible. The first account of persecution of lepers in 1321 came from Périgueux on 16 April. The city's mayor ordered a systematic arrest of local lepers, on suspicions of attempted well poisoning and a plot to cause mass mortality. They were held prisoners and questioned for ten days, until they were all convicted and burned at the stake on 27 April. The mayor and the city council officially confiscated their lands and property, and offered them for sale. On 6 May, an official statement of sale was issued, and the property of the lepers was sold to local lords. During the same month, the council also sent its representatives to investigate lepers suspected of involvement in the plot in seven other towns and villages around the Périgord. These investigations spread the notion that the lepers poisoned wells in the area, and

[7] Paul Lehugeur, *Histoire de Philippe le Long*, (Paris: Hachette, 1897), 2:421-450; Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems," 1-17; Bériac, "La persécution des lépreux," 204-221; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews", 294-329; Jordan, "Home Again", 37-39; Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 244-248; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 33-62; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 51-68.

probably caused the persecution of lepers in nearby locations, like Bassillac.[8] As the analysis of inquisitorial records related to these events will show, this dynamic was not unique to this area.

Indeed, the persecution of lepers quickly spread from the Périgord. On Easter, 19 April, only three days after the beginning of the persecution in Périgueux, the same accusations were made against the lepers of Lisle-sur-Tarn, near Toulouse. This village is about seventy miles away from Périgueux, and considering the limitations of medieval communication, it is unlikely that one event caused the other.[9] Similarly, the lepers of Pamiers, even further to the south, were first arrested on 19 April. In addition, on the same day an investigation was opened against the lepers of Martel, about 20 miles east of Périgueux. Thus, one has to assume that the persecution began earlier, elsewhere in south-western France, and spread directly to these scattered sites, or that the notion that lepers were poisoning wells was already widespread.[10]

The persecution continued during May and June, spreading through south-western France. A chronicle from Uzerche, a town located about 45 miles north-east of Périgueux, allows us an additional window on this process. On 13 May three lepers and "a noble matron" confessed to poisoning wells and were executed. During the following week, 26 lepers, both men and women, were executed in three groups. Another 16 lepers were burned at the stake for the same reason about a month later. The remaining fifteen lepers, who included only pregnant women and some young children, were permanently enclosed in a leper house. The account adds that: "Entering the

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[8] Lavergne, "La persecution", 107-112. Léon Dessalles, *Histoire du Périgord* (Périgueux: Delage et Joucla, 1885), 2:160-161; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 36, 39-41.

[9] Information could travel quickly enough to cover such distance in three days even in the Middle Ages. However, this was only the case when it was transmitted deliberately, with intention to convey it as quickly as possible. There is no reason to assume that someone in Périgueux decided to send the news about the lepers' plot to Lisle-sur-Tarn immediately: Yves Renouard, "Information et transmission des nouvelles," in *L'histoire et ses méthodes*, Charles Samaran, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 98-104, 110-117.

[10] Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 39-41; Bériac, "La persécution des lépreux," 205-206, 209; Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 123; Vincent Raymond Rivière-Chalan, *La Marque infâme des lépreux et des christians sous l'Ancien régime: des cours des miracles aux cagoteries* (Paris: la Pensée universelle, 1978), 47-50.

house, all [the lepers] equally were branded on their neck by a hot nail, so if one of them escaped, he would be recognized among other people".[11] The chronicle does not explain why certain people were convicted and executed earlier than others, but it seems reasonable that a series of trials took place. First, only a few individuals were suspected of well poisoning, but during their investigation they may have implicated others. Thus, one trial led to the next, and soon all local lepers were said to be involved in the plot.[12]

It is clear that the persecution of lepers was most prevalent in the Périgord and around Toulouse, and that in these areas most lepers were executed or enclosed.[13] Only in a few places is it possible to find chronicles or detailed records which supply the dates of the persecution and the numbers of lepers executed, as for Uzerche. However, monetary accounts of the property confiscated by local officials from convicted lepers can be quite revealing. In Périgueux, the possessions confiscated from the lepers were re-sold to 25 people, at least 19 of whom bought real property, such as gardens, vineyards or plots of land. Unfortunately, the documents do not include the names of the original owners, but it is likely that such a large amount of property previously belonged to a few dozen lepers. The confiscation and redistribution of the property of lepers was probably systematic, since it left behind a detailed record of a series of transactions which happened at the same date. Thus, is very likely that the authorities re-sold all of the property that previously belonged to lepers in one organized procedure, which took place on a single day, after

[11] "in introitu domus, omnes pariter fuerunt cum quadam clave fervente faucibus sigillati ut, si quis ipsorum evaderet, inter alios nosceretur " - Georges De Manteyer, "La suite de la chronique d'Uzerche (1320-1373)," in *Etudes d'histoire du Moyen Age*, ed. Paul Fabre, 403-415 (Paris: Picard, 1902), 412-413.

[12] This dynamic was not unusual in investigations of heresy or "conspiracies" in medieval southern France: Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, 15, 21-24, 98; Friedlander, *The Hammer of the Inquisitors*, 18-19, 213-214, 228-229.

[13] Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 40; Bériac, "La persécution des lépreux," 205-206, 209; François Maillard, *Comptes royaux (1314-1328)* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1961), 98-100; Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 123; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 52-54; Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems," 2; Rivière-Chalan, *La Marque infâme des lépreux*, 47-50.

the lepers were already condemned.[14] One may conclude that the persecution targeted many of the local lepers, if not all of them, and that local authorities confiscated their property when the victims were executed or enclosed. Evidence from the area of Toulouse reveals a similar pattern. In a summary of the incomes of the *sénéschal*, the royal official, of Toulouse for the years 1321-1322 there is an entire section dedicated to incomes resulting from the property of lepers. It mentions thirteen towns in which such incomes were received, and lists the total amount of income for each case. Most of the entries in this account are quite short, and usually include only the name of the town, the local notary or official who reported to the *sénéschal*, and the total monetary value of the property taken. It is possible that in some cases these incomes were the result of ordinary taxation of leper-houses, or agreements and trade with them. However, in other cases it is quite clear that the property was confiscated as part of the persecution of lepers. The account mentions that Master Jacobo de Ferrando sold goods that belonged to lepers in four locations around Toulosue, but does not explain how he received these goods. Also Master Arnaldo de Serzera of Saint-Sardos sold the property of local lepers, while Master Guillelmo de Monte Olivo sold 32 sheep that previously belonged to the lepers of Gimont. Most notably, Petro Adam, the *bailli* of Rabastens, took over the property of lepers who were burned in his town. Johanne d'Anglars of Pampelonne confiscated goods from four "fugitive lepers" that he caught by himself and burned at the stake. Moreover, the nature of the record itself indicates that something more than regular acts of taxation took place in the spring of 1321. First, incomes from taxation of lepers or leper-houses are not usually listed separately from other incomes in other monetary records of the *sénéschal* of Toulouse. The fact that there was a need for such special summary for the year 1321 indicates that a significant change in the legal status of lepers had taken place. Second, the total

[14] Lavergne, "La persecution", 110-113.

sum of the incomes from the property of the lepers is suspiciously high: more than 258 *livres*. Indeed, the account presents other sources of income of the *sénéschal* that were as lucrative and more, but one must remember that the lepers were just a small minority of the population, and not necessarily a very rich one. It is doubtful that regular taxation on such a marginal minority can explain a significant amount of income in the fiscal account for the whole area.[15] Thus, it seems very likely that a systematic execution of lepers and confiscation of their goods happened around Toulouse, as it did in Périgord.

By June the wave of persecutions had crossed the Pyrenees and reached Navarre, which was under the control of the king of France. On 1 June, ten lepers were arrested in Tudela "by the order of the governor".[16] Two days later in Estella twenty lepers were imprisoned in a castle, and on 6 June eight others were arrested in Sangüesa. Similar events also occurred in Pamplona and in small towns around it. The documents do not specify what the cause for these arrests was, or the sentences of the victims. However, the fact that the property of the lepers found its way into the hands of local lords suggests that the persecution was carried out in the same manner as in Toulouse and Périgord.[17] King Jaime II of Aragon learned about the persecution of the lepers sometime between 2 and 5 June, but did not act until a week later.[18] On 10 June he sent a letter to his officials throughout Catalonia and Aragon reporting the plot. He expressed concern that lepers

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[15] Maillard, *Comptes royaux*, 98-100. For a list and a map of leprosaria around Toulouse, and a map of the rural officials in the area, see: John Hine Mundy, *Studies in the Ecclesiastical and Social History of Toulouse in the Age of the Cathars* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 134-139, 148-149.

[16] "diez mesieyllos que son en prison por mandamiento del Gouernador, del primer dia de junio, anno XXI°" - Florencio Idoate, *Documentos sobre agotes y grupos afines en Navarra* (Pamplona: Diputación Foral de Navarra, Institución Príncipe de Viana, 1973), 82.

[17] Idoate, *Documentos sobre agotes y grupos*, 81-84.

[18] King Jaime learned about the persecution from a letter sent to him by king Sancho of Mallorca: Heinrich Finke, ed., *Acta Aragonensia: Quellen zur deutschen, italienschen, französischen, spanischen, zur Kirchen- und Kulturgeschichte aus der diplomatischen Korrespondenz Jaymes II (1291-1327)* (Berlin and Leipzig: Rothschild, 1908-22), 3:390-391, no. 178/1. Translation in: Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 93-94.

who attempted to avoid arrest and investigation in France "secretly transferred into our lands and regions." He also warned his officials that "a great danger can come upon our commonwealth and the people of our land by their [the lepers'] presence".[19] Thus, he ordered his men to prevent any lepers from entering the kingdom, and to arrest those who already did. The king emphasized that his decree was not meant to prevent other visitors from crossing the border into Aragon. However, by the end of the month king Jaime decided that these measures were simply too limited to deal with the threat that he perceived. On 27 June he wrote again to his officials and stated that based on confessions of lepers and other sources, he was now certain that the danger was real. He declared that the lepers, with cooperation of other foreigners, tried to spread their disease in his kingdom by poisoning water sources. Therefore, he ordered his men to arrest all foreigners, men or women, unless there were clearly above suspicion. Those who were found to be lepers should be tried and punished immediately, and the others expelled from the kingdom. If they returned, they faced corporal punishment. Local lepers were to be confined to their houses and warned that if they left they would be killed.[20] It seems that during June King Jaime became completely convinced that the accusations against the lepers were true. He used his full authority to prevent possible cases of well poisoning in his kingdom, ordering his officials to act quickly and decisively against possible suspects.

[19] "Et non nulli ex dictis leprosis, laqueum justitiae evadere cupientes […], ad terras et regna nostra clandestine transferunt, ex quorum praesencia posset nostre rei publice et gentibus terre nostre grande periculum invenere." - Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 94, n. 2. Full text in: David Nirenberg, "Violence and the Persecution of Minorities in the Crown of Aragon: Jews, Lepers and Muslims before the Black Death" (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 1992), 327-328. The letter is addressed to the vicar of Girona and Besalú and under it appears a list of the vicars and *sobrejunteros* who received a similar copy: ACA (Barcelona, Archivo de la Corona de Aragón), Cancillería, Registros, no. 246, f. 227r.

[20] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 94-95; Nirenberg, "Violence and the Persecution of Minorities," 328-330; Finke, *Acta Aragonensia*, 2:934, no. 605. However, while the king's orders were clear, not all of his officials necessarily obeyed: Nirenberg, "Violence and the Persecution of Minorities," 335-336. Original in: ACA, Cancillería, Registros, no. 246, f. 241 r.

Local officials throughout Aragon and Catalonia executed the orders of the king efficiently. Sometime before 4 July, the authorities in the village of Martorell, not far from Barcelona, arrested a man named Master John. He "was alleged to be one of the major pestilential criminals who infected the water."[21] The king demanded that he be extradited to the vicar of Barcelona, as his crime was aimed against the general common good. He also asked that the authorities of Matorell send with the prisoner "potions and other things that he was discovered with."[22] On the same day, the vicar of Barcelona also arrested one Jacobo Rothlandis, who was carrying poisonous powders, together with other suspects.[23] The king ordered the vicar to torture and punish the prisoners, but Jacobo's political connections to the countess of Urgell may have saved him from this fate. On the 18 July he was sent to the king with his confession and the other testimonies related to the case, but his fate remains unclear.[24] Shortly before the arrests in Barcelona, the royal official in Huesca and Jaca sent the king confessions made by people who were accused of poisoning water sources around Toulouse. Apparently, people who crossed the border from France were investigated about crimes that they allegedly committed there, and not only regarding plans for future poisonings in Catalonia-Aragon.[25] On 6 July, the king ordered the bailiff of Manresa to torture eight men that he

[21] "qui ex maioralibus pestilencium sceleratorum qui aquas inficiunt fore pretenditur" - Nirenberg, "Violence and the Persecution of Minorities," 331. It is interesting to note that the king addressed the suspect as "one of those who wished to infect the water" ("unus ex maioribus illorum pestilentium sceleratorum qui aquas nituntur inficere"- Nirenberg, "Violence and the Persecution of Minorities," 332), namely, he was not convinced that the poisoning actually took place.

[22] "una cum potionibus et similibus cum quibus deprehensus extitit"- Nirenberg, "Violence and the Persecution of Minorities," 332. Also see: 330-333; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 97-98. Original documents in: ACA, Cancillería, Registros, no. 246, f. 233r-v.

[23] "ad illum qui cum pulvuris [sic, pulveris] deprehensus extitit" - ACA, Cancillería, Registros, no. 246, f. 233r.

[24] ACA, Cancillería, Registros, no. 173, f. 197r-v.

[25] "Jacobi etc. Nobili et dilecto nostro Petri Fferdinandi de vergua superiunctario Osca et Jacca. Etc. Recepimus litteram vestram nobis missam. Una cum transscripto confessionis cuiusdam ex illis qui aquas pulveris probantur apud Tolosam receptum […]" - ACA, Cancillería, Registros, no. 246, f. 234r., letter sent on 5 July. Unfortunately, it seems that the actual confessions did not survive.

had captured, and to execute them by fire if they confessed.[26] Similar orders were given a day later to the vicar of Montblanc, who arrested ten men suspected of well poisoning. Only some of these men were lepers, but by this time some of them had already confessed to committing such crimes, usually under torture. They were to be burnt at the stake.[27] Investigations and arrests of possible well poisoners also took place in Ejea, Tarazona, and Barbastro during the summer. In Cervera lepers were banished from their house, and some even executed. And, Perhaps as a result of the accusations, lepers' property was confiscated for the Crown in Tàrrega, Vilafranca, Tarazona and Borja.[28] It seems that King Jaime was rather shocked by the number of confessions and volume of evidence he received from his officials, and came to believe that he was dealing with a widespread phenomenon. So much so, that on 13 July he ordered his men to keep all records and confessions related to the plot secret, so others would not be inspired to imitate such horrible crimes.[29] Yet, despite these efforts to keep the matter quiet, the accusations did not die out.[30] As we will see, the social dynamic that initiated and promoted well-poisoning accusations was rather strong, and as long as there were royal officials willing to investigate, there were people willing to bring forward suspects.

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[26] "vos captos teneris octo homines […] visis [?] personibus predictos torqueri feceris. Et deinde se ipsus crimen confessi fuerunt [?] igni subiciatis." - ACA, Cancillería, Registros, no. 246, f. 234r.

[27] "Jacobi etc. dilecto nostro Guillemo leon [?] de Riali vicario montesalbi. Salute et dilectam. Recepimus litteram vestram nobis missam super facto illorum decem hominum de infectionibus aquarum suspectorum quorum ilius leprosi sunt qui in posse vero capti donnentur [?]. […] pro volumus ut illos qui confessi fuerunt vel deinde confferbantur precedentibus tormentes vel sine tormentes se pulveres seu potions aliquas in aquis communis sic conntemnnenti [sic] igni absque mercede aliqua supponatis. " - ACA, Cancillería, Registros, no. 246, f. 232v.

[28] McVaugh, *Medicine Before the Plague*, 220; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 98, 101-105.

[29] "Considerantes quam grave quamque perniciosum est et abhominabile negocium leprosorum […] Idcirco ne tarn nephandi et horribilis criminis actus gentibus patefiant vel transeant in exemplum vobis dicimus et mandamus quatenus processus inquisicionum seu confessionum factos vel faciendos coram vobis contra dictos leprosos et alios de predictis inculpatos non publicetis neque pandatis alicui seu aliquibus nisi in quantum de necessitate fuerit et pro exequcione justitie fuerit opportunum." - Nirenberg, "Violence and the Persecution of Minorities," 334-335.

[30] Nirenberg's work on the issue of well-poisoning accusations in Aragon is quite conclusive, and thus I decided to present here only a short conclusion with a few additional quotations from the primary sources. For more information on the subject, see: Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 93-124; Nirenberg, "Violence and the Persecution of Minorities," 317-338, 342-343, 358-361; Idoate, *Documentos sobre agotes y grupos*, 15-19.

At the same time, lepers were also executed in Avignon, where the papal court was situated. Rumors about possible well poisoning must have arrived at Avignon quite quickly, since lepers were captured and investigated even before 2 June. An official decree ordered the residents of Avignon to avoid drinking water from wells and fountains located outside.[31] Most importantly, it seems that local Jews were suspected of participating in the plot, for the first time during the events of 1321.[32] This critical turn of events will be discussed further in the next chapter, which studies the persecution of Jews in detail. In addition, the persecution continued in the south-western parts of France, and a few sources mention executions of lepers during May and June in the dioceses of Albi, Rodez, Cahors, Agen and Limoges.[33] The lepers were also arrested in areas to the north of Périgord, in Poitou in particular. An anonymous chronicler mentioned that in Parthenay "a certain great leper"[34] confessed to organizing mass well poisoning in this area, sometime before 24 June. Moreover, the chronicaler claimed to have seen a female leper who was caught with a little bag of poison in the town of Vouillé, at an unspecified date.[35] Another chronicler noted that the lepers

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[31] The lepers allegedly poisoned only water sources located outside of the houses, "extra domos" - Finke, *Acta Aragonensia*, 3:390, no. 178/1. Some of the wells and fountains in medieval cities were public (and protected by municipal laws), but others were private and restricted. In addition, there were private reservoirs which received rain water from gutters, and were not part of the public water system: Grewe, "Water Technology in Medieval Germany," 145-151.

[32] Guillaume Mollat, *Jean XXII (1316-1334), lettres communes analysées d'après le registres dits d'Avignon et du Vatican* (Paris: De Boccard, 1930), 11:55-56, no. 55412; Raymond Bernard de la Mote, *Chronique de Bazas*, ed. M. E. Piganeau, in *Archives Historique du Départment de la Gironde* (Bordeaux: Lefebvre, 1874), 15:39; Bériac, "La persécution des lépreux," 213. The first piece of evidence regarding the persecution of lepers in Avignon is the letter sent by king Sancho of Mallorca to king Jaime II of Aragon: Finke, *Acta Aragonensia*, 3:390-391, no. 178/1; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 93-94.

[33] Louis Guibert, *Les Lépreux et les léproseries de Limoges* (Limoges: Ducourtieux et Gout 1905), 35; Louis Combarieu and Paul Lacombe, eds., *Le Te igitur: manuscrits de la ville de Cahors* (Cahors: Laytou, 1888), 65-66, no. 77; Nicole de Peña, ed., *Documents sur la maison de Durfort: XIe-XVe siècle* (Bordeaux: Fédération historique du Sud-Ouest, 1977), 1:287, num. 414.

[34] "confessionem cujusdam magni leprosi" - Girardus de Fracheto and an anonymous chronicler, *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto et Anonyma Ejusdem Operis Continuatio,* R.H.G., 21:55-56.

[35] Ibid.

were executed “in the upper parts of Aquitaine” and also in Tours.[36] As we will see, the persecution of lepers in this area is particularly important, as it led to the persecution of Jews.

It is important to note that King Philip did not respond to these events until the end of June, more than two months after they began. It is unlikely that he was unaware of the persecution earlier, as representatives of Périgueux left for Tours, where the king was staying at the time, on 3 May. They were charged with reporting the events to the king, though there was little that he could do to change their outcome, as the lepers of Périgueux had already been executed.[37] It is not clear when exactly the king learned of the events, but it probably was no later than 14 June.[38] Before the persecution started, the king was scheduled to meet with representatives of different cities of France in Poitiers, on that very day. The leper’s plot must have been one of the subjects discussed, and several chroniclers stated that the king was in Poitiers when he heard about it.[39] However, the king still did not address the issue officially until 21 June. This late response is even more conspicuous in comparison to the quick actions of King Jaime of Aragon, who almost immediately provided his officials with detailed orders to investigate and prevent the plot.[40] As we will see,

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[36] “Propter quod crimen confitentes multi leprosi, in superioribus partibus Aquitaniae jam morti adjudicati fuerant et combusti” - *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis de 1113 à 1300, avec les Continuations de cette Chronique de 1300 à 1368*, ed. Hercule Géraud (Paris, J. Renouard et cie, 1843), 2:31, 34; Bériac, “La persécution des lépreux,” 205, n. 20.

[37] Lavergne, “La persecution”, 108.

[38] In his letter wrriten on 10 June, king Jaime of Aragon suggested that the lepers were already being persecuted in France by the order of the king, but he may have assumed incorrectly that local officials in the South-West were acting on behalf of king Philip: Nirenberg, “Violence and the Persecution of Minorities,” 327-328.

[39] According to one chronicle, the king heard about the plot only on 19 June: *Chronique parisienne anonyme*, 59; Barber, “Lepers, Jews and Moslems,” 1-2; *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 31; Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita Joannis XXII*, in Baluze-Mollat (Stephanus Baluzius, *Vitae Paparum Avenionensium*, ed. Guillaume Mollat (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1917)), 1:132. About the assembly: Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 55, 60; Brown, “Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews”, 309; Lavergne, “La persecution”, 109.

[40] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 93-95, 97-99; Nirenberg, “Violence and the Persecution of Minorities,” 317-338, 342-343. Nirenberg only transcribed a few of the many documents of royal correspondence on the issue of the lepers’ plot. All of the originals are in: ACA, Cancillería, Registros, no. 246, ff. 227r-240v, 253v. In contrast, Lehugeur claimed that King Philip actually played a major part in the development of the persecution against lepers, but he was unware of most of the events that took place before the king issued his decree: Lehugeur, *Histoire de Philippe le Long*, 2:425-429.

King Philip may have had good reasons to think that intervening in the situation could exacerbate political tensions between the Crown and local leaders and institutions in the South-West. Yet, by 21 June he could not ignore the persecution anymore and issued a decree to the *bailli* of the Vermandois, in north-western France, where the persecution of lepers was still underway. The decree ordered the arrest of lepers in this location. It stated that the men should be interrogated, under torture if necessary, about their part in the plot, and those who confessed should be executed. Women were to be questioned, probably without torture, and executed if they confessed, unless they were pregnant. Men and women who did not confess, children under the age of 14 and pregnant women should be permanently detained in leprosaria. Moreover, the decree defined the crimes of the lepers as *lèse majesté*, an offence against the king himself or the whole kingdom. Thus, the lepers were now under the jurisdiction of the king, and the property confiscated from them belonged to him rather than to local lords.[41]

There is evidence that similar decrees were sent to other parts of the country as well. A copy of the decree sent to the *bailli* of the Vermandois was also re-sent on 11 July to the *bailli* of Laon, a city not far away.[42] Similar orders from the king were also distributed in Poitou and the Limousin.[43] It is difficult to say whether these orders contributed much to the spreading of the persecution or if it spread spontaneously. But there were several cases of attacks against lepers also in the eastern and northern parts of France. Other than in the Vermandois and Laon, such attacks may have happened in Lyon,[44] and certainly took place in Amiens. The *bailli* of Amiens,

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[41] For the Latin text and analysis: Duplès-Agier, "Ordonnance de Philippe le Long contre les lépreux," 265-272. For bibliography about this document: Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 309-310, n. 43; Rivière-Chalan, *La Marque infâme des lépreux*, 44-47; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 55-56.

[42] Rivière-Chalan, *La Marque infâme des lépreux*, 44; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 309-310, n. 43; Duplès-Agier, "Ordonnance de Philippe le Long contre les lépreux," 270.

[43] Guibert, *Les Lépreux*, 35.

[44] *Anniversaria Ecclesie Sancte Crucis Lungdunensis*, in: Georges Guigue, "Fragment d'une Chronique Lyonnaise, Treiziéme et Quatorziéme Siècle," *La Revue Lyonnaise* 3 (1882): 296-297.

Pierre Remont, stated in a letter written on 7 August that his lieutenant "burned many lepers" not far from the city. The officials of Amiens decided to execute the lepers after they "were notified about the enormity of their crime". It seems that this decision was accepted as a result of the king's decree against the lepers.[45] The persecution spread as far east as Lausanne, in the territory of the German Empire. The bishop of Lausanne mentioned in a letter from 3 September that some of the local lepers were executed sometime earlier, "for the scandal and disgrace of the lepers".[46]

These few examples should not obscure the general picture, which is that the persecution of lepers took place mostly in the South-West of France. However, they show that the notion that the lepers plotted to poison the wells was widespread in the kingdom. This may be the reason that some of the chroniclers stated that the persecution of lepers took place in all or most of France.[47] Yet, as we have seen, the documentary evidence suggests that this statement is somewhat exaggerated. It is hard to evaluate precisely what the extent of the persecution in 1321 was. One chronicler, who was the only one attempting to present a general number, estimated that about 600 lepers were executed in Languedoc in one day.[48] This is very unlikely, as we have seen that the persecution in this area happened over several weeks, and probably included small numbers of

[45] "A tous ceux qui ces présentes lettres verront et orront, Pierre Remont, dit de Rapestain chevalier, bailli d'Amiens, salut. Comme Mathieu Boivin, nostre lieutenant, ait fait ardoir plusieurs ladres au lieu que on dit Fosse Ferneuse, étant ès mettes de le banlieue de le ville d'Amiens, en le justice et seigneurie d'icelles, et encore pour le justice notifier, pour le énormité du meffait, li maires et échevins de ce lieu, à son commandement, fissent sonner leur clocque, ce que accoutumé n'ont mie du faire à justice du roy notre sire et comme ils dient." - Augustin Thierry, *Recueil des monuments inédits de l'histoire du Tiers-Etat* (Paris: Didot, 1850), 1:386-387.

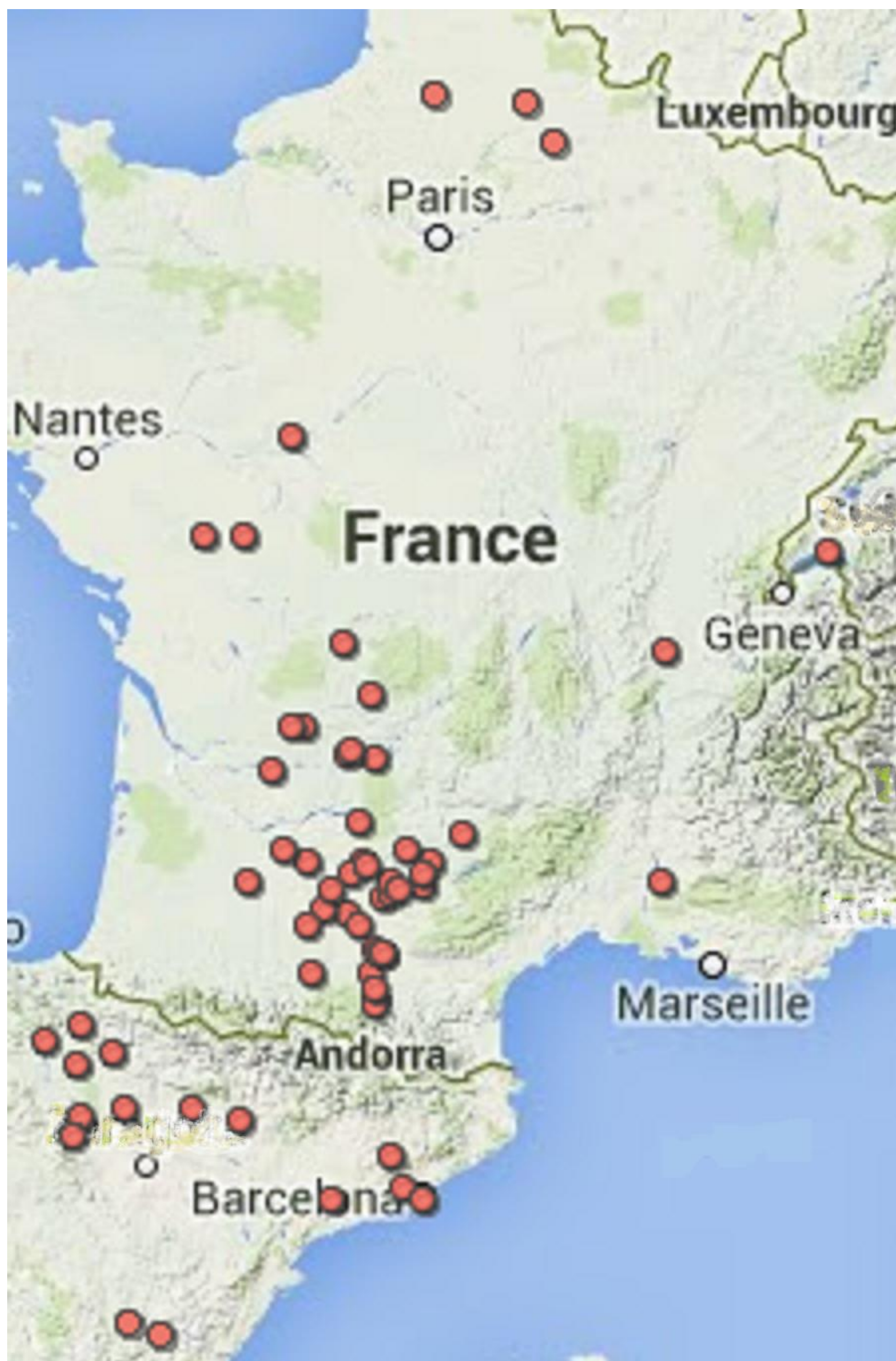
[46] "propter scandalum et infamam leprosoram" - Nicolas Morard, "A propos d'une charte inédite de l'évêque Pierre d'Oron: Lépreux brûlés à Lausanne en 1321," *Zeitschrift für schweizerische Kirchengeschichte* 75 (1981), 238; Piera Borradori, *Mourir au monde: les lépreux dans le Pays de Vaud, XIIIe-XVIIe siècle* (Lausanne: Université de Lausanne, 1992), 84-86, 116.

[47] *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 55-56; *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 31-33; *Ex Uticensis Monasferii Annutibus et Necrologio*, R.H.G., 23:483; *E Chronico Sanctae Catharinae de Monte Rotomagi*, R.H.G., 23:409. Other chroniclers noted that the persecution happened mostly in south-western France: *Chronique de Saint-Denis depuis 1285 jusqu'en 1328,* R.H.G., 20:704; *Chronique parisienne anonyme*, 59; Combarieu and Lacombe, *Le Te igitur*, 65.

[48] *Chronique parisienne anonyme*, 59.

lepers in each town. However, as a total number of victims in the main area of persecution, this seems more reasonable.

Sites where lepers were persecuted in spring and summer 1321



It is interesting to note that another minority group was persecuted with the lepers in the spring and early summer of 1321, but these were not the Jews. A few of the sources report that people called *Cagots* were involved in the lepers' plot, and therefore were arrested and executed with them.[49] The *Cagots*, which were sometimes also called *Crestians* or "white lepers", were a distinct group in south-western France during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. However, it is not easy to say what made these people distinct, as they were Christians and spoke the dialects of the areas they lived in. Some scholars suggest that they had some common historical or racial background: they were the descendants of the Visigoths, or maybe of Muslims. Others speculate that they were family members of lepers, or suffered from some disease which resembled leprosy. In any case, they probably had to endure segregation and social limitations similar to those forced on lepers.[50] It seems that in 1321, the persecutors saw a clear connection between the *Cagots* and the lepers. As we will see, *Cagots* were suspected of involvement in the plot from the very beginning of the investigation, so much so, that chroniclers who did not live in the South-West did not distinguish between these groups.[51] Unfortunately, as a result of this confusion, it is very hard to present a clear account of the persecution of *Cagots* in 1321. They seem to have suffered a similar fate to that of the lepers, at least in the area of Toulouse, but it is hard to say much more than that.[52]

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[49] Rivière-Chalan, *La Marque infâme des lépreux*, 47-50; *Chronique parisienne anonyme*, 57; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 38-39; Jaume Felip Sánchez, "La persecució d'un collectiu marginat a la societat catalana al segle XIV: els cagots," *I Jornadas d'Història Medieval* (2004), 35-42.

[50] Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 9-12, 260-421; Alain Guerreau and Yves Guy. *Les cagots du Béarn: recherches sur le développement inégal au sein du système féodal européen* (Paris: Minerve, 1988); Brody, *The Disease of the Soul*, 93; Boeckl, *Images of Leprosy*, 49-50. For more bibliography: Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 99, n. 14.

[51] "meseaux qui estoient appellez Cacos" - *Chronique parisienne anonyme*, 57, and n. 2; The *Chronique de Saint-Denis* uses the terms "Crestiens" and "mesiuax" interchangeably: *Chronique de Saint-Denis depuis 1285 jusqu'en 1328,* R.H.G., 20:704-705. All the Latin chronicles refer to the perpetrators of the plot as "leprosi".

[52] While *Cagots* were investigated with the lepers in this area, there is no record of their punishment: Rivière-Chalan, *La Marque infâme des lépreux*, 44-47; Sánchez, "La persecució d'un collectiu marginat," 35-42. Nirenberg speculates that *Cagots* were also persecuted in Navarre and Aragon in 1321, but the evidence is limited: Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 98-99. See below: Ch. 3, pp. 220-221, 224.

Overall, it is evident that in the spring and summer of 1321 systematic persecution of lepers and *Cagots* took place, mostly in south-western France and in the kingdom of Aragon. In most cases, the lepers were arrested, investigated and executed by local officials, and their property confiscated. While King Philip probably contributed to these events by his decree condemning the lepers, the persecution was in motion for more than two months before his involvement. It seems that often, especially in the South-West, local lords executed lepers without asking for the king's approval. Yet, these insights are only the first step towards understanding of the events of 1321, since they reveal very little about the causes for the persecution. For the purposes of this study, the main question is whether this violence was truly driven by well-poisoning accusations, or by something else. Could the idea of well poisoning be convincing enough to cause such mass violence?

Documentation of well-poisoning accusations – the chronicles

The chroniclers answer with a resounding yes. All of them, with the exception of those who described the events in a few sentences and wrote nothing about the reason for the persecution, agree that the lepers were executed because they poisoned water sources. A chronicle from Tours states that: "[it was agreed] that these lepers would put poison in fountains and wells, so that Christians who would drink or otherwise consume this water would die early death; and so it was done."[53] A chronicle from Paris takes these accusations a step further and claims that:

> *[The lepers,] through great deliberation made by them during several assemblies and for a long time, put together deadly poisons in order to administer and give [them] to all of*

[53] "ipsi leprosi ponerent venena in fontibus et puteis, ut sic Christiani ex aquis talibus potantes et allia edentes, morte tempestiva interirent; et sic factum fuit" - *Chronicon Turonense Abbreviatum,* in *Recueil de Chroniques de Touraine*, (Tours: Société Arcathéologique de Touraine, 1854), 1:198.

the people who were not infected by their sickness by several and diverse manners; it was known to be put in wells, in fountains, in wines, in wheat and in other things which are necessary to sustain the life of men and women, so that all of the people who would use or drink or eat these poisons in any way would either die or lose their mind and be infected by their [the lepers'] illness.[54]

This is the only account which suggests that lepers poisoned food and wine in addition to wells and other water sources. Yet, the idea that the poison was meant to infect the healthy with leprosy is fairly common among these sources.[55] One may doubt the accuracy of these accounts, which were written in the North, far from the center of the persecution in the South-West. Still, chronicles composed close to the locations of the attacks tell a similar story, even if some of the details are different. Bernard Gui, who was the senior inquisitor in the area of Toulouse at the time of the events,[56] was convinced that the lepers indeed tried to poison the wells:

Since [the lepers] were plotting against the health of the public, [and] were unhealthy in body and insane of mind, [they] arranged that they would infect the water of rivers, springs and wells everywhere, by placing in them drugs, poisons and infections made into powders, so the healthy people, by drinking or using that water, would be infected in such a way,

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[54] "Les quieux […] par grant deliberacion eue à eux par plusieurs assembléez, et de long temps, avoient appareillez poisons mortieux pour adminstrer et donner à tout le peuple qui de leurs maladies n'estoient enteichiez, par plusieurs et diverses magnieres, c'est assavoir pour meitre en puis, en fontaines, en vins, en bles et en aultrez choses necessaires à soustenir vie de homme et de fame, affin que tous ceux qui de ses poisons en aucune magniere useroient en boire ou en mengier, ou ilz mourroient ou ilz feussent espris et enteichez de leur maladie. - *Chronique parisienne anonyme*, 58.

[55] Manteyer, "Chronique d'Uzerche," 412; *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 34; Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 132; Robert de Béthune, *Chronique*, in *Istore et Croniques de Flandres,* Kervyn de Lettenhove, ed. (Brexelles: F. Hayez, 1879), 1:325; Bernard Gui, *Vita Joannis XXII*, in Baluze-Mollat, 1:163; Petrus de Herenthales, *Vita Joannis XXII*, in Baluze-Mollat, 1:179-180; Amalricus Augerii, *Actiis Romanorum Pontificum, Vita Joannis XXII*, in Baluze-Mollat, 1:194; Raymond Bernard de la Mote, *Chronique de Bazas*, 39.

[56] Amargier, "Éléments pour un portrait de Bernard Gui", 26.

that they could become lepers or die, or would be destroyed from the inside; and in this manner the number of lepers will increase and of the healthy people will decline.[57]

Bernard presented in his chronicle the same basic narrative as the chroniclers of the North: the lepers organized a wide-spread conspiracy to kill healthy Christians or turn them into lepers, and this is the reason that they were arrested and executed. Accounts from other central sites of persecution, such as Uzerche and Cahors, present a similar picture.[58] The chronicle of Raymond Bernard de la Mote, the bishop of Bazas, is unclear about the timing of the persecution, but adds interesting details about the production of the poison:

The said lepers had two casks of rotting bread over which they threw snakes and toads so they would corrupt and infect this bread. They intend to make powder of this bread to infect wells and streams in order that all the healthy people would die or be afflicted by most repulsive leprosy.[59]

This focus on the poison and its preparation shows that the author of this source saw well poisoning as the major reason for the persecution of the lepers. Even in such a short account, well-poisoning accusations had to take a major role.

The most informative and influential account of the persecution of lepers is the work of an anonymous writer who continued the chronicle of Girardi de Fracheto and probably lived somewhere around Poitou. The basic narrative regarding the plot in this chronicle is similar to the ones discussed above, but the chronicler added many details that made the accusations more

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[57] "Machinantes siquidem in salutem populi , male sani in corpore et insani mente disposuerant ut aquas fluminum et fontium atque puteorum ubique inficerent, appositis venenosis et infectis atque inficientibus confectis pulveribus in eisdem, ut homines sani, bibentes ex eis aut utentes eisdem aquis sic infectis, efficerentur leprosi aut morbidi, aut penitus necarentur; sicque leprosorum numerus augeretur et sani deficerent." - Bernard Gui, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 163.

[58] Manteyer, "Chronique d'Uzerche," 412; Combarieu and Lacombe, *Le Te igitur*, 65-66.

[59] "dicti leprosi habebant duo plena dolia panis putrefacti super quem serpentes et grapaldos mittebant ut corrumperent et inficerent panem illum, de quo pane proponebant facere pulverem ad impociandum fontes et flumina ad finem ut omnea sani morerentur vel eflicerentur turpissimi leprosi" - Raymond Bernard de la Mote, *Chronique de Bazas*, 39.

convincing. For example, he describes further the practical procedure of well poisoning, allegedly according to the confession of a leper from Parthenay:

> *And when he [the leper] was asked about the recipe of these kinds of potions [used for well poisoning], he answered that they were made of human blood and urine, and from three herbs which he did not know or was unwilling to name. The body of Christ [a consecrated host] was also put in [the potions], so it is said; and then all [the ingredients] were cut to pieces, until they were ground into powder; then, after the mixture was put into small bags tied with some weight, they were thrown in wells and springs.*[60]

These kinds of details made this report much more reliable for a medieval audience. Not only that did one of the participants in the plot allegedly confess his crime, he was also able to explain the technical elements necessary to perform it. The statement that the witness "did not know or was unwilling to name" some of the ingredients of the poison makes the account sound like a citation of a real confession, with its typical inaccuracies and memory gaps.[61] It is impossible to say if this confession was indeed given by one of the victims of the persecution under rigorous investigation (and possibly torture), or if it is a complete fiction by the chronicler. However, the continuation of the account presents another example of similar literary technique, and thus points towards the second option. The author of the chronicle declares:

> *At another time, in our town Vouillé in Poitou, we saw the potions with our own eyes: a certain female leper was passing through town, [and] since she was afraid to get caught, threw behind her a little tied bag, which was brought to the authorities immediately. And*

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[60] "Et cum ab eo quaereretur recepta talium potionum, respondit quod fiebant de sanguine humano et urina, et de tribusherbis quas nescivit aut noluit nominare. Ponebatur etiam in eis, ut dicebat, corpus Christi; et cum essent omnia desiccata, usque ad pulverem terebantur: quas missa in sacculis, ligata cum aliquo ponderoso, in puteis et fontibus jactabantur." - *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 56.

[61] See, for example, the significant differences between the different questioning sessions of Guillaume Agassa, which are discussed in detail below: Ch. 2 pp. 121-125.

inside the bag were found the head of a snake, the feet of a toad and hairs like those of women, infected with some very black and stinking liquid. [The bag] was thrown into the fire, [but] could not be consumed in any way. Thus, since it was manifested by experiment that this was a very powerful poison, and so that the Christian people would not suddenly die, the king of France ordered that everywhere in his kingdom that the lepers be imprisoned.[62]

Again, the chronicler added to his description many details that could strengthen the credibility of his report: he claims to have seen the poison "with his own eyes", he lists the ingredients in detail and notes that the poison was tested by an "experiment". Moreover, he suggests that this experiment was so convincing, that it played a major role in the decision of the king to arrest the lepers.[63] Interestingly, the stated composition of the poison is different than the one presented in the beginning of the account. This may be considered as an indication that the chronicler incorporated into his report different sources, or simply as another attempt on his part to add literary details to enrich his narrative. We will probably never know if these descriptions represent evidence that was truly used against lepers in Poitou, or ideas of a creative writer. However, from an historical perspective, it is more important to note that others in medieval France found this account reliable. Three other important chroniclers who worked at the beginning of the fourteenth century used it as a major source for their description of the events of 1321, usually with only

[62] "Alias vero in villa nobis subjecta, Vallis in Pictavia oculis nostris conspeximus potiones: leprosa quaedam, per villam transitum faciens, timens ne caperetur, quemdam post se panniculum ligatum projecit, qui statim ad justitiam est delatus; et inventum est in panno caput colubri pedes bufonis et capilli quasi mulieris, infecti quodam liquore nigerrimo et olente; quod, in igne projectum, nullatenus potuit concremari. Habito igitur manifesto experimento venenum esse fortissimum, ne subito periret populous christianus mandavit rex Franciae ubique per regnum suum ut omnes leprosi carceri traderentur." – Ibid.

[63] The idea that poison cannot be consumed by fire was not unusual: *Gesta Romanorum*, 320.

minor changes.[64] In conclusion, a review of the chronicles makes clear that the narrative claiming that the lepers indeed poisoned wells was widely accepted among the writers of the period.[65]

Burning of lepers in 1321

British Library, Royal 20 C VII, f. 56v - Manuscipt Chronique de Saint Denis, c. 1380.

[64] Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 132-134; *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 31-36, and also a French version of this chronicle, which presents some differences: *Chronique de Saint-Denis,* 704-705. Since these chronicles were created in Paris, it is more likely that they were influenced by the chronicle of Girardi de Fracheto than the other way around; see: Touati, *Maladie et société*, 718-719. There are many similarities between these accounts since they were connected to the chronicle tradition of the Abbey of Saint-Denis. For a survey of this tradition, the dating of the chronicles and the connections between them, see: Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *The Chronicle Tradition of Saint-Denis: A Survey* (Brookline: Classical Folia Editions, 1978), 98-126. The description of the events of 1321 in fifteenth-century chronicles is also based on these sources: *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, ed. J. Viard, (Paris: Société de 1'Histoire de France, 1934), 8:357-361; Arnaud Esquerrier, *Chroniques romanes des comtes de Foix*, ed. Félix Pasquier and Henri Courteault (Paris: Picard, 1895), 45-46.

[65] There are thirteen major chronicle sources describing the events of 1321. Four of them originate from south-western France: Raymond Bernard de la Mote, *Chronique de Bazas*, 39 (written from 1320 to 1335); Manteyer, "Chronique d'Uzerche," 412-413 (written from 1320 to 1373); Combarieu and Lacombe, *Le Te igitur*, 65-66 (written during the fourteenth century); *Chronicon Turonense Abbreviatum,* 198 (continuation written between 1317 and 1337). Four are related to the Abbey of Saint-Denis: *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 31-36 (continuation written during the first half of the fourteenth century); *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto,* 55-5736 (continuation written during the first half of the fourteenth century); *Chronique de Saint-Denis,* 704-705 (written before 1358); *Chronique parisienne anonyme,* 57-59 (written before 1339). Another four are papal chronicles: Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 132-134 (written before 1335); Bernard Gui, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 163-164 (written between 1314 and 1331); Petrus de Herenthales, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 179-180 (written before 1391); Amalricus Augerii, *Actiis Romanorum Pontificum,* 193-194 (written shortly after 1321). The last one originates from Flanders: Robert de Béthune, *Chronique*, 325 (written around 1322). Several other chronicles briefly mention the events of 1321, but do not add details: Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems," 6, n. 24.

Documentation of well-poisoning accusations – inquisitorial records

While the chroniclers were mostly in agreement about the details of the lepers' plot, that does not mean that their accounts are reliable. The literary nature of these chronicles, in addition to the fact that many of the chroniclers did not witness the events themselves, raise doubts. Moreover, many of these reports were written only after the persecution ended, and thus adopted the already accepted notions about the plot. And above all, the chroniclers of the fourteenth century, like many writers today, may have preferred a good story to an accurate report.[66] Thus, in order to understand how the story of the well-poisoning plot took shape, one must examine documents that were created during the persecution rather than in hindsight. Luckily, several such documents, the records of investigations of lepers who were accused of well poisoning, have survived.[67] Due to the significance of these documents, it is worthwhile to present and analyze each of them separately, before offering general conclusions.

The first set of documents was created in Lisle-sur-Tarn and Castelnau-de-Montmiral, right between Toulouse and Albi; and it records the investigation of several lepers and *Cagots* from this area.[68] The earliest questioning happened during Easter, 19 April. The lepers were accused of conducting a meeting in the leprosarium of Gaillac, during which they plotted to throw infectious matter into the water sources, or casting spells on them.[69] One of the witnesses, a leper from Lisle-

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[66] For the social and cultural background for the writing of the relevant chronicles, and for theoretical framework, see: Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *The Past as Text: the Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 3-82, 178-228.

[67] Unfortunately, as we will see, most of these documents originate in south-western France and not in Aragon. However, it is clear that similar recordes circulated in Aragon, see: ACA, Cancillería, Registros, no. 246, 232v-234r; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 97-98. The one clear record of a well poisoning investigation from Aragon that I was able to find will be presented in the next chapter, as it is mostly relevant to the accusations against Jews. See: Fritz Baer, *Die Juden im Christlichen Spanien* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1929), 1:224-228.

[68] These documents were reviewed in: Rivière-Chalan, *La Marque infâme des lépreux*, 47-50. I inspected the original documents which are in: Albi, Département du Tarn, Archives départementales, coté 64 EDT FF 7, pièce 1. Unfortunately, they are in a very bad shape.

[69] "Pourriture" or "Fachilas" - Rivière-Chalan, *La Marque infâme des lépreux*, 48.

sur-Tarn, testified that he heard another leper, whose name he did not know, promoting the plot. Allegedly, he said that the lepers should cast spells on fountains in his town and in Gaillac, so the healthy people would also become infected. Another leper, from the leprosarium of Montauban, presented a similar testimony. The investigation eventually led to a leper named Peter de Cris, who denied ever hearing about the plot. He admitted that he was walking around the area with a friend, but insisted that on the night the water was allegedly poisoned he was in his leprosarium in Lisle-sur-Tarn. Moreover, he claimed that on this night the lepers hosted some women in their house, and thus it is unlikely that they would have been able to go and cast spells on the fountains. Finally, the investigators had to admit that they found very little evidence that the lepers infected any water sources. Still, they sent the case to a different court, which interrogated the lepers again, and since they had nothing to add, decided to torture them.[70] The document does not specify what the result of this questioning under torture was, or record the final verdict of the suspects. However, considering the evidence of mass persecution of lepers around Toulouse in the months following this investigation, one may guess that there was no happy ending to this story.

This document reveals the accusations in their original basic form: no universal conspiracy, no sacs of disgusting potions and no attempt to cause mass mortality. Just a few lepers who may or may not have discussed infecting their neighbors with leprosy using unknown spells. In late April, when this investigation took place, some of the suspects may have been honestly surprised to hear the accusations, and thought that denying them completely would save them from punishment. It seems that even the investigators were not completely convinced that there was a basis for the allegations. Still, the trials continued, the idea that the lepers poisoned the wells spread with them, and suspects were more willing to cooperate.

[70] Ibid, 47-50.

During the month of May, the narrative of well poisoning began to evolve beyond the limited version presented in the investigation in Lisle-sur-Tarn. On 4 July the court of Salignac, about 15 miles east of Périgueux, convened to determine the verdict in a case of alleged well poisoning.[71] The defendant was a leper named Johan, from the leprosarium of Archignac, a village not far away. His conviction was based on a confession that he gave "freely and voluntarily, without any kind of pressure"[72] in an investigation that had taken place almost two months earlier. Johan was arrested and questioned by the order of the lord Raymundo de Valle, in the nearby village of Paulin, on 9 May. In his confession, Johan stated that he received a small bundle of poisonous powder from a man named Heptianus de Bergerac, whom he had met on Christmas of the previous year. He threw the poison in seven springs or wells around Archignac, with the intention that people who drank the water could become lepers. He also confessed to stealing land, grain and several other items from his brother, Gerald. In addition, two witnesses, Guillelme Laroqua and Peter Salagnac, accused Johan of another conspiracy. While the account is somewhat vague on this point, it seems that they suggested Johan tried to harm a local lord named Eymericus de Baselva by using talismans or potions. They claimed that they heard Johan saying that he paid twelve dinars to an "emissary" who was staying with Eymericus at the time. This anonymous emissary was supposed to give the talismans to Eymericus, so Johan would be able to "entrap" him. Johan supposedly targeted the lord because he prohibited lepers from using the cemetery of

[71] BnF (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France), Collection Périgord, vol. 93, f. 86-88. This is an eighteenth-century copy of the original, which I could not find. Unfortunately, the document is damaged, and some words are missing from each of the last five lines of folios 86 and 87. The same case is also mentioned in: BnF, Collection Périgord, vol. 52, f. 227. This source is mentioned briefly in: Jean M. Maubourguet, *Le Périgord méridional des origines à l'an 1370; étude d'histoire politique et religieuse* (Cahors: Coueslant, 1926), 271; and also in: Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 61, 123; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 54, n. 41 (citing volume 92 instead of 93 by mistake). See an appendix for the full transcription.

[72] "recognovit gratis et sponte, et sine prisione [pressione?] aliquâ" – BnF, Coll. Périgord, vol. 93, f. 86.

Archignac.[73] The record does not state whether this scam was successful, or what happened to the emissary or to lord Eymericus.[74] Finally, the court convicted Johan, and he was burned to death in the leprosarium of Salignac.

According to this document, the accusations against Johan differ in several respects from those presented against the lepers of Lisle-sur-Tarn. First, in this case it was agreed that the defendant was successful in committing the crime, namely, the wells were indeed poisoned. Second, he was accused of attempting to harm an official, lord Eymericus, because of his political action against lepers. As we will see, these ideas were presented again as part of the accusations in later trials against lepers. However, the allegation that the defendant also stole property was unique to this case. Moreover, it seems somewhat strange: the crime of well poisoning was much more serious than a simple case of theft, and a conviction was likely to lead to an execution of the accused, so why bother investigating the less important crime? The answer may be that in this case the accusation of theft led to the other allegations. Johan was probably having an argument about land and property with his brother, Gerald, even before the persecution of lepers started. But when lepers were arrested and accused of well poisoning, Gerald, or someone else who was involved in the dispute, may have seen an opportunity to settle the conflict for good. It was only a matter of organizing a few witnesses and alerting the authorities in Paulin and Salignac. This may explain the fact that the indictment of theft remained a part of the charges against Johan, even when more serious allegations were brought against him. And so, this case suggests that well-poisoning

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[73] The idea that lepers should use a separate cemetery was not new or unusual. Canon 23 of the Third Lateran Council prevented lepers from using regular cemeteries: Norman P. Tanner, ed. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (Sheed & Ward, 1990), 222-223; Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux*, 160-162; Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 72.

[74] "Guillelmus Laroqua, alias vocatus folqual, dixit per juramentum suum, quod ipse audit dicere sulico leproso leprosia de Archiniaco, quod ipse sulicas tradidit aliquas facilias, cuidam nuncio qui morabatur tunc temporis eum magistro Eymerico de Baselva, quas facilias dedit dictus nuncius dicto magistro Eymerico, et propter dictas facilias decepit dictus magister Eymericus; item dixit quod ipse sulias dedit duodecim denaris dicto nuncio, ut traderet dictas facilias dicto magistro Eymerico, quia habuit verbatim ipso, quia vetabat leprosis cimeterium de archiniaco." – BnF, Coll. Périgord, vol. 93, f. 87.

accusations were not only a manifestation of hatred towards minorities, or of struggles between different political powers. Sometimes, they could derive from a simple argument between brothers.[75]

The records from additional trials that happened during May 1321 show that the accusations against lepers become more severe by the week. On 16 May, in the town of Réalville, a leper named Johan de Bosco confessed to poisoning water sources. He was originally from a leprosarium in a place called "Alterque", maybe Alairac, near Carcassonne. According to this confession, three weeks earlier he had received from brother Geraldus, a leper from his own leprosarium, two big bags of "very wicked powder". Geraldus paid Johan to throw the powder into different water sources. While Johan said he did not know what the composition of the powder was, he explained that it was supposed to turn anyone who drank from the water into a leper, or kill him within two months. He also confessed that before he was caught in Réalville, he was able to poison the water in 28 towns and villages in south-western France. Among these places were, other than Réalville, Montauban, Rabastens, Gaillac and Caraman.[76] In comparison to the cases in Lisle-sur-Tarn and Salignac, Johan was accused of poisoning water sources over a much larger geographical area. This area included larger towns, and also places in which lepers were already arrested and investigated. Moreover, he allegedly poisoned the water for pay, and used a substance that was meant to kill the victims, not only to infect them with leprosy. And, above all, since he supposedly succeeded in his plan, an outbreak of leprosy or mass mortality was pending. It is

[75] Inquisitors often use disputes within local communities or families to extract information: Friedlander, *The Hammer of the Inquisitors*, 10-12, 41-45, 119-120; Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society,* 121-122, 181-185.

[76] Felip Sánchez, "La persecució d'un collectiu marginat," 35-42; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 54. I thank Jaume Felip Sánchez for his help in finding this information. The manuscript of this document, as well as the next one, are kept in the archive of the museum of the town of Montblanc, Spain. It is unclear how these documents found their way there, but one may speculate that they were sent to Montblanc as evidence to support the investigation of the lepers there, at the beginning of July: Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 98; ACA, Cancillería, Registros, no. 246, 232 v.

probable that these elements of the accusations evolved in the first half of May, as they do not appear in the record of investigation from Lisle-sur-Tarn and Salignac. Overall, this new narrative is much closer to the one presented in the chronicles, but it was still not yet fully developed.

A later document represents a major step towards description of the lepers' plot as a wide-scale conspiracy. This is a record of the investigation of Johan de Jardi, the leader of the leprosarium of Montauban. On 18 May, only two days after the events in Réalville, Johan was interrogated by the court of Montauban. He confessed that he participated in a general meeting of lepers, which took place about a year earlier, on 11 May 1320. The meeting took place in the leprosarium of Porte Arnaud-Bernard, one of the two larger leprosaria of Toulouse, just outside of the northern gate of the city.[77] Johan listed the names of about 20 participants in this meeting, all representatives of leprosaria in south-western France, mostly from around Toulouse, but also from Albi, Gaillac, Lisle-sur-Tarn and Castres. In this meeting, a leper from Condom convinced the others to create a substance that would poison water sources, so the victims would die or turn into lepers. It was the second attempt of the lepers to create such a poison, after trying to do so eight years earlier. They were guided by a doctor called Bernard de Solhac from the town of Souillac, who received ten *livres* for his services. The poison included the bodies of animals such as snakes, lizards, ticks and turtles, mixed with herbs such as hyssop and celandine (which can indeed be poisonous). All these ingredients were ground into powder, and portioned out among the attending lepers, so each of them could use it in his own town. Johan stated that he fulfilled this task, spreading the poison in wells around Montauban, and also further north near Bergerac and Périgueux. In addition, he provided poison to other lepers from the area of Toulouse and Réalville,

[77] John Hine Mundy, "Hospitals and Leprosaries in Twelfth and Early Thirteenth-Century Toulouse," in *Essays in Medieval Life and Thought, Presented in Honor of Austin Patterson Evans,* ed. John H. Mundy, Richard W. Emery and Benjamin N. Nelson (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1965), 181-205; Mundy, *Studies in the Ecclesiastical and Social History*, 49-65, 225-234.

so they might do the same. Also, Johan mentions that when he was in a village called Issigeac, south of Bergerac, he met some thirty men who were plotting to murder a senior judge of Périgord. The reason for the plot was that the judge, Bernard Gervàs, ordered that lepers should wear white robes called "baneyrells".[78] A local *Cagot* called Johan de Campaneis prepared a poisonous potion that indeed killed the judge. Even more curious is Johan's report regarding the contact of the lepers with the king of Granada. According to this report, lepers from Albi confessed that they were planning to contact the king in the following month, so he would reward them for their actions. Allegedly, since they caused many of the inhabitants of the land to die or become lepers, their possessions would fall into the hands of the king of Granada. With this incredible story, Johan ended his confession.[79]

This confession presents several new and important elements of the plot. First, the list of places in which water sources were supposedly poisoned continued to grow, and we can assume that the persecution spread accordingly. Second, the plot was said to be systematically organized by representatives of different leprosaria more than a year in advance. Third, the recipe of the poison was now revealed, with its abundance of repulsive ingredients. Finally, the idea of cooperation between the lepers and the Muslims, namely between two enemies of the public, was first proclaimed. According to this document, this cooperation was not realized, but as we will see, this notion would soon change.

Records of the investigation of another leper, Guillaume Agassa, expose the next stages in the development of the accusations. Agassa was the head of the leprosarium of Lestang, one of the two leper-houses of Pamiers, located right to the north of the city.[80] He was investigated by the

[78] Maybe from the word "banniére", that means a banner or a flag.
[79] Felip Sánchez, "La persecució d'un collectiu marginat," 35-42.
[80] Weis, *The Yellow Cross*, 256.

order of the local bishop, Jacques Fournier (whom we met as an inquisitor of heresy in the previous chapter).[81] When he was first investigated on 4 June, Agassa immediately said that he wanted to help punish the guilty, and blamed two local lepers for poisoning wells. These two lepers, Guillelmus Normanh and Fertandus Spanhol, allegedly went to Toulouse on 25 November of the previous year to obtain "potions"[82]. On their way back to their leprosarium, they poured these potions into "wells, fountains and streams of Pamiers", [83] and also near Auterive, where they spent the night. Allegedly, they did this "so they would have fellowship and multitude of lepers"[84], and hoped that many would be infected with leprosy or die. Agassa also mentions that he had heard that lepers in other places also poisoned water sources. It is quite clear that he was already aware of accusations against lepers, including some of their details. It is probably not a coincidence that he pointed to Toulouse as the source of the poison, in a similar manner to Johan de Jardi of Montauban. He probably understood that he would have to cooperate to avoid execution, and tried to create a convincing story that would put the blame on others. Still, he did not portray a clear picture of a wide-scale conspiracy, mainly referring to people and places near Pamiers.

A week later, in his second investigation, Agassa presented a much more elaborate story. He "confessed by his own free will without any fear of torture"[85] that in May of 1320, he himself was invited to attend a general assembly of lepers, as the head of the leprosarium of Lestang. The

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[81] The document was published in: Jacques Fournier, *Le Registre d'Inquisition de Jacques Fournier,* 2:135-147. For a French translation, see: Jacques Fournier, *Le Registre d'Inquisition de Jacques Fournier, 1318-25,* trans. Jean Duvernoy (Paris, New York: Mouton, 1978), 2:633-643. It is interesting to note that many years after this trial, in 1338, Fournier changed his mind completely regarding the guilt of the lepers. In a letter that he wrote as pope Benedict XII to the archbishop of Toulouse, he protected the legal rights of the lepers. He stated that they "were already found to be innocent and not guilty [of the crime they were formerly accused of]" – "quorumdam criminum dudum eisdem leprosis impositorum, a quibus postea tanquam innocentes et inculpabiles exinde reperti": Jean Marie Vidal, "La poursuite des lépreux en 1321: d'apres des documents nouveaux," *Annales de Saint-Louis-des-Français* 4 (1900), 473-478; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 53.

[82] "pociones" - Jacques Fournier, *Le Registre d'Inquisition de Jacques Fournier,* 136.

[83] "in puteis, fontibus et fluminibus Appamiarum" – Ibid.

[84] "adeo ut haberent societatem et multitudinem leprosorum" - Ibid.

[85] "confessus fuit gratis et sponte absque omni terrore tormentorum" – Ibid, 137.

meeting took place shortly after Pentecost, in the leprosarium of Porte *Arnaud-Bernard* in Toulouse. About 40 lepers attended, all representatives of leper-houses around Toulouse or from other places; some of them Agassa knew personally. The meeting was arranged by the head of the house of Porte Arnaud-Bernard, whose name Guillaume did not know. He approached the other lepers and said: "you see and hear how the healthy Christians consider us, the unhealthy, with reproach and disdain, and that they cast us away from fellowships and partnerships, and hold us with scorn and slander and despise us."[86] He presented the other lepers with an agreement, in which they undertook to poison the all the healthy Christians so they would die or get infected with leprosy. This was meant to allow the lepers to take control of their lands, property and positions. He added that the king of Granada had already agreed to assist the plot and defend the lepers. Then, he supplied the others with poisonous powder in little sacs of leather or cloth, so they could poison the water sources around their places of residence. All of them agreed to this plan, and swore that they would fulfill their part. Guillaume Agassa himself confessed to receiving some of the poison and distributing it in different water sources around Toulouse and Pamiers. He also repeated his story about the involvement of Guillelmus Normanh and Fertandus Spanhol in the poisoning, and added that lepers from Saverdun, Varilhes and Foix did the same.[87] It seems that there are two main differences between this narrative and the one presented by Agassa a week earlier: First, he now admitted (under duress, no doubt) to playing an important part in the plot. Second, he now stated that the actions of the lepers of Pamiers were part of universal conspiracy, supported by the Muslim king of Granada. Clearly, even if Agassa was not tortured at the time of his testimony, he was pressured into providing a narrative to similar that of Johan de Jardi.

[86] "Vos alii videtis et auditis qualiter christiani sani habent nos infirmos in opprobio et despectu, et quod habiciunt nos ab eorum consorciis et participationibus, et quod habent nos in derrisione et blasphemia et despectu." – Ibid, 138.
[87] Ibid, 137-140.

Agassa was investigated again on 6 and 7 July, and this time the bishop was the main inquisitor.[88] Again, interesting details are added to the story. Agassa described again the meeting in the leprosarium of Porte Arnaud-Bernard, but he now "remembered" the name of the organizer, Iordanus, and said that there were fifty or sixty people present. He stated that the plot was orchestrated not only by the king of Granada, but also by the sultan of Babylon. Their representatives, including a tall and dark man carrying a helmet and sword, were present. The two Saracen leaders planned to take over the entire Christian world, with the help of the lepers. In return, they promised the lepers large sums of money, as well as titles as local rulers. The lepers would not only have to accept the leadership of the Saracens, but also to deny the Christian faith. Iordanus promised that the Saracen kings would be present at the next meeting, which would also include representatives of all the lepers in the Christian world. The lepers should be ready to show their contempt to the Christian faith by treading on a cross and a consecrated host. The confession also describes the poison itself in detail, stating that it was made from snakes, toads, lizards and bats mixed with human excrement and a consecrated host, all ground into powder. Agassa also repeated his confession regarding well poisoning around Pamiers and Toulouse, and named his accomplices. The trial continued until July of 1322, but he did not add many noteworthy details to his story in the later investigations.[89] It is noteworthy that in this narrative the Muslim kings seem to be the leaders of the plot, while the lepers mostly accept their conditions and follow their orders. Moreover, the lepers are presented as heretics, who were willing to deny Christianity for wealth

[88] The fact that almost a month passed between this session of investigation and the one that preceded it may seem unusual, but leaving a suspect imprisoned for a few weeks during an investigation was a common tactic for inquisitors: Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, 52-65.

[89] Jacques Fournier, *Le Registre d'Inquisition de Jacques Fournier*, 140-147; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 41-44; Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems," 6-9; Bériac, "La Persécution des Lépreux," 212-213; Jean Marie Vidal, "La poursuite des lépreux en 1321," in *Mélanges de littérature et d'histoire religieuses publiés à l'occasion du jubilés episcopal de Monseigneur de Cabriéres évêque de Montpellier, 1874-99*, (Paris: Picard, 1899), 1:491-498.

and power. Also, the plot is described as fully universal, as representatives of lepers from around the Christian world were expected to join it. By early July, therefore, the idea of the plot had developed far beyond the limited accusations of April and May. The accounts in the chronicles represent the final narrative, and thus depict the accusations in their most exaggerated form.

These records of investigation present different stories, even if there are some similarities between them. Thus, without further analysis, it is hard to answer what kind of general insights one should draw from them. However, it is quite clear that it would be imprudent to accept them as exact representations of historical reality. While they claim to convey the words of medieval lepers, and not a literary reconstruction, they were created in a situation that makes them questionable. First, these records were the result of a fierce investigation, which put severe pressure on the defendants to confess to committing the crime they were accused of. Many modern historians have focused on the issue of torture, or the fear of torture, as a major factor in false confessions.[90] While confessions given during torture were inadmissible as evidence, it was acceptable to torture a victim as a method of investigation. After the suspect confessed under torture, he was asked to repeat his confession before the court with a clear mind. He could change his story if he wanted, but he would take the risk that he would be investigated again, and possibly tortured. The fact that some of the records declare that the accused confessed without any pressure actually raises suspicion that they were tortured, or threatened with torture. Namely, the statement that they were not under pressure during the time of the confession may be precisely an attempt to

[90] Amy G. Remensnyder, "Torture and Truth: Torquemada's Ghost," in *Why the Middle Ages Matter,* ed. Celia Chazelle et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 158-165; For the case of the persecution of lepers in 1321: Rivière-Chalan, *La Marque infâme des lépreux*, 50; Lehugeur, *Histoire de Philippe le Long*, 2:423-429; Vidal, "La poursuite des lépreux en 1321," 498-510; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 42-44, 50; Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems," 6-7. Torture was used often during the investigations of lepers in Aragon: ACA, Cancillería, Registros, no. 246, 232v-234r; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 98.

hide the fact they were under pressure during the time of the investigation.[91] In any case, the investigators had other methods to force suspects into confession. The accused were often imprisoned in harsh conditions during the investigation, and sometimes would confess only to avoid further imprisonment. We should also keep in mind that the persecution of lepers happened at the time as an extensive inquisition against heretics in southern France. The investigators, people like Jacques Fournier and Bernard Gui, had vast experience in investigating heretics, and knew every method of questioning. They were experts in manipulating witnesses, pressuring suspects into confession and establishing complicated cases based on dozens of testimonies. They knew exactly how to present questions in a way that would lead a suspect to the answers that they were expecting.[92] This is not to suggest that every local judge or bailiff was an expert investigator, but as the persecution continued, these professional inquisitors probably found the matter worthy of their attention. Eventually, a simple man like Guillaume Agassa would find himself forced into confession by Jacques Fournier, one of the sharpest inquisitors of the time. The investigation records were influenced not only this enormous imbalance of power between the suspect and the inquisitor, but also by the nature of the bureaucratic system that created them. The investigation was usually carried out in a vernacular language that the suspect understood, in our case probably Occitan, Gascon or Basque. First, the defendant confessed in his own language, usually as a response to the questions of the investigator. Then, a court notary translated his confession into Latin, and edited it into an organized record.[93] These actions of translation and editing leave us with a record that represents the confession in the way the notary understood it, rather than the

[91] Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, 54; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 42; Edward Peters, *Inquisiton* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 65. Guillaume Agassa was certainly tortured: Jacques Fournier, *Le Registre d'Inquisition de Jacques Fournier*, 141.

[92] Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, 23-65; John H. Arnold, *Inquisition and Power: Catharism and the Confessing Subject in Medieval Languedoc* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 77-110.

[93] Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, 28.

way the suspect presented it. All in all, the records reflect the system that created them more than they reflect the uninfluenced ideas and actions of the subjects.

So, considering these serious doubts regarding the reliability of the records, what can we learn from them? Naturally, we cannot assume that they represent the real actions or intentions of the suspects. It is impossible to determine whether the lepers planned to poisoned wells, or if they indeed tried to do so. All we know is that officials in south-western France forced them to admit that they did. This, however, is not a small achievement. As we try to understand the dynamic of well-poisoning accusations, we can point to the agents that promoted and spread them. The lords, judges, *baillis* and investigators of south-western France accepted the notion that the lepers poisoned the wells, acted to question and punish them, and developed the narrative of well poisoning.[94] The records of investigation allow us to better understand how this process occurred.

[94] Such methodological skepticism is common among historians of heretical movements in medieval Europe: Moore, *The War on Heresy*, 332-336; Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 5-10.

Development of the accusations against lepers over the spring and summer of 1321

Accusation \ Case	Lisle-sur-Tarn, starting 19 April	Paulin, 9 May	Réalville, 16 May	Montauban, 18 May	Pamiers, 4 June	Pamiers, 11 June	Pamiers, 6 July
The lepers planned to poison wells	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
The victims of the plot were supposed to become lepers	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
The lepers succeed in poisoning wells		X	X	X	X	X	X
Conspiracy to kill an official		X		X			
The victims of the plot were supposed to die			X	X	X	X	X
A general meeting of lepers in Toulouse				X	X	X	X
The plot started a year earlier				X	X	X	X
The lepers planned to take over land, property or titles				X		X	X
The lepers intended to cooperate with Muslims				X		X	X
The recipe of the poison is specified				X			X
The plot was universal						X	X
The Muslims led the plot							X
The lepers denounced Christianity							X
The lepers agreed to desecrate a cross or a host							X

The chart above shows the development of different elements of the accusations against lepers according to the records of investigation. The first conclusion is that the accusations developed significantly over two and a half months of persecution. While the first case, in Lisle-sur-Tarn, included only a suspicion that lepers tried to spread their disease by poisoning wells, the last case, in Pamiers, presented a universal conspiracy of lepers and Muslims to cause mass mortality and take over Christianity. The second conclusion is that once a new element was added to the narrative of the accusations, it was usually presented again in subsequent investigations. The result was that every investigation preserved the accusations of previous trials and added to them. This is the process that allowed the narrative of the plot to develop so quickly from unclear suspicions into a convincing story of universal plot. This conclusion also suggests that the investigators of each case shared their findings with officials in other places, and provided them with a baseline for their own investigation. Every time an unfortunate leper invented an insignificant detail to make his confession reliable and avoid further questioning, he contributed to the development of the accusations. The last conclusion is that the notion that lepers tried to use well poisoning to spread their disease was the nucleus of the accusations. It was presented in every investigation, without an exception. Other stories, like the ones about a general council of lepers or the involvement of the Muslims, evolved around it. Thus, when looking for the origin of the persecution of lepers in 1321, we should focus on the idea that lepers wished to spread their sickness by poisoning wells. Even if some of the chronicles claim that the plot started as an initiative of Muslims or Jews, the evidence points in a different direction.

Possible reasons for the persecution of lepers

The study of inquisition records of lepers from the spring and summer of 1321 leads us to the conclusion that the persecution evolved gradually from one root: the idea that the lepers tried to poison wells to spread their illness. As the first chapter showed, this idea was not particularly unusual in the European culture of the later Middle Ages. Still, one wonders why it triggered wide-spread persecution of lepers in south-western France in 1321, while in other times and places it had a very limited effect. This question actually calls for an answer in two parts: First, it is necessary to explain why lepers in particular were the subject of persecution. Second, one has to explain why well-poisoning accusations were the weapon of choice. To answer the first question, the next part of this chapter will focus on the social status of lepers in south-western France around 1321. As we will see, lepers found themselves involved in several social and political struggles, which eventually drove powerful people and institutions to act against them. An additional analysis of the political tensions of the area is also required in order to answer the second question. Studying the allegations and power mechanisms that political rivals used against each other will illuminate why well-poisoning accusations were particularly useful to undermine the status of lepers. The answers for these two questions will provide the historical context for the eruption of well-poisoning accusations in 1321.

The first important fact regarding the social status of the lepers is that there was nothing unusual about their presence. In south-western France, like in most of Europe, almost every town had a leprosarium outside its walls, and larger cities usually had more than one. In the middle of the thirteenth century, there were seven leper-houses in Toulouse. These were separate from

another fifteen hospitals and other charitable institutions for the sick or poor.[95] The leprosaria were not large, and usually did not house more than ten lepers. In the beginning of the fourteenth century the numbers decline even further and in many of the houses there lived four lepers or less.[96] The houses were usually organized according to the model of convents of monastic communities or regular canons. The head of the institution was usually called a minister, rector or procurator and the staff *fratres* or *sorores*. The lepers themselves were often considered lay brothers, and some of the records from 1321 suggest that lepers often addressed each other as "brother".[97] The common meeting in which they allegedly planned to annihilate Christianity in 1321 was referred to, perhaps cynically, as a "chapter meeting".[98] The lepers indeed lived as lay brothers, and sometimes worked in the house or in fields around it. Overall, the leprosaria were closer in character to small convents than to hospitals in the modern sense.[99]

But while lepers were an inseparable part of the towns of south-western France during the Middle Ages, there are signs that their social status started to decline during the late thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth. First, the building of new leprosaria, which was very

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[95] Mundy, *Studies in the Ecclesiastical and Social History*, 49-65, 225-234; Henri Marcel Fay, *Lépreux et Cagots du sud-ouest: notes historiques, médicales, philologiques suivies de documents* (Paris: Champion, 1910), 265-275; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 257-267.

[96] Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 61-66; Mundy, *Studies in the Ecclesiastical and Social History*, 84; Mundy, "Hospitals and Leprosaries," 201-202; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 294-300; James W. Brodman, "Shelter and Segregation: Lepers in Medieval Catalonia," in *On the Social Origins of Medieval Institutions: Essays in Honor of Joseph F. O'Callaghan*, ed. Donald J. Kagay and Theresa M. Vann (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 36-37.

[97] Mundy, *Studies in the Ecclesiastical and Social History*, 71-72; Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux*, 155-156, 171-172; Brodman, "Shelter and Segregation," 44; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 329-339, 344-349; Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 303; Rivière-Chalan, *La Marque infâme des lépreux*, 48; Felip Sánchez, "La persecució d'un collectiu marginat," 35-42.

[98] "Capitulum" - Jacques Fournier, *Le Registre d'Inquisition de Jacques Fournier*, 143; Bernard Gui, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 164; Petrus de Herenthales, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 179. Also see: Touati, *Maladie et société*, 400-401, 448.

[99] Mundy, *Studies in the Ecclesiastical and Social History*, 71-74, 83-85; Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux*, 232-264; Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 47-59; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 358-365, 447-461; Brody, *The Disease of the Soul*, 73-77; Brodman, "Shelter and Segregation," 35, 42-43; Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 302-343.

common in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, stopped towards the beginning of fourteenth.[100] In the high Middle Ages, rich and powerful nobles founded these institutions to show their piety and their commitment to public charity. They provided financial support to leprosaria, and made arrangements so that they would prosper after their death.[101] Some monastic orders or confraternities also established, supported and managed leper-houses. These houses were officially under the authority of the local bishop, but he was not always involved in the routine administration. Thus, they often enjoyed some degree of autonomy, and the inhabitants could influence decision making.[102] The fact that no new houses were established, and some even closed, may suggest that supporting lepers carried less social prestige at the time. Indeed, it seems that the number of lepers in each house also declined, as mentioned above, so it is possible that there was less need for new institutions. Yet, there is other evidence that the public was not willing to support leper-houses as it did in the past. In the same period, the amount of alms given to these institutions declined. Other kinds of charitable institutions also suffered economic difficulties at thi period, but the state of the leprosaria was particularly difficult.[103] Alms were a significant part of the leprosaria income, and it was much harder to keep them operating in these new conditions. This may explain the fact that in this period municipal institutions, such as the city council, become more significant in the administration of the houses, while the power of private patrons and confraternities

[100] Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux*, 163-164; Mundy, *Studies in the Ecclesiastical and Social History*, 225-232; Brodman, “Shelter and Segregation,” 36-37, 41-42; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 247-267.

[101] Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 79-83; Mundy, *Studies in the Ecclesiastical and Social History*, 74-79; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 210-228, 241-246

[102] Mundy, *Studies in the Ecclesiastical and Social History*, 66-74, 80-82; Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 32-43; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 388-398; Brodman, “Shelter and Segregation,” 43-44.

[103] Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux*, 175-179. For the general transformation in the forms of public charity in European society: Michel Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages: An Essay in Social History,* trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 158-177; Mundy, *Studies in the Ecclesiastical and Social History*, 231-232; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 485-504. Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, 328-331;

eroded.[104] Since the social benefit of supporting the leprosaria declined, there were fewer patrons who were willing to invest in them, and public institutions took charge.

This transformation in the administration of the houses caused some political tensions. As the power of private patrons, confraternities and monastic orders declined, several institutions struggled to implement their authority over the leprosaria. The major one was the city councils, but bishops or royal officials also sometimes claimed control. The ministers of the houses, or even the lepers themselves, tried occasionally to use these struggles to insure their freedom and privileges. For example, in 1268 lepers from the area of Toulouse sent a petition to Count Alphonse requesting an exemption from regional tolls. The count accepted their request, and local officials had to comply.[105] However, in 1290, when the preceptor of the leper house of Combecrose, near Rodez, wanted to sell property to the local bishop, he had to get permission from the municipal council. It seems that he had less autonomy in the management of the house than his predecessors.[106] In one case, the struggle for authority over the lepers developed into a political crisis. Sometime before December 1320, the *bailli* of Maremne executed a local leper for an unknown crime, by the order of lord Amanieu of Labrit (Albret). The bishop of Dax saw this act as a challenge to his authority, since he claimed jurisdiction over all the lepers in his diocese. He reacted by arresting all of the lepers in the area, as some of them were suspected of involvement in the crime, and as a sign of his control over them. He demanded that royal officials, in particular

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[104] Mundy, *Studies in the Ecclesiastical and Social History*, 80-83,141-142, 230-231; Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 109-110; Susanne Frances Roberts, "Charity and Hospitality in the Rouergue, 1100-1350" (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 1975), 351-353. A similar process happened in northern France earlier in the thirteenth century: Touati, *Maladie et société*, 678-684. The council of Vienne in 1311 also acknowledged the economic and administrative crisis of the leprosaria, and issued a canon to reform them: Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 1:274-276; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 736.

[105] Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 29, 58. Count Alphonse was a great benefactor of lepers: Mundy, *Studies in the Ecclesiastical and Social History*, 83, 135.

[106] Roberts, "Charity and Hospitality," 351-353.

the *sénéschal* of Guyenne, acknowledge his authority in that matter. The issue developed into a struggle between several secular and ecclesiastical authorities. Finally, it was settled by an agreement that appointed an arbitrator for legal matters involving lepers.[107] This was not the only case in which bishops had to confront secular authorities to protect their rights to judge and tax the lepers.[108] While this incident can certainly be seen as a precedent for the persecution of 1321, the record does not specify what accusations were brought against the lepers, and so it is hard to prove such connection.[109] Still, it is likely that the conflict between different institutions regarding the authority to manage the affairs of the lepers could turn the power of these institutions against the lepers themselves.[110]

The growing control of public institutions over the lepers had even more significant implications. Unlike private benefactors who supported leper houses as a manifestation of charity, public institutions managed the houses as part of their regular responsibilities. Thus, they acted to strengthen their control over the operation of the leprosaria. In the house of Combecrose, the power of the confraternity that originally administered the leprosarium declined, while the city council of Rodez took control. The rector was no longer chosen by the members of the confraternity, but appointed. He needed the approval of the consuls to accept new inhabitants or make property transactions.[111] In 1296, town officials of Bazas had the power intervene in a dispute between the lepers of Monségur-en-Bazadis and the local community there.[112] Also in Toulouse and Périgueux

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[107] Fay, *Lépreux et Cagots du sud-ouest*, 213-214, 519-526; Jean-Bernard Marquette, "Les Albret: le role politique," *Les cahiers du Bazadais* 41 (1978), 445-446.

[108] Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 28-32; Fay, *Lépreux et Cagots du sud-ouest*, 209-214.

[109] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 52-53; Bériac, "La persécution des lépreux," 207-208.

[110] Bériac suggests that the actions of the bishop can also be seen as an effort to protect the lepers, but the document describing the event focuses on issues of authority and jurisdiction: Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 30.

[111] Roberts, "Charity and Hospitality," 351-352, 356.

[112] Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 29.

the city councils became more involved in the administration of the neighboring leprosaria towards the end of the thirteenth century. This was probably a part of a general process of the strengthening in just this period of municipal authority over areas surrounding the cities in south-western France.[113]

Unfortunately for the lepers, municipal councils were more interested in issues of public administration and sanitation than in protecting their rights and privileges. Leprosy was considered extremely infectious, and the leprosaria were meant to seclude the sick from the healthy.[114] When there was a suspicion that a person was infected with leprosy, he was first diagnosed by a doctor. If he was found to be ill, he was forced to join a leprosarium, and performed a ritual of separation from the world. As part of this ritual, he swore to never leave the leper-house without a costume that marked him as a leper. He also swore to keep distance from healthy people, never eat or drink with them, and not to touch their belongings.[115] These means of separation were standard in medieval Europe, but towards the end of the thirteenth century city councils in south-western France considered them insufficient. In 1290, the council of the province of Auch prohibited lepers from entering towns in the area or attending markets. Other towns allowed lepers to enter only when necessary, and not delay for long.[116] In 1308 and 1309, the council of Toulouse forced two leper houses to relocate themselves further away from the suburbs of the city. In 1315 the council

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[113] Marie-Simone De Nucé de Lamothe, "Les diverses formes de charité à Toulouse d'aprés les testaments." *Cahiers de Fanjeaux* 13(1978), 175-176; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 678-684; Lavergne, "La persecution", 107; Mundy, *Studies in the Ecclesiastical and Social History*, 146-149; Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 70.

[114] Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux*, 24-26; Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, 138-146; Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 274-276.

[115] Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux*, 192, 215-227; Brody, *The Disease of the Soul*, 66-67; Johan Picot, "La Purge": une expertise juridico-médicale de la lèpre en Auvergne au Moyen Âge," *Revue historique* 662 (2012), 292-321. As we have seen in chapter one, some historians suggested that these practices were over-emphasized in the existing historiography, and were probably less common in some areas in Europe: Geltner, "Social Deviancy," 29-34; Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 13-43, 302-322; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 27-52. However, south-western France was probably not one of the areas, as the following passages show.

[116] Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 74-75. Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux*, 197.

of Périgueux forced the leprosarium of Sauvajou (Salvanjou) to move, since it was considered too close to the town of Saint-Martin. Another such case may have happened in Castelsarrasin in 1306.[117] In addition, it seems that the law that required lepers to wear special clothing when they left their house was enforced more vigorously at this period.[118] For the purpose of understanding the reasons for well-poisoning accusations against lepers, it is important to note that the authorities were especially worried that lepers might contaminate water sources. Lepers were not allowed to drink from public fountains, and certainly not to wash their bodies or clothing in them. Instead, specific fountains were designated for their use, especially in the area of Périgord.[119] The physical separation of lepers from the general society was obviously a major concern for local administrators of south-western France at the beginning of the fourteenth century.[120]

There are reasons to think that the desire of local leaders to isolate the lepers played an important role in the persecution of 1321. According to the Chronicle of Uzerche:

> *In the year 1320, the kings and princes of the land legislated that all of the lepers would carry a sign of linen cloth, so they would be recognized as others among all men; and, for this reason, such a great iniquity appeared against all the lepers of the kingdom: they conspired between themselves and secretly arranged that all the wells and the water in the world would be poisoned and infected.*[121]

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[117] Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux*, 183-184; Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 69-70; Lavergne, "La persecution", 107; Mundy, *Studies in the Ecclesiastical and Social History*, 62.

[118] Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 48, 80.

[119] Ibid, 70-71; Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux*, 189. The issue of bathing may have been a point of contention, as some doctors prescribed frequent baths as a treatment for leprosy: Luke Demaitre, "The Relevance of Futility: Jordanus de Turre (fl. 1313-1335) on the Treatment of Leprosy," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 70 (1996), 49-50.

[120] This was not unique to this area: Touati, *Maladie et société*, 723-724.

[121] "anno Domini M CCC XX, reges et principes terre statuerunt quod omnes leprosi signum deferrent de panno lineo, ut inter omnes alios agnoscerentur; et, inde, introivit tanta iniquitas in omnibus leprosis de regno quod inter se conspiraverunt et secrete ordinaverunt ut per eos omnes fontes et omnes aque de mundo venenarentur et toxicarentur" - Manteyer, "Chronique d'Uzerche," 412.

According to this description, the attempt to segregate the lepers led to the persecution. The fact that many leaders believed that it was best to mark the lepers so they could be avoided convinced many that there must be a good reason to fear them. And so, the rumor that the lepers poisoned wells appeared and prospered. The author naturally rejected this rumor, but saw it as the main reason for the persecution of lepers in Uzerche during the following year. Other sources suggest a different mechanism by which segregation could cause the persecution. As we have seen, in two cases lepers were accused of trying to poison officials who acted to promote their segregation. In the investigation in Paulin, Johan was accused of trying to hurt Lord Eymericus de Baselva because he prohibited lepers from using the cemetery of Archignac. Also Johan de Jardi of Montauban reported about lepers who tried to poison Judge Bernard Gervàs, since he ordered that they must wear white robes.[122] According to these narratives, at least one of the reasons for the plot was that lepers wanted to take revenge for their marginalization. A similar idea appears also in the confession of Guillaume Agassa and in several of the chronicles. These sources present the lepers as frustrated by their rejection from general society, and explain their plot to spread leprosy as an attempt to take back their place: if the conspiracy were successful, everybody would be a leper, and therefore equal again.[123] All these sources indicate that even when officials were successful in segregating the lepers, they only considered them more dangerous. According to their logic, if the lepers were prevented from accidentally poisoning the public, they might react by doing so deliberately.

[122] BnF, Coll. Périgord, vol. 93, f. 87; Felip Sánchez, "La persecució d'un collectiu marginat," 35-42. Above: Ch. 2, pp. 117-118, 121.

[123] Jacques Fournier, *Le Registre d'Inquisition de Jacques Fournier,* 138, 142; Many of the chronicles present different version of these narrative, some more explicitly than others: *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 34; Bernard Gui, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 163-164; Petrus de Herenthales, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 180; Amalricus Augerii, *Actiis Romanorum Pontificum,* 193.

An additional document can shed further light on the motives and strategies of these officials regarding the lepers. Sometime before February 1321, communities from the area of Carcassonne sent King Philip a petition regarding several issues of royal jurisdiction and justice.[124] The citizens of Toulouse probably presented a similar document, and maybe also those of Albi.[125] The last passage in this document deals with the privileges of lepers, and changes that local administrators wanted to apply to them, with the approval of the king. The administrators accused lepers of deliberately poisoning the healthy population: "they [the lepers] infect your [the king's] people everywhere and in a variety of ways with their disease, or other illnesses, through poisons and noxious, magical potions, with vile, malignant intent, and evildoing. Unless they are stopped."[126] This seems to be an expression of the ideas that triggered the persecution, and it was presented a few months before the violence started. It shows that the accusations were not random, but a manifestation of a long standing tension between lepers and local administrators. But it is even more revealing to examine the explanation the administrators presented for the malice of the lepers. According to the document, they claimed that: "the lepers distrust [our – the administrators'] good kindness and wish to have many allies in their possessions".[127] To understand this unclear statement, it is necessary to study further its context. It seems that the lepers were suspicious of the municipal councils, and doubted that their actions were motivated by "kindness". The main issue of contention was the possessions of the lepers. The leprosaria usually had incomes from a variety of sources, and while many of them suffered a decline in those incomes

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[124] Printed in: Clement Compayre, *Etudes historiques et documents inédits sur l'Albigeois, le Castrais et l'ancien diocèse de Lavaur* (Albi: Papailhiau, 1841), 255-257. For the dating of the document: Rivière-Chalan, *La Marque infâme des lépreux*, 55. Also see: Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 37.

[125] Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews,'" 309, n. 41; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 53.

[126] "cum venenis et potionibus pestiferis et sortilegiis, cogitatione execrabili et maligna, et operatione dampnosa, populum vestrum inficere multipliciter et universaliter morbo suo, seu alia mortifera, nisi fuerint impediti." - Compayre, *Etudes historiques*, 257.

[127] "leprosi de bono patientie diffiderent sociosque multiplices in suis possessionibus cupientes habere", ibid.

at this time, they still held valuable property.[128] As we have seen, this property was often managed by several agents and institutions, including the minister of the house, confraternities or private patrons, the local bishop or even the inhabitants themselves. This arrangement allowed the lepers some level of autonomy, as there was no institution that had absolute authority over them.[129] When the municipal councils tried to take control over the leprosaria and their property, the lepers apparently opposed them, and supported the traditional system of administration. As the petition describes it, they "wished to have many allies in their possessions", rather than let one institution, the city council, control these possessions single-handedly. This interpretation of the document is further supported by the demands of the local administrators from the king. They asked him to order that the lepers be enclosed in their houses (or new houses that would be built) for the rest of their lives. Men and women were to be separated, so the lepers could not reproduce. As for the financial management of the houses, the administrators proposed that: "after they [the lepers] were enclosed in this way, they would be supplied with the necessary sums from their own revenues, alms, gains and goods of piety by the consuls and patrons of the said goods, and they [the consuls and patrons] would release from these goods [the money needed] for the expenses made by the lepers."[130] In other words, the administrators suggested that the lepers would lose all control over their property, and would be given only the amount necessary for their immediate expenses. Their property was to be controlled by "consuls and patrons" rather than by confraternities, ministers of the houses, bishops or the lepers themselves. While the document does not specify who these

[128] Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 79-85; Lavergne, "La persecution", 110-113; Maillard, *Comptes royaux*, 98-100; Roberts, "Charity and Hospitality," 355, n. 96.

[129] Mundy, *Studies in the Ecclesiastical and Social History*, 66-83; Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 36-43, 52-59; Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux*, 170-179; Brodman, "Shelter and Segregation," 43-44.

[130] "quibus sic inclusis ex eorum redditibus et helemosinis adquirendis et bonis pietatis, taxata necessitate per consules et patronos dictorum bonorum ministrentur et expensis factis per eosdem leprosos de dictis bonis solvantur" - Compayre, *Etudes historiques*, 257.

consuls and patrons should be, the context makes this clear. The whole document was composed to protect the privileges and jurisdiction of municipal councils and local administrators, and the part regarding the lepers was probably not different. The writers hinted that the property of the lepers should be controlled by them, as part of their rights as local rulers. This was not only a question of control: if the king had accepted the plan to segregate the lepers as it was suggested, they were expected to die without leaving any heirs. Their property, which was substantial, was likely to remain in the hands of the authorities that managed it. Thus, the local administers hoped to kill two birds with one stone: with a single act of legislation, they would completely segregate the lepers from the general public and would insure that the property of the lepers ended up in their hands.[131]

As far as we know, the king did not respond to this petition, if he received it at all.[132] The claim that the segregation of lepers was necessary because they might poison water sources did not produce the desired effect at this time. However, local administrators continued to believe that they had the right to fully control the lepers and their property as part of their position. According to their view, the fact that the lepers dared to challenge this claim made them into traitors, who did not respect the legitimate authorities. This perception probably led to the accusation that the lepers organized the plot in order to usurp the nobility. In one of his confessions, Guillaume Agassa presented the goal of the plot as it was explained by its leader. This leader allegedly stated that after all the victims of the plot died or became lepers the conspirators would take over: “And then, these sick people [the lepers] and their current ministers will have their own administration and

[131] Compayre, *Etudes historiques*, 255-257; Rivière-Chalan, *La Marque infâme des lépreux*, 51-55; Brown, “Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews”, 308-309; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 53; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 37.

[132] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 53; Brown, “Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews”, 308-309.

government, and will receive and govern their own lands, and also appropriate them."[133] According to this source, the lepers hoped to achieve self-administration and control over their own property. The ministers of the leper-houses, not lepers themselves, became part of the plot since they hoped to keep their economic and administrative autonomy. For the people who orchestrated this confession, the fact that the lepers wished to keep their independence was a sure sign of their treachery. This was not a unique case, as Johan de Jardi of Montauban also presented a similar story in his own investigation.[134] In addition, Guillaume Agassa repeated this story in one of his later investigations, but this time he stated that the lepers planned to completely take the place of the nobility.[135] According to this narrative, the lepers planned to govern not only themselves, but also everyone else. After Guillaume Agassa, and probably other lepers as well, were forced to confirm this idea in their confessions, it found its way into the chronicles. Bernard Gui states that "[the lepers], it seems incredible to say, aspire to the domination of cities and castles. And they have already divided between them the places of ruling, and assigned the names of rulers, counts and barons in different lands, in case the thing they devise should happen."[136] Other chroniclers also presented different versions of this accusation.[137] It may not be a coincidence that in all of these sources the attempt of the lepers to take over political positions is linked to their alliance with the Muslims. It seems that the officials who promoted the plot tried to present the

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[133] "et quod tunc ipsi infirmi et ministri qui nunc erant haberent administrationem eorum et gubernationem, et terras eorum reciperent et gubernarent, et etiam sibi ipsis appropriarent." - Jacques Fournier, *Le Registre d'Inquisition de Jacques Fournier,* 138.

[134] Felip Sánchez, "La persecució d'un collectiu marginat," 35-42.

[135] Jacques Fournier, *Le Registre d'Inquisition de Jacques Fournier,* 142.

[136] "Et quod dictu incredibile videbatur, in villarum et castrorum dominium aspirabant, jamque inter se diviserant locorum dominationes, et sibi imposuerant nomina potestatum, comitum et baronum in diversis terris, si id quod conceperant eveniret." - Bernard Gui, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 163-164.

[137] *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 34; Petrus de Herenthales, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 180; Amalricus Augerii, *Actiis Romanorum Pontificum,* 193; Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 133; Pichon, "Quelques réflexions," 27-28.

lepers as the ultimate traitors. In the eyes of the local rulers, the lepers' attempt to undermine their authority could only be understood as cooperation with the worst enemies of Christianity.

However, it seems that propaganda was a less efficient strategy to take over the property of the lepers than quick political action. As we have seen, officials in Périgueux, around Toulouse and in Navarre confiscated the property of the lepers soon after they were convicted, and sometimes resold it. The difference between these cases is that in Périgueux and Navarre the property of the lepers found its way into the hands of the local nobility, while in Toulouse the *sénéschal*, a royal official, was able to secure it.[138] This evidence reflects a struggle between local and municipal authorities and royal officials over the property of the lepers. For example, in the leper house of Combecrose, near Rodez, this struggle started as early as May 1321. On 10 May the consuls of Rodez performed an inventory of the property in the house, possibly as a first step towards taking control over it. The royal *bailli* responded on 15 May by demanding, and receiving, the keys to the house. On 26 May the consuls removed the rector of the house from his position, and burned him at the stake. Then, they sent two representatives to walk all over the properties of the house as a symbolic gesture representing their control.[139] However, unlike the authorities in Périgueux, the consuls could not complete the confiscation of the lepers' property before the royal officials could respond. In his decree of 21 June, the king defined the crime of the lepers as *lèse majesté*, and so they were now under his jurisdiction, and he had the right to confiscate their property if they were convicted.[140] In the case of the leprosarium of Combecrose, the *bailli* indeed tried to implement this decision, and took control over it. During the end of May, he tried to sell

[138] Lavergne, "La persecution", 110-113; Maillard, *Comptes royaux*, 98-100; Idoate, *Documentos sobre agotes y grupos*, 81-84.

[139] Roberts, "Charity and Hospitality," 355-357.

[140] Henri Duplès-Agier, "Ordonnance de Philippe le Long contre les lépreux (21 juin 1321)," *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 18 (1857), 265-272; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews", 309-310; Rivière-Chalan, *La Marque infâme des lépreux*, 44-47; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 55-56.

the property of the lepers, according to the order of the *sénéschal* of Rouergue. The consuls of Rodez objected, and appealed to the *sénéschal* and the king himself to change the decision.[141] Other local leaders in south-western France also opposed the policy of the king, and during June and July sent similar petitions in an attempt to change it.[142] Their efforts bore fruit, and in 4 August the king made his first concession in the matter to the council of Narbonne. The *sénéschal* of Carcassonne took over the goods of the lepers in the king's name, but the consuls claimed that they were traditionally in charge of managing the property of lepers. The king accepted their position, and ordered the *sénéschal* to return the goods to the hands of the council.[143] By 16 August, the king made this consent into a general policy, and issued a decree that ordered his officials to return the property of the lepers to the control of local institutions and nobility.[144] On 18 August he cancelled fines that were issued against local leaders who arrested lepers without royal permission, and in particular against the bishop of Albi. The king's explanation for his decision is especially noteworthy, as he stated that he was "in doubt whether the crime [of the lepers] was of *lèse majesté* or not".[145] Clearly, the pressure that municipal councils and local nobility put on the king to allow them to take over the property of the lepers was successful. Yet, in some cases, including in Rodez, it took years before royal officials actually gave up this property.[146] Based on

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[141] Roberts, "Charity and Hospitality," 357; Bériac, "La persécution des lépreux," 210.

[142] Bériac, "La persécution des lépreux," 210-211, 214-217; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 55; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 34; Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems," 3-4.

[143] Text printed in: Léon Le Grand, "Les Maisons-Dieu et les léproseries du diocèce de Paris au milieu du XIVe siècle," *Mémoires de la Société de l'Histoire de Paris 25* (1898), 141, n. 3.

[144] Eusèbe-Jacob Laurière, ed., *Ordonnances des roys de France de la troisième race*, (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1723), 1:814-815.

[145] "aliqui revocant in dubium, an sit vel non majestatis lese crimen" - Two copies of this decree survived, one that was sent to the *sénéschals* of Toulouse and Carcassonne, and another that was sent to Beaucaire and Périgord: Laurière, *Ordonnances des roys de France*, 11:481-482; Claude De Vic and Joseph Vaissete, *Histoire Générale de Languedoc*, ed. Edward Barry et al., vol. 10 (Toulouse: Privat, 2003-2006), coll. 613-615. Also see: Touati, *Maladie et société*, 734.

[146] Roberts, "Charity and Hospitality," 357-358; Bériac, "La persécution des lépreux," 216-219; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews", 309-310, n. 43; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 55-56.

this analysis, it is obvious that the attempt to take over the property of the lepers was a major consideration for local authorities during the events of 1321.

To conclude, the persecution of lepers in 1321 was a result of a long-standing struggle between several political institutions over the right to judge the lepers, tax them and manage their property. Municipal councils tried to secure these rights for themselves, but were confronted by bishops, confraternities, ministers of the houses and the lepers themselves. The councils tried to achieve royal support for their demands by presenting possible well-poisoning accusations against lepers in the beginning of 1321, but failed. Yet, they repeated these allegations in the spring in order to delegitimize the lepers' claim for some autonomy. Moreover, this allowed local councils and lords to take control over the property of the lepers through legal action. It is hard to determine whether the accusers intended to cause the execution of all the lepers, or simply to force them to give up their privileges. Since the accusations evolved gradually, it is very possible that they developed in a way that no one could plan or predict. However, while conducting the arrests, trials and executions proved to be fairly easy for the local lords and councils, taking over the property of the lepers proved to be a different story. Once royal officials understood that the property of the lepers was available, they acted quickly to confiscate it. The king himself declared the crime of the lepers *lèse majesté*, probably to support this confiscation. The protest of local leaders forced him to eventually retract his decision, and allow them the rights and property that they set out to gain from the beginning.

Possible explanations for the timing of the persecution against lepers

It is now clear why the persecution of the lepers happened in south-western France in the beginning of the fourteenth century; it was a result of a long process of segregation of lepers and attempts to

take control over their property. Only in this political situation was it possible to attack the lepers without any response. As we have seen, even under these circumstances it was very difficult for local authorities to confiscate the property of the lepers. Still, one wonders whether there was something unique in the spring of 1321 that led local leaders to act. Françoise Bériac-Lainé suggested that the persecution of lepers was triggered by a different social movement that flourished in south-western France in the previous spring and summer. The members of this movement, the Pastoureaux (shepherds), were determined to initiate a new crusade. The movement first appeared in the North, maybe in the area of Normandy, and some of the shepherds made their way to Paris. There, they demanded that King Philip lead their crusade, but the king was unwilling to do so.[147] Thus, the shepherds continued through south-western France and into the kingdom of Aragon, aiming to eventually attack the Muslims of the kingdom of Granada. However, they never got that far. In their journey through France and Aragon, they attacked royal officials, clerics and most of all Jewish communities. These actions were probably meant as a protest against the king, who did not perform his "duty" of leading the crusade. In any case, the violence of the shepherds led towns and royal officials to unite against them. Within a few weeks, the movement was dispersed and many of its leaders dead. Bériac-Lainé noted that the persecution against lepers took place in the same area in which the shepherds' crusade was the most prominent. Thus, she suggested that both movements resulted from religious zeal to fight against "the enemies of Christianity" and from popular challenge to political authority.[148] She also presents some evidence

[147] This new movement was probably inspired by the Pastoureaux of 1251, see above: Ch. 1, pp. 79-80.
[148] Bériac, "La Persécution des Lépreux," 206-209; Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems," 12-13. For more about this movement: Malcolm C. Barber, "The Pastoureaux of 1320," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 32 (1981): 143-166; Georges Passerat, *La Croisade des Pastoureaux: Sur la Route du Mont-Saint-Michel à Narbonne, la Tragédie Sanglante des Juifs au Début du XIVe siècle (1320)* (Cahors: La Louve, 2006). For the questionable commitment of the king to a new crusade, see: Christopher J. Tyerman, "Philip V of France, the Assemblies of 1319–20 and the Crusade," *Historical Research* 57 (1984): 15-34.

that the hostility towards lepers appeared already during the Pastoureaux affair. According to the claim of a royal official, in the town of Sauveterre-de-Guyenne the shepherds tried to torch the local leprosarium and he had to intervene.[149] The CShronicle of Bazas also states that shepherds took over a leprosarium, possibly in Mas d'Agenais. In addition, according to this source the lepers had already prepared the poison they were about to use for their plot.[150] Nirenberg took Bériac-Lainé's argument a step further and claimed that both movements posed a specific challenge to the authority of the king. While the shepherds questioned the king's legitimacy from a religious standpoint, the councils ignored his jurisdiction over the lepers. Thus, the king responded to both challenges by reasserting his authority. In the first case he had to order his officials to attack the shepherds, and in the second case to uphold his decree and take over the property of the lepers. If one accepts this theory, it is becomes clear why the persecution of lepers started less than a year after the shepherds' crusade; the first movement spread the notion that the king had not acted as a true Christian leader, and thus it was legitimate to challenge his authority. The urban councils of the South-West agreed, and confronted the king on a subject that was important to them, namely the control over the lepers and their property.[151]

There is a good reason to support this interpretation of the events. As we have seen, before the councils started to arrest lepers, they addressed the king and asked him to intervene in the question of the control over the leprosaria.[152] Only after the king ignored their request did they turn to independent action. Then, the king tried to reestablish his authority over the lepers, but pressure from local lords forced him to give up his claim. However, this is only a partial description

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[149] Jules Lépicier, ed., *Archives historiques du département de la Gironde*, (Bordeaux: Gounouilhou, 1864), 6:366-367; Bériac, "La Persécution des Lépreux," 207; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 52.

[150] Raymond Bernard de la Mote, *Chronique de Bazas*, 39; Bériac, "La Persécution des Lépreux," 207; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 52.

[151] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 43-68.

[152] Compayre, *Etudes historiques*, 255-257.

of the dynamic that surrounded the persecution. Most of the documents suggest that before 1321 the councils struggled to prevent other local institutions from controlling the lepers and their property. Confraternities, ministers of leprosaria and bishops, like those of Dax and Albi, were usually the rivals of municipal councils in this matter.[153] The petition that the councils sent to the king shows that they hoped to receive his support, probably as a counterbalance to the claims of other local institutions. There is no reason to think that the king saw this petition as a challenge to his authority, or that he considered intervening in the dispute over the lepers and their property before May 1321. Only when local councils and leaders started to persecute the lepers and confiscate their goods did royal officials find it necessary to react. A conflict between local authorities was not a major concern for the Crown, but a large-scale attempt to exterminate the lepers and take over their property was a very different story. But even when the king did intervene, pressure from local leaders and institutions convinced him to retract his claims only a few weeks later.[154] Overall, it seems that despite the king's attempt to take over the property of the lepers, the tension between the Crown and the councils was not the major reason for the persecution of the lepers. Thus, the political circumstances of the persecution of 1321 seem quite different from those surrounding the Pastoureaux, and it is less likely that there was a direct connection between these events. During the shepherds' crusade councils cooperated with royal officials to suppress a popular movement, while in 1321 the councils acted independently against other local institutions.[155] Therefore, one has to conclude that the shepherds' crusade does not explain the

[153] Roberts, "Charity and Hospitality," 351-353; Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 28-32, 70; Fay, *Lépreux et Cagots du sud-ouest*, 209-214, 519-526; De Nucé de Lamothe, "Les diverses formes de charité," 175-176; Lavergne, "La persecution", 107; Mundy, *Studies in the Ecclesiastical and Social History*, 66-70, 79-83.

[154] Roberts, "Charity and Hospitality," 353-358; Bériac, "La persécution des lépreux," 210-211, 214-217; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 55; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 34; Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems," 3-4.

[155] Nirenberg acknowledges this issue: Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 54-55. The councils acted with royal officials to suppress the shepherds, e.g. in Albi: Compayre, *Etudes historiques*, 254-255.

persecution of the following year, even if it sheds some light on the political situation in south-western France.

Another possible explanation for the timing of the persecution focuses on the economic and social crisis that hit Europe in the beginning of the fourteenth century. In this period, the climate cooled drastically, leading to excessive summer rains and floods. The constant rain destroyed many of the crops on which European society relied for sustenance, especially grains. In addition, the bad weather caused mortality of sheep and cattle. The result was massive hunger in most of Europe, naturally followed by economic crisis that led to social instability. The most dramatic episode of this crisis was the massive hunger of 1315 to 1317, which caused mass mortality across northern Europe. This disaster happened only a few years before the violence of the shepherds' crusade and the persecution of the lepers.[156] William Jordan, who analyzed carefully the crisis of 1315-1317, suggests that this may not be a coincidence. He presents the shepherds' crusade as an attempt to please God, so he would relieve the suffering of the starving people. But this attempt was ultimately a failure that further exacerbated the crisis. It led to random violence and did not gain any significant victories for Christianity. In this atmosphere of fear and distress, many were willing to believe poisoning accusations that could explain some of the mortality. Moreover, since they accepted the notion that the environmental crisis was caused by poisoning, they believed that attacking the alleged poisoners could potentially provide some relieve.[157] There are reasons to accept this idea, as violence and crime indeed became much more common in areas that were hit by hunger. In many cases, struggles over resources between

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[156] Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 7-39; Aberth, *An Environmental History of the Middle Ages*, 49-56; Barber, "The Pastoureaux," 162-163; Lehugeur, *Histoire de Philippe le Long*, 2:412-414.

[157] Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 170-171; Jordan, "Home Again: The Jews in the Kingdom of France, 1315-1322," in *The Stranger in Medieval Society,* ed. F.R.P. Akehurst and Stephanie Cain Van D'Elden (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 37-38; Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 243-246.

different social groups spiraled out of control. Persecutions of marginalized groups also took place, as heretics were attacked in a few German towns.[158] In Normandy, there were several cases of persecution against lepers following 1315, probably as a result of the crisis.[159] Thus, it is not surprising that the first case of mass well-poisoning accusations took place right after one of the most significant episodes of hunger in European history.

In addition to the psychological influence of the hunger, it had also economic implications. The low harvests led to higher prices of grain, and foodstuffs in general. This situation was more severe in the towns, as they were dependent on food supply from the country. In addition, the mortality caused a shortage of laborers that resulted in a quick rise in wages. Many nobles suffered, as their incomes were based mostly on rents, which were fixed, but their expenses grew significantly.[160] Moreover, in France the Crown had been suffering from continuing economic difficulties even before the crisis. The mortality eroded the tax base, and forced the king to try to raise more income from his nobles and towns. However, the nobility and municipal councils were also struggling to deal with the economic crisis, and less willing to pay additional taxes. This tension was probably one of the reasons that the king invited representatives of the councils and nobility of the South to an assembly in Poitiers in June 1321 (an assembly for the towns of the North took place in Paris in September). This meeting focused on issues of subsidy for the Crown through taxation, property rights, and monetary reforms. One of its decisions, which will be discussed further in this study, was to raise a major sum of money from the Jews of France.[161]

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[158] Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 164-166. Jordan also suggested that the shepherds' crusade had elements of class struggle: Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 243-244. Also see: Lehugeur, *Histoire de Philippe le Long*, 2:412-420.

[159] Damien Jeanne, "La société rurale face à la lèpre à travers le registre de l'Officialité de Cerisy de 1314 à 1377," *Annales de Normandie* 43 (1993), 91-106.

[160] Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 43-86, 127-166.

[161] Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 240, 244-245; Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 167-171; Jordan, "Home Again," 37-38; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 55, 60-61; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 714-718; Brown, "Philip

When the councils of south-western France received an invitation to this meeting, during March and April, they knew well that they would be asked to give up money or privileges for the king. Their action against the lepers may have been an attempt to secure their property before the Crown had a chance to lay its hands on it.[162] If this was indeed the case, future events proved that the councils predicted the actions of the king quite accurately, as the king indeed tried to confiscate the goods of the lepers.

There are, however, significant problems with this explanation. There is no doubt that the hunger and the economic crisis it caused had a major influence on European society. But the crisis of 1315-1317 was mostly limited to the northern parts of Europe, and was probably not significant in south-western France.[163] If the persecution of lepers was a direct result of this crisis, one would expect that the violence would be centered in the North. Also, both the Pastoureaux and the persecution of 1321 happened a few years after the hunger itself. By then, the grain production had improved, and the economic pressure had been reduced.[164] If the events of 1320-1321 were caused mainly by the demographic and economic crisis, one would expect them to have happened sooner. In addition, as we have already seen, there is little evidence that the king tried to confiscate the property of the lepers before the persecution began. Thus, it seems more likely that the actions of the councils were meant to secure their rights to control the lepers against the challenge of other local institutions. This is not to suggest that this crisis was completely irrelevant in explaining the violence towards lepers. Economic crises have a tendency to spread geographically, and the

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V, Charles IV, and the Jews", 309-310. Charles H. Taylor, "French Assemblies and Subsidy in 1321," *Speculum* 43 (1968), 217-244.

[162] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 60-61; Taylor, "French Assemblies," 223-224; Elizabeth A. R. Brown, "Subsidy and Reform in 1321: The Accounts of Najac and the Policies of Philip V," *Traditio* 27 (1971), 399-431.

[163] Marie-Joséphe Larenaudie, "Les Famines en Languedoc aux XIVe et XVe Siècles," *Annales du Midi* 64 (1952), 37-38; Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 7-39.

[164] Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 185-186; Jordan, "Home Again," 37.

monetary difficulties of the Crown, the nobility and the towns were far from over.[165] It is likely that this economic and social crisis was a contributing factor for the persecution against lepers, even if it was not the major cause.

Overall, it is undeniable that the years that preceded the persecution of the lepers were a time of environmental, social and political crisis. The great famine, the economic difficulties and the violence of the shepherds surely made the people of France more anxious and suspicious. Still, it is not easy to determine to what extent these psychological factors contributed to the persecution of lepers. However, it is reasonable that the economic crisis forced the king, the nobility and the councils to look for new sources of income, and clearly increased the tension between them. In this political situation, the shepherds' crusade and the expected assembly in Poitiers could have been triggers for the persecution of lepers. The crusade challenged the authority of the king and convinced the councils that they could act against the lepers without any objection from him. The imminent assembly prompted them to do so before their window of opportunity would close. But even if this analysis of the political situation is accurate, one must remember that these events were merely triggers for action. The attempts of municipal councils, local institutions and nobility to segregate the lepers and confiscate their property started long before the Famine, the Pastoureaux or the assembly of Poitiers. The spring of 1321 may have presented them with an opportunity to achieve their goals, but these goals were shaped by wider social and political processes. The main reasons for the persecution were the rise in the political power of councils and the decline in the social status of the lepers. These reasons led councils to believe that the lepers should be completely segregated, and that they were the institution that should be in charge of the

[165] Brown, "Subsidy and Reform," 421-430; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 55, 60-61; Taylor, "French Assemblies," 219-220; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 714-718.

administration of the lepers' houses and property. And so, when the political situation presented an opportunity to act on these claims, they acted.

Why well poisoning? – Cultural reasons

The next logical step is to ask why municipal councils, and other local institutions, chose to charge the lepers with well poisoning in particular. In theory, any major crime could justify the actions of these institutions against the lepers. But, as we have seen, the accusations first focused on well poisoning. Other crimes, like attempts to assassinate officials or cooperation with the Muslims, were only later added to the narrative. There were surely reasons for the accusers to believe that lepers were more likely to commit well poisoning than other crimes, or that the public might be convinced by such accusations. To understand these reasons, we must study three major issues: The first is the cultural notions regarding lepers in fourteenth century society. The second is the change in the medical understanding of leprosy and its spread in this period. The third is the political use of poisoning accusations in south-western France. All of these factors led the accusers to believe that the public would believe well-poisoning accusations against lepers, and to the fact that this belief was proven correct.

In the previous chapter, we saw that leprosy was often allegorically associated with sin in medieval culture. The *exempla* literature, as well as secular texts, often presented the disease as punishment for sin, and enforced the notion that lepers were sinners. At the same time, poison and poisoning were also used as a symbol for the way the sinner could infect the people around him with his immoral behavior. In contrast, water is necessary to sustain human life, and so represented the true faith or righteous behavior. On some occasions, these ideas were combined into allegorical stories which depicted water sources poisoned by leprosy as a symbol for the spread of sin among

the Christian community. Such stories were clearly allegorical, and were meant to be used by preachers to convince their audience to avoid sinful behavior. Still, they depicted lepers as representing danger for the whole society, and lay people who heard them told may have missed the symbolic aspect.[166]

Thus, it may not be surprising to find echoes of these literary images in several of the sources describing the events of 1321. Bernard Gui depicted the lepers as "unhealthy in body and insane of mind", a reference to their sickness as both physical and spiritual.[167] The petition that the communities of the area of Carcassonne sent to the king in February 1321 stated that the lepers acted to poison the healthy "with vile, malignant intent."[168] Similarly, the chronicler Amalricus Augerii suggested that the lepers acted "with diabolical inspiration."[169] Other sources implied that the lepers were guilty of moral sins, which led to their plot to poison the wells. One of these sins was avarice, as lepers were said to be seduced by the Saracen kings to betray their coreligionists for large sums of money or plots of land. Their avarice led them to surrender to this temptation, against better moral judgment.[170] Other sins were heresy and betrayal, as some sources suggested that the lepers had to abjure Christian faith to receive the support of the enemies of Christianity. In some cases, the rejection of faith was marked by desecration of a cross or a host, symbolic acts which represented the gravest offenses against Christ. According to this narrative, these acts also served a practical purpose, as they allowed the organizers of the conspiracy to be sure that the lepers were no longer faithful Christians who could be trusted. The conclusion was clear: all lepers

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[166] See above: Ch. 1, pp. 68-76.

[167] "male sani in corpore et insani mente" - Bernard Gui, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 163.

[168] "cogitatione execrabili et maligna" - Compayre, *Etudes historiques*, 255.

[169] "instinctu dyabolico" - Amalricus Augerii, *Actiis Romanorum Pontificum,* 194.

[170] Bernard Gui, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 163-164; Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 132-133; Girardus de Fracheto, *Chronicon,* 55-56; *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 32-34; Jacques Fournier, *Le Registre d'Inquisition*, 138-139, 142-143; Felip Sánchez, "La persecució d'un collectiu marginat," 35-42.

were traitors and heretics, and these were probably the reasons why they became lepers in the first place.[171] In contrast, the sin of sexual promiscuity does not seem to play a major role in the accusations against lepers in 1321,[172] but may have contributed to the decision to enclose them in separate leprosaria. The lepers who survived persecution were enclosed in leper-houses in which men and women were separated, so they would not be able to bear children.[173] As we have seen, there were political reasons for this policy, but it may have also been a result of the idea that lepers could not control their sexual desire, and thus had to be separated from members of the opposite sex. In any case, it is likely that the accusations were supported by the idea that all lepers were sinners, and their physical illness represented moral decay. Saints' stories and moral examples provided many with reasons to believe that lepers were indeed capable of planning and executing a terrible crime such as mass well poisoning.

Why well poisoning? – Medical theory

Contemporary medical literature also presented reasons to believe well-poisoning accusations against lepers. Often, the language used to describe leprosy and lepers in medical texts followed the harsh terms presented in religious and literary sources. Doctors obviously noted the disfigurations that the disease causes to the face and body of the sick, and the bad smell associated with it. Thus, they described the disease as particularly "unclean", "filthy" or "ugly", and

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[171] Rubin, Gentile *Tales*, 40-69; Jacques Fournier, *Le Registre d'Inquisition*, 143-144; *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 34; Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 133; Girardus de Fracheto, *Chronicon,* 56; Pichon, "Quelques Réflexions," 27-28. At least some lepers in medieval France were well aware of these perceptions: Tanase, "Corps 'enferm'," 149-153.

[172] The one exception may be the investigation of the lepers of Lisle-sur-Tarn, which discussed a visit of some women to the leprosarium: Rivière-Chalan, *La Marque infâme des lépreux*, 49.

[173] Bernard Gui, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 164; Compayre, *Etudes historiques*, 255; Amalricus Augerii, *Actiis Romanorum Pontificum,* 194; Petrus de Herenthales, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 180; Duplès-Agier, "Ordonnance de Philippe le Long contre les lépreux," 271.

sometimes used these terms to describe the sick themselves as well.[174] Many also believed that leprosy was infectious and very hard to cure, and concluded that it was simply a “bad sickness”.[175] Some chose even more harsh terms, and described the disease, and sometimes the sick, as “foul” or “gross”.[176] Moreover, the sick were often said to have an uncontrollable sexual desire, an idea that echoed the notion that leprosy was caused by sin. All in all, in many cases medical literature represented the unflattering medieval perceptions of lepers and leprosy, but of course focused on the physical aspects of it.[177]

However, since the medical texts were unavailable and incomprehensible for the laymen, one has to assume that they had only a limited influence on public opinion regarding the possibility of well poisoning. Still, the few people who read them were often required to make medical decisions that had legal implications for the lives of lepers. As we have seen above, before a sick person could be isolated in a leprosarium, he had to be diagnosed as a leper. Until the second half of the thirteenth century, this diagnosis was usually performed by local surgeons or priests, who had very little theoretical knowledge of medicine. After this time, as part of the great development of theoretical medicine in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, doctors were asked to perform this procedure. And indeed, the doctors of southern France, and in particular those of the great faculty of medicine in Montpellier, took this task seriously. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, the famous doctor Bernard de Gordon complained about the low level of knowledge among lay examiners of leprosy. Probably as a response to this problem, the doctors of Montpellier

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[174] “Immundus” - Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, 95-97.

[175] “Malus morbus” - Luke Demaitre, “The Description and Diagnosis of Leprosy by Fourteenth-Century Physicians.” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 59 (1985), 339.

[176] “Feda”, “vilis”, “turpis” - Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, 98-99.

[177] Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, 91-102; Resnick, *Marks of Distinction,* 110-118; Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux*, 29-34; Brody, *The Disease of the Soul*, 49-52; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 109-126. Still, Demaitre shows that medieval doctors were often level-headed and professional as they tried to explain leprosy and diagnose it: Demaitre, “The Description and Diagnosis of Leprosy,” 327-344.

focused their efforts at this period on defining clear diagnostic procedures for leprosy. Other than Bernard de Gordon himself, other influential medical writers associated with the faculty of Montpellier, such as Arnald de Villanova, Henri de Mondeville, Jordanus de Turre and Guy de Chauliac, dedicated parts of their works to discussing leprosy. Generally, they focused less on possible cures for the disease, and more on its cause and symptoms. While the work of such experts surely promoted the academic understanding of the disease, its influence was not limited to the university circles. Doctors were indeed involved in the examination of lepers, in some cases in cooperation with lay examiners. Officials, councils and courts often accepted their judgment on this subject, and acknowledged their expertise. And so, while public opinion may have been ignorant about the medical notions regarding leprosy and lepers, decision makers probably knew more about the subject, and granted it importance.[178] The most relevant example of such connections between the medical literature and the public status of lepers is a treatise by Jordanus de Turre, titled *De Lepra Nota* (notes about leprosy). Jordanus wrote his treatise in southern France shortly before the persecution of lepers in 1321, and focused on possible treatments for leprosy. He designed his essay for an academic audience, and noted that his colleagues, probably in the University of Montpellier, were very interested in the subject. Still, he also stated that he wish "not to neglect the benefit of the commonwealth", an unusual remark in a short medical treatise.[179] It seems that Jordanus was aware of the social and political tension around the status of lepers at this period, and believed that medical discussion of leprosy could help solving the problem. As we will

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[178] Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux*, 26-27, 44-51; Brody, *The Disease of the Soul*, 66; Picot, "La Purge," 293-308; Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine,* 26-29, 34-40; Demaitre, "The Description and Diagnosis of Leprosy," 335, 342-344; Boeckl, *Images of Leprosy*, 57-59; McVaugh, *Medicine Before the Plague*, 219-221; Demaitre, "The Relevance of Futility," 31-32, 53. The growing involvement of doctors in legal procedures at this period was a part of a wider trend in European culture: Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine, and Medieval Society*, 3-8.

[179] "…publice rei utilitatem non obmittendo." - Demaitre, "The Relevance of Futility," 26-27, 54.

see, there are reasons to believe that medical literature indeed influenced the social dynamic in 1321.

In order to better understand the possible importance of the medical discussion of leprosy for the persecution of lepers in 1321, it is necessary to examine it further. In general, a new medical interest in leprosy started to develop in the West at the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of fourteenth centuries. This new attitude was inspired by the re-discovery of several writings by Galen (sometimes referred to as the "new Galen"), and in particular a short text titled *De malicia complexionis diverse*. Of course, these writings were well known in the Muslim world, and some of the ideas they presented regarding leprosy were developed further by Avicenna. This corpus of medical analysis of leprosy became available to Italian doctors in the last third of the thirteenth century, and to those of the University of Montpellier around 1290.[180] Drawing on the medical theory of humors, Galen claimed that leprosy is caused by an excess of black bile in the body, due to a failure in the "assimilative faculty", namely the system incorporating materials into the organs. The black bile is burned and deposited in the blood, functioning as a toxic substance. It causes the body to become overly dry and cold, counteracting the warm and moist qualities that were considered necessary to support life. Thus, the body goes into a steady process of disintegration, which is manifested in the "corruption" or "disintegration" of leprosy. Based on this theory, Avicenna suggested that a failure in the liver causes the burning of the blood and black bile, which in turn leads to leprosy.[181] In general, the doctors of the early fourteenth century accepted this model, but found it insufficient. It did not account for different kinds of leprosy, did not explain

[180] Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, 114-117; Brody, *The Disease of the Soul*, 44-45; Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux*, 16.

[181] Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, 104-107; Brody, *The Disease of the Soul*, 35-37; Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux*, 17-20; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 120-122; Resnick, *Marks of Distinction,* 175-180. For black bile as poison in literary sources: Pierre Levron, "La mélancolie et ses poisons," *Cahiers de recherches médiévales* 17 (2009): 173-188.

all of the symptoms and did not provide enough diagnostic tools to recognize the disease. Thus, influential doctors such as Bernard de Gordon, Arnald de Villanova and Henri de Mondeville suggested more sophisticated explanations. Naturally, each of them presented a different model and focused on different details. Still, they all emphasize the nature of leprosy as a sickness that infects and corrupts all of the systems of the body, and not only the organs that seem diseased.[182] For the purpose of this study, it is particularly important to note the implications of this new medical theory on the understanding of leprosy as an infectious disease. Most doctors at this period did not doubt that leprosy was indeed infectious, but were not always sure about the mechanism of transmission. Several of them suggested that one can get infected by touching a leper, and others claimed that the disease was only sexually transmitted. Other possible reasons were unbalanced nutrition, excess of sexual activity, or intercourse during menstruation. But a new notion that appeared in this period, and was adopted by the influential Bernard de Gordon, stated that leprosy could be disseminated by "corrupt air". The lepers were said to infect the air with their sickness, probably a reference to the bad odor which is a possible symptom of leprosy. Thus, Bernard de Gordon concluded that one could contract the disease simply by being in the proximity of lepers. His contemporary, Henri de Mondeville, warned doctors against treating lepers, and claimed that long conversations with them might convey the sickness. It is likely that these new medical ideas were an additional cause for the segregation of lepers at the beginning of the fourteenth century.[183]

Yet, one wonders if these medical texts indeed supported the notion that one could spread leprosy by throwing potions or powders in water sources, as the accusers suggested in 1321.

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[182] Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, 117-123; Resnick, *Marks of Distinction,* 108-111; Demaitre, "The Relevance of Futility," 32-33; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 128-139, 165-167.

[183] Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, 134-140, 163-175; Demaitre, "The Relevance of Futility," 50-53; Resnick, *Marks of Distinction*, 111-121, 140-143; Brody, *The Disease of the Soul*, 24-25, 52-56; Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux*, 20-26; Luke Demaitre, "The Description and Diagnosis of Leprosy by Fourteenth-Century Physicians," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 59 (1985), 331-337; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 114-126, 147-151.

Indeed, some medieval medical sources suggest that such method of poisoning was considered possible. In his *Treatise on Poisons and their Antidotes*, Maimonides described a common phenomenon of men who were poisoned by their wives and became lepers or died. To understand what kind of poison could cause this result, he consulted with other physicians. He reports that:

> *The physicians whom I found told me that they themselves intensely investigated such cases until they learned from the wives (of the victims) what substance they used to deceive so-and-so in the known occurrence, and the physicians learned from them that they deceived (their husbands) with menstrual blood in that they took some of the blood at the beginning of the menses — even only a small amount — and cast it into a cooked dish and thus produced the observed sufferings.*[184]

Maimonides pointed out that he could not find a description of this kind of poisoning in the medical literature available to him. However, the eleventh-century medical book *Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm* (the aim of the wise) states that: "he who would be given [to eat or drink?] the menstruation of a woman will become a leper; and if he would receive it in [his] bath, will quickly die."[185] The treatise by Maimonides was available in Latin translation to the doctors of Montpellier, and it is very possible that the other text was known there as well.[186] And so, it is not surprising that a French text from the late thirteenth century known as *The Secrets of Philosophers* also presented this idea.[187] Interestingly, the Italian doctor Pietro de Abano, who wrote a treatise about poison around 1310,

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[184] Maimonides, *Treatises on Poisons*, 89-90.

[185] "Menstruum mulieris cuicumque dabitur fiet leprosus; et si quis in balneo susceperit, cito morietur." - David E. Pingree, ed. *Picatrix: the Latin version of the Ghayat Al-Hakim* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1986), 163; Resnick, *Marks of Distinction*, 115. For more about thie text: Thorndike, *A History of Magic*, 2:813-824.

[186] Maimonides, *Treatises on Poisons*, 21-22; Pingree, *Picatrix,* xvi (Spanish and Latin translations were available at the end of the thirteenth century). For an explanation of the connections between menstruation and leprosy: Touati, *Maladie et société*, 109-126; Resnick, *Marks of Distinction*, 112-121.

[187] Franck Collard, "Le poison et le sang dans la culture médiévale," Médiévales 60 (2011), 142-143; Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 48; Demaitre, "The Description and Diagnosis of Leprosy," 329.

suggested that the blood of lepers could be used as poison in a similar way. He warned that "a person who drinks the blood of menstruation or of a leper will seem to be stunned and crazy and injured and forgetful."[188] This medical opinion was fairly new in European medicine at this period, but it became much more popular during the next two centuries.[189] The belief that the leper's blood can transmit leprosy actually made sense considering the accepted medical theory that the disease leaves poisonous materials in the blood. Therefore, it may not be a coincidence that the chronicler who continued Girardi de Fracheto, and the other sources based on his account, reported that the poison in 1321 included human blood as its first component.[190] He also referred to "some very black and stinking liquid"[191] as part of the poison, which can be understood as a reference to the burnt black bile that was said to contaminate the blood of lepers.[192] Indeed, as the Collard pointed out, these sources do not specify that the blood for the poison was taken particularly from lepers.[193] Yet, it is important to note that regular human blood was not usually considered poisonous in medieval medical literature. Only menstrual blood, the blood of lepers and of certain animals could cause leprosy or death.[194] Therefore, if the chroniclers indeed knew the relevant medical literature on poisons, it is likely that they meant to suggest that the lepers used their own blood, rather than

[188] "Ille qui sanguinem menstruum aut leprosi biberit videbitur esse peristrigiatus et lunaticus et maleficiatus et obliviosus." - Petrus de Abano, *Conciliator*, 260; also see 257; Petrus de Abano, *De Venenis*, 83.

[189] Collard, "Le poison et le sang", 142-144, 147-155. For the ideas which allowed this new perception, see: Resnick, *Marks of Distinction,* 112-121.

[190] *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 56; Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 133; *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 32-33; *Chronique de Saint-Denis*, 704.

[191] "quodam liquore nigerrimo et olente" - *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 56.

[192] Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, 104-107; Demaitre, "The Relevance of Futility," 37; Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems," 15; Levron, "La mélancolie et ses poisons," 175-177.

[193] Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 48.

[194] Maimonides, *Treatises on Poisons*, 85-94; Petrus de Abano, *Conciliator*, 260; Arnoldus de Villa Nova, *De Arte Cognoscendi Venena*, 4-10; Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 46-50. In popular culture, bathing in human blood was considered to be a cure for leprosy: Gow, "'Sanguis Naturalis'," 139-144; Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 243-247.

regular blood. In any case, if decision makers turned to medical opinion to conclude if poisoning accusations against lepers were plausible, the probably received a positive answer.

The accounts regarding the composition of the poison also reported about other ingredients that may have hinted that the poison was created to cause leprosy. To be sure, most of the ingredients were common poisons which were mentioned in most of the medical guides of the period. These included human urine and excrement, poisonous herbs and the bodies of poisonous animals such as snakes, toads or lizards.[195] However, for a person knowledgeable about medieval medicine, some of these materials had a direct connection leprosy and lepers. According to several medical texts, the dried and ground skin or meat of a snake could be used to cure leprosy (among other miraculous qualities). In rare cases, the meat of a toad or other animals was also suggested for the same purpose. This idea probably originated in the writings of Galen and Avicenna, but found its way into late thirteenth and early fourteenth medical texts. It is particularly important that Jordanus de Turre, who wrote his treatise about leprosy shortly before the persecution of 1321, also mentions this cure. Curiously, this treatment was often recommended despite Galen's note that snake-contaminated wine could cause leprosy.[196] Similarly, Jordanus recommended that lepers should consume "fresh roots or herbs, if they can be found", in order to clear the body of

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[195] *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 56; Raymond Bernard de la Mote, *Chronique de Bazas*, 39; Felip Sánchez, "La persecució d'un collectiu marginat," 35-42; Jacques Fournier, *Le Registre d'Inquisition de Jacques Fournier,* 142-144; Maimonides, *Treatises on Poisons*, 85-94; Petrus de Abano, *Conciliator*, 260; Arnoldus de Villa Nova, *De Arte Cognoscendi Venena*, 4-10; Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 46-50; Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems," 16.

[196] Nicholas of Poland, *Experimenta,* in John W. S. Johnsson, "Les 'Experimenta magistri Nicolai'," *Bulletin de la société français d'histoire de la medicine*, 10 (1911), 272; Johannes Paulinus, *Experimenta duodecim*, in John W. S. Johnsson, "Les 'Experimenta duodecim Johannis Paulini'," *Bulletin de la société français d'histoire de la medicine*, 12 (1913), 262; Juan Gil of Zamora, *Iohannis Aegidii Zamorensis - Liber contra venena et animalia venenosa*, 217, 250; Demaitre, "The Relevance of Futility," 40-43, 49, 61; Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, 267-270; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 160, 178-179, 182; Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 220-223. For similar ideas in non-medical litreture: Piero Morpurgo, "I veleni nella letteratura e nell'iconografia al tempo di Pietro d'Abano," *Medicina nei secoli* 20 (2008), 526-528.

black bile.[197] While in this case he did not specify what kind of herbs was required, it is very possible that poisonous herbs were not out of the question. For example, he suggested that lepers should apply absinthe juice or bitter-oyster-mushroom ointment to their skin, both quite poisonous. He also proposed that every morning the patient should take two ounces of sap of fumitory, or a dried powder of this plant, which can be poisonous in a high dosage.[198] Thus, it seems that the recipes of poison mentioned in the accounts of the persecution of 1321 included many of the recommended cures for leprosy. This may be considered odd, as the poison was clearly meant to cause leprosy rather than cure it. However, it can be explained by the medieval medical principle that "one poison expels another", and therefore a poison which would cause leprosy in a healthy person can be useful to cure a leper.[199] According to the same principle, some doctors suggested that the blood of lepers should be utilized as a medicine for their sickness, despite the notion that it could also transmit leprosy. Others recommended the use of menstrual blood for this purpose, or the blood of a hare (the Latin word for a hare, *lepus-leporis*, was perceived as having an etymological connection to leprosy, *lepra*).[200] And so, according to the medical literature of the time, the poison that the lepers allegedly used in 1321 may have indeed cause the victims to become lepers.

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[197] "radices et herbe omnes recentes si tempus et locus fuerint reperiendi" - Demaitre, "The Relevance of Futility," 44-45, 58, 60.

[198] "Et breviter poteris post balneum ungere cum oleis stipticis vel aliis, vel accipiatur succus absinthii […] Et consilium meum est ut paciens utatur quolibet mane succo fumiterre in omni specie lepre si inveniri possit ad quantitatem unc.ii; et si succus eius non reperiatur, ut in hyeme, loco eius sumantur dram.ii pulveris frigidi ex ea" - Demaitre, "The Relevance of Futility," 43, 47, 60. Also see: Levron, "La mélancolie et ses poisons," 184-185.

[199] "Comedat [serpentem] leprosus quia unum venenum expellit aliud" – From the anonymous treatise *De Lepra*, cited in: Demaitre, "The Relevance of Futility," 40, n. 80. This idea may be based on: Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies*, ed. and trans. Stephen A. Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach and Oliver Berghof (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 114 (IV.ix.8). Also see: Touati, *Maladie et société*, 160-161; Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 220.

[200] Demaitre, "The Relevance of Futility," 38-39; Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, 268-269; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 160-161; Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 219-220, 247-248. Also see: Bauchau, "Science et racism," 22; Gow, "'Sanguis Naturalis'," 139-144. The blood of a hare was sometimes considered as an antidote: Juan Gil of Zamora, *Iohannis Aegidii Zamorensis - Liber contra venena et animalia venenosa*, 241.

For the persecutors of lepers in 1321, the next logical question was how the lepers could concoct such a powerful poison without having the necessary medical knowledge. The answer was, of course, that they had assistance. The notion that lepers used medical help to manufacture the poison appeared as early as 18 May, in the investigation of Johan de Jardi of Montauban. He confessed, or was forced to confess, that when the lepers created the poison, they were guided by a doctor called Bernard de Solhac from the town of Souillac, and paid him ten *livres* for his advice. The task of producing the poison was seemingly quite complicated, as the lepers had failed in their attempt to do so eight years earlier.[201] Guillaume Agasse also reported in his interrogation that the poisonous powders were made in consultation with the doctors.[202] This idea may also explain the arrest of a Jewish physician called Amonaut in Huesca about a year after the events of 1321. He was accused of being a leper and of planning to poison water sources, and the fact that he was a doctor probably supported these accusations.[203] We should also consider the report about an experiment that proved the potency of the poison by showing that it could not be burnt.[204] While one may doubt the notion that such an experiment indeed took place, it is reasonable that the chronicler thought that this report would convince his readers that the poison was effective. Thus, one can conclude that many believed that the poison was produced according to valid medical principles, and could be convincingly examined by an experiment. To sum up, there is some evidence to support the assumption that the lepers were accused of implementing medical knowledge to commit well poisoning in 1321. And so, the fact that the medical literature of the period claimed that lepers could indeed transmit their disease through poisoning was probably

[201] Felip Sánchez, "La persecució d'un collectiu marginat," 35-42.

[202] "ad hoc faciendum de consilio medicorum facti fuerunt multi pulveres" - Jacques Fournier, *Le Registre d'Inquisition de Jacques Fournier*, 138.

[203] McVaugh, *Medicine Before the Plague*, 220; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 99.

[204] *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 56.

relevant to support the accusations against them. This conclusion is further supported by the descriptions of the poison itself. According to these, the ingredients of the poison allegedly used by the lepers line up with the ingredients listed in medical texts as creating or transmitting leprosy. Considering the growing social role of doctors in southern France at the time in diagnosing and segregating lepers, this is probably not a coincidence.[205]

Why well poisoning? – The frequency of political poisoning accusations

The last factor that possibly led many to believe that the lepers indeed poisoned water sources in 1321 was the fear of political poisoning. As we have seen in the first chapter, accusations of political assassination by poisoning were far from rare in Europe of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Whenever a powerful political figure died in mysterious circumstances, suspicions of poisoning arose.[206] However, in the kingdom of France, and in the South in particular, such accusations were even more common. This may be explained by the fact that this area saw a series of political and religious struggles at the beginning of the fourteenth century. We have already discussed the political struggles between city councils and other local institutions, and between these and the Crown. The inquisition against the Cathar heretics and the activity of spiritual Franciscans in area also contributed to the tension. Public accusations and sometimes even official

[205] Several historians emphasize the symbolic nature of the poison, and pointed out that its ingredients represent corruption and condemnation. I see no clear contradiction between this idea and the conclusion that according to many medieval medical texts, the poison was supposed to be effective. Touati, *Maladie et société*, 722-723; Pichon, "Quelques réflexions," 25-30; Bauchau, "Science et racism," 24-25; Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems," 15-16.

[206] Ch. 1, pp. 44-47; Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 90-93, 181-183; Friedlander, *The Hammer of the Inquisitors*, 273-275; Richard Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, 108-114. This is not to suggest that these fears were not sometimes justified: Fornaciari et al., "A Medieval Case of Digitalis Poisoning," 162-167.

charges were a useful tactic to undermine a political rival. Poisoning accusations were particularly useful, as they were very serious and hard to disprove.[207]

And so, several important political figures in France found themselves facing poisoning accusations in the years leading up to the events of 1321. In 1308, Bishop Guichard of Troyes was accused of poisoning queen Blanche of Navarre, who had died six year earlier. He was also said to have assassinated her daughter Jeanne by sorcery, and to be planning to use similar methods against other high nobles. After a five-year trial, he was excommunicated and executed.[208] In the same year, the lord of Ulmet was accused of poisoning his wife.[209] In 1317 bishop Hugues Géraud of Cahors was burnt by the ecclesiastical court in Avignon. He was charged with organizing a plot to kill Pope John XXII and several cardinals by using poisoning and sorcery. Similar accusations were presented three years later against Matteo and Galeazzo Visconti, relatives of the archbishop of Milan. They allegedly plotted to assassinate the pope in concert with none other than Dante Alighieri.[210] In 1315, Enguerrand de Marigny, who served as a minister of King Philip IV, was hanged for using magic against King Louis X and Count Charles of Valois. A year later, similar accusations were presented against Cardinal Francesco Gaetani.[211] In 1319, the Franciscan Bernard Délicieux, who organized popular resistance to the inquisition in the South, was finally brought to trial after many years of political action. One of the accusations focused on the attempted

[207] Friedlander, *The Hammer of the Inquisitors*, 273-277; Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 127-142, 227-234; However, Frans van Liere doubts the political nature of some of these accusations: Van Liere, "Witchcraft as Political Tool?," 165-171.

[208] Rigault, *Le procès de Guichard*, 180-191, 270-291; Mollat, "Guichard de Troyes," 310-316; Friedlander, *The Hammer of the Inquisitors*, 273-274; Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, 108-109; Thorndike, *A History of Magic*, 3:20-22; Augustin Cabanès and Lucien Nass, *Poisons et sortilèges* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1903), 1:203-211.

[209] Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita prima Clementis V*, Baluze-Mollat, 1:12.

[210] Albe, *Autour de Jean XXII*, especially 40-67. Note that much of the plot took place in Toulouse: Michel, "Le procès de Matteo et de Galeazzo Visconti," 269-327; Van Liere, "Witchcraft as Political Tool?," 165-173.

[211] *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 1:415-418, 2:64-65; *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 42-43; Charles Victor Langlois, "L'affair du cardinal Francesco Caëtani (avril 1316)," *Revue historique* 62 (1896), 56-71; Cabanès and Nass, *Poisons et sortilèges*, 1:211-217.

assassination of Pope Benedict XI in 1304 using both sympathetic magic and poison. Bernard Délicieux was said to have cooperated with Arnald de Villanova, who was indeed an expert on the subjects of poison and leprosy. While these particular charges were dropped, Bernard died a few months later in the inquisition's prison.[212] But even Bernard Délicieux's great enemy, Bishop Bernard de Castanet of Albi, could not avoid poisoning accusations. Several citizens of Albi complained to the pope that the bishop was a serial poisoner. Allegedly, he used to invite his political opponents to dine with him, so he could assassinate them more easily. Several citizens of Albi, including a royal judge and some clerics, were said to have ended their lives at his table. One of the townsmen testified that "whomever the lord bishop wished to poison he did poison".[213] Bernard Gui also mentioned that only a year before the persecution of lepers a major poisoning accusation shocked the French nobility. Count Louis I of Nevers was accused of plotting to poison his father, Count Robert III of Flanders. Louis allegedly convinced a monk called Galter, who was Robert's confessor, to poison his drink. However, the plot was discovered and Louis lost his inheritance rights for the county of Flanders to his brother.[214] Collard noticed that in many of these cases the accused were clerics, usually noble and powerful.[215] But occasionally, simple citizens, often women, were also said to have commited political poisoning. In 1315 three women were executed in Paris for using potions to kill the bishop of Châlons-sur-Marne. Another woman confessed to similar crimes four years later.[216] Indeed, accusations of assassination through

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[212] Friedlander, *The Hammer of the Inquisitors*, 276-292; Friedlander, *Processus Bernardi Delitiosi*, 39-47, 99, 103, 107; Bernard Gui, *Le livre des sentences,* 1184-1185.

[213] "dicebatur quod quemcumque dominus episcopus volebat venenare venenabat" - Friedlander, *The Hammer of the Inquisitors*, 275-276.

[214] Bernard Gui, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 131-132.

[215] Franck Collard, "In claustro venenum: Quelques réflexions sur l'usage du poison dans les communautés religieuses de l'Occident medieval," *Revue d'histoire de l'Église de France* 88 (2002), 5-19; Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 96-97.

[216] Mollat, "Guichard de Troyes," 310-316; *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 1:422.

poisoning or sorcery (and in most cases, both) were very common in southern France at the beginning of the fourteenth century, and one can easily find additional examples for this.[217]

These circumstances made the accusations against lepers in 1321 look plausible, if not convincing. Most people were probably aware of the public poisoning charges against bishops, nobles and monks, which were quite common. Thus, it would probably not seem unusual for them that the lepers might use similar measures to achieve their political goals, namely, to take over the kingdom. Moreover, as Collard suggested, poisoning was the weapon of the weak. The reason that clerics and women were often accused of poisoning was that they were unlikely to settle their disputes in an open battle, and therefore they had to use the cunning method of poisoning. They could not take arms themselves, and often could not depend on the help of family members to fight for them.[218] The lepers had the same problem – they were a minority group of sick, isolated and underprivileged people, with powerful enemies in key political positions. Moreover, we should remember that the lepers were lay brothers, or at least lived in a religious community. And so, it is possible that the image of religious men as poisoners fitted well with the accusations against them. Considering this explanation, the fact that some of the sources referred to the meeting of the poisoners as a "chapter meeting" makes more sense, as the religious status of the lepers supported the poisoning accusations.[219] In any case, it evident that while poisoning accusations may sound

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[217] Albe, *Autour de Jean XXII*, 126-138; Friedlander, *The Hammer of the Inquisitors*, 273-276; Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, 108-114; Lehugeur, *Histoire de Philippe le Long*, 2:415-417; Cabanès and Nass, *Poisons et sortilèges*, 1:202-221, 234-253; *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 1:415-422; Collard, "In claustro venenum," 8-9, 12-13; Shlomo Simonsohn, ed., *The Apostolic See and the Jews* (Toronto: Pontifical Instiitute of Medieval Studies, 1988), 1:304-307, no. 296. Kieckhefer (see above) reviews most of the relevant cases, and the majority of them indeed originated in southern France. If one includes the cases related to the papal court in Avignon, this conclusion is even clearer. A review of the Collard's general study of poisoning in the Middle Ages gives a similar impression, even if its thematic organization makes a definite conclusion difficult: Collard, *The Crime of Poison*.

[218] Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 96-106; Collard, "In claustro venenum," 5-6, 18-19.

[219] Jacques Fournier, *Le Registre d'Inquisition de Jacques Fournier*, 143; Bernard Gui, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 164; Petrus de Herenthales, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 179. Also see: Touati, *Maladie et société*, 400-401, 448.

unusual to a modern reader, they were quite common and plausible in southern France at the beginning of the fourteenth century.

And so, as we consider the cultural, social and political circumstances in south-western France at the beginning of the fourteenth century, we can understand how well-poisoning accusations against lepers seemed believable. Preachers may have spread moral stories and examples in which leprosy was allegorically compared to sin, and heresy to poisoning. A few of these stories actually presented in vivid detail well poisoning as the cause for leprosy. While these stories never claimed to represent a historical reality, they supported the cultural image of lepers as well poisoners. When powerful political leaders promoted the accusations, they only needed to convince the public that this well-known legend was actually a reality. In addition, the medical literature of the period supported the idea that spreading leprosy through poisoning was quite possible, and that the poison allegedly used in 1321 would indeed cause this effect. Moreover, some texts suggested that the lepers had easy access to the required poison, as it was often based on lepers' blood or medications used to treat leprosy. And finally, political poisoning accusations were so common in this society, that the charges against the lepers probably seemed ordinary. The social reasons that made poisoning accusations against clerics and women plausible applied also to the lepers, and so many probably believed that they were indeed guilty. Overall, the cultural, political and social atmosphere in south-western France made well-poisoning accusations against lepers look at least reasonable.

Conclusion

As we review the argument presented in this chapter, it becomes clear that its three parts are actually three stages of interpretation, built to support each other. The first stage is the technical

mapping of the persecution of lepers, geographically and chronologically. This is the necessary foundation which allows the analysis and assessment of the more complicated claims presented in the subsequent parts of the chapter. Similarly, the careful review of the records of investigations of lepers provided us with a fundamental insight: the idea of well poisoning was indeed the core of the accusations against lepers, and the other details evolved gradually around it. Only after this conclusion was established, was it possible to understand the original reasons for the persecution, since it allowed us to separate the accusations which were presented against the lepers before the events of 1321 from the ones that evolved during the investigation of the plot. And so, the second part of the chapter focuses on the social and political status of the lepers in south-western France before the persecution started. It highlights the actions of local institutions, in particular municipal councils, to isolate the lepers and confiscate their property. It shows that these institutions were working consistently to achieve these goals during the years that preceded the persecution, and tried to gain royal support for their claims. This analysis led to an additional important understanding, namely that while the royal officials tried to take control of the property of the lepers during the events, they probably did not initiate the persecution. After recognizing the agents who indeed worked to isolate the lepers and revoke their privileges, it was easier to understand the timing of the persecution. The great famine, the Pastoureaux movement and the expected royal demand for additional taxation exacerbated the monetary needs of local rulers and councils. At the same time, they led them to believe that the Crown was in a vulnerable political position and would not challenge their claims for jurisdiction over the lepers (a belief that was proven wrong). Thus, they tried to promote this claim through official channels, but when this course of action failed, they turned to legal persecution of lepers. This conclusion led to the question which was the focus of the last part of this chapter: why were well-poisoning accusations chosen as the major charge

against the lepers. The answer was based on three very different social and cultural factors. The first is the representation of leprosy in medieval culture as it is reflected in exempla and hagiographical literature. As we have seen in the previous chapter, these sources contain a few examples in which well poisoning was presented as a reason for contracting leprosy, an idea that may have had an influence on the persecution of lepers. Indeed, these sources are allegorical in nature, but they probably made the notion of well poisoning more familiar and believable. A very different set of evidence can be found in the medical sources regarding leprosy and poison. According to those, spreading leprosy through poisoning was possible, and the ingredients allegedly used in the potions of 1321 could indeed cause this effect. As this literature also presented leprosy as highly infectious, hard to cure and malignant, it made the threat of a widespread outbreak of the disease more ominous. The third major reason that probably led many to believe well-poisoning accusations against lepers was that cases of political poisoning were extremely common in southern France in the years before the events of 1321. The notion that weaker political agents, clerics and women in particular, would plot to gain power through poisoning and sorcery was well established in this culture. Thus, many accepted the idea that the lepers, a weak minority group with powerful enemies, could use the same method to protect their privileges. All in all, this wider historical perspective on the society in which well-poisoning accusations against lepers developed allows us to understand that this development was not as strange as it may seem at first glance. There were good political reasons behind the persecution of lepers, which rested in turn on strong cultural notions.

Yet, well-poisoning accusations in 1321 were not limited to lepers and Cagots. During June, July and August other minority groups in France and Aragon were accused of participation in the plot, and were judged and persecuted. The victims were mostly Jews, but also Muslims and

maybe also Italians and Basques. These facts call for series of questions: First, since we saw that the accusations were constructed to convince the public that the poisoners were particularly the lepers, how could they be so easily be transferred to other groups? What was the social, cultural and political situation that made the new accusations believable? Why did this transformation happen mostly in Aragon and northern France, but skipped south-western France, the origin of the persecution against lepers? Why did it happen only after about two or three months in which lepers were the main target of the accusations? – These questions, central for understanding of the social dynamic that surrounded well-poisoning accusations, will be answered in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: The Persecution of Other Minorities (Jews, Muslims, Foreigners) in Summer 1321

The first two chapters of this research presented two very different approaches to the question of the development of well-poisoning accusations. While the first chapter analyzed mostly wide cultural trends that could be considered as the origins of such accusations, the second chapter studied a specific location and time in which these accusations erupted. These two approaches may seem contradictory: while in the first chapter the idea of well poisoning was presented as a general characteristic of European medieval culture, in the second chapter it was discussed as an accusation that was tailored specifically for the lepers of south-western France. The truth, as always, is somewhere in the middle. There were general elements in European culture that made the idea of well poisoning plausible, but they could only trigger a widespread persecution of minorities in specific times and places. The third chapter attempts to further bridge this gap. It discusses the persecution of minorities other than lepers in the summer of 1321, mostly Jews, but also Muslims and possibly also Italians and Basques. By focusing on the dynamic that allowed well-poisoning accusations to transfer from lepers to these other groups, it allows us to understand how an accusation that was very specific in the first two months of the persecution became more universal. Clearly, the cultural ideas that presented different minorities as potential well poisoners played some part in this process, but we will see that this was not the whole story. This transference of the accusations only happened in specific locations and circumstances. In the areas that were the center of the persecution against lepers, other minorities were almost never accused of well poisoning. But in different outlying areas this transformation followed quite quickly, and persecution of Jews, and sometimes also Muslims or foreigners, broke out. This chapter will try to explain why.

Naturally, historians who have studied the marginalization of and violence against Jews in the Middle Ages have not failed to analyze the events of 1321. Brown and Jordan explained them as part of continuous attempts to expel the Jews of France during the fourteenth century.[1] Resnick points out the similarities between Jews and lepers in medieval culture, and presents them as the reason that these two groups were accused of a similar crime.[2] Nirenberg focuses his explanation on the political status of the Jews in medieval Europe, as a minority protected by the king.[3] There is much truth in all of these explanations, and this study is not an attempt to refute or replace them. However, they all refer to the events of summer 1321 as a part of a wider historical phenomenon: Brown and Jordan use them to explain the expulsion of 1322, Resnick as an example of Christian perceptions of Jews, and Nirenberg as background for his study of violence in Aragon. Thus, they do not analyze all of the details of the persecution, as they focused solely on the information required to make their arguments. The studies by Ginzburg and Barber suffer from a different problem: they explain the persecution of the Jews and the lepers together, and thus fail to point out some of the unique characteristics of each case.[4] In contrast, Holtmann explores particular case studies of persecution against Jews, but does not put them together into a full analysis of the persecution in summer 1321.[5] To better understand the persecution of all minorities in this case, it is necessary to present a full report of these events, taking into account the work of previous historians. This chapter will analyze each case in which well-poisoning accusations were

[1] Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 297-320; Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 243-248; Jordan, "Home Again," 37-38.

[2] Resnick, *Marks of Distinction,* 93-143.

[3] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 56-68.

[4] Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 33-62; Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems," 1-17.

[5] Annegret Holtmann, "Implantation et expulsion des Juifs dans une region frontalière: Le comté de Bourgogne (1306 et 1321-1322)," in *Philippe le Bel et les Juifs du royaume de France (1306),* Danièle Iancu-Agou, ed. (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2012), 139-159; Holtmann, "Le massacre des Juifs à Chinon en 1321," *L'ecriture de l'histoire juive: Mélanges en l'honneur de Gérard Nahon,* ed. Danièle Iancu-Agou and Carol Iancu (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 71-95.

transferred from lepers to other minorities, and explain the circumstances which allowed such a transformation.

The persecution of Jews in France - Origins and royal involvement

The earliest reference to the persecution of Jews in 1321 was a letter sent by King Sancho of Mallorca to King Jaime II of Aragon on 2 June.[6] According to this letter, the lepers of Avignon were arrested and tortured, and as a result they confessed to poisoning water sources. It also stated that "it is said, that the Jews consented to all of this."[7] However, other than this short comment, the Jews are not mentioned in the letter, and it is unclear if they were indeed arrested or questioned for the same crime. As Bériac-Lainé notes, there is evidence that the pope knew about the persecution and approved the accusations in hindsight, but he was probably not involved at such an early stage.[8] The investigation was conducted by secular authorities, which tended to be suspicious about the Jews. Indeed, less than a year before these events the pope had to issue two letters calling on secular officials to avoid harassing Jewish converts, who were still associated with their previous community.[9] This is not to suggest that Pope John XXII was particularly eager to defend the Jews. He indeed condemned the *Pastoureaux* (the Shepherds) for their attacks against Jewish communities in summer 1320, but in September he re-issued a papal decree for the burning

[6] Finke, *Acta Aragonensia*, 3:390-391, no. 178/1; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 93-94.

[7] "Et dicitur, quod Judei in istis consensiebant." - Finke, *Acta Aragonensia*, 3:390.

[8] Bériac, "La persécution des lépreux," 213.

[9] Mollat, *Jean XXII*, 3:134, nos. 11842-11843; 11:55-56, no. 55412; Raymond Bernard de la Mote, *Chronique de Bazas*, 39; Bériac, "La persécution des lépreux," 213. After the expulsion (and mass conversion) of 1306, Christians often doubted the sincerity of Jewish converts: Jessica Marin Elliott, "Jews 'Feigning Devotion:' Christian Representations of Converted Jews in French Chronicles before and after the Expulsion of 1306," in *Jews and Christians in Thirteenth Century Europe*, ed. Elisheva Baumgarten and Judah Galinsky (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 169-178.

of the Talmud.[10] According to Jewish sources, on 18 June 1321, representatives of Jewish communities, probably from Rome, came to Avignon to meet the pope. They protested the decree against the Talmud, and possibly asked for the pope's protection against expulsion from Rome. It is unclear if the representatives were successful on the second issue, as it seems that no Jews were expelled from Rome at the time, but the Jews of Avignon were expelled in the following year (perhaps as a response to the lepers' plot). However, there is no doubt that the pope did not cancel his decree against the Talmud: it was burned in 1322 in Rome, and maybe also in other locations. For the purposes of this chapter, the central point is that none of the Jewish sources that record these events mention that the Jews of Avignon were persecuted during the month of June. One can find a prayer commemorating the appeal of Jewish representatives to the pope and a lament over the burning of the Talmud, yet not a word about violence against Jews around the papal court.[11] Indeed, these sources are poetic in nature, and often unclear, but later Jewish texts support this conclusion.[12] Thus, the most likely explanation is that there were indeed rumors in Avignon regarding Jewish involvement in the lepers' plot, but no official action was taken against them, at least at this early stage. As we will see, the pope eventually accepted the notion that the Jews

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[10] Mollat, *Jean XXII*, 3:169, no. 12238; 3:232-233, no. 12842; 3:353, no. 14131; Caesar Baronius et al. eds., *Annales Ecclesiastici*, (Bar-le-Duc: L. Guerin, 1864), 24:127-131; Elie Nicolas, "Jean XXII et les juifs du Midi," in *Jean XXII et le midi* (Toulouse: Privat, 2012), 299-301.

[11] Eleazar Birnbaum, "The Cluj Manuscript Dated 5159 A.M./ 1399 C.E. and the Public Fast in Rome in 1321 C.E." *Jewish Quarterly Review* 76 (1985), 65-69; Heinrich Graetz, "Burning the Talmud in 1322," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 2 (1889), 104-106; Kenneth Stow, "The Church and the Jews: St Paul to Pius IX"", in *Popes, Church and the Jews in the Middle Ages: Confrontation and Response* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 37-38; Todros ben Isaac, *Tosafot Le-Maseḥet Nazir,* in *Shitat Ha-Kadmonim,* ed. Moshe Yehuda Blau (New York: Deutsch, 1972), 596-597; Nicolas, "Jean XXII et les juifs du Midi," 299-304. The text of a lament over the burning of the Talmud in 1322 was published in: Adolf Neubauer, "Notiz von Ad. Neubauer," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 21 (1872), 376-377. The prayer commemorating the appeal of Jewish representatives to the pope in 1321 was preserved in the tradition of Roman Jews. It appears in several manuscripts, some mentioned by Birnbaum, but was not printed. I used: Frankfurt am Main, Goethe Universitätsbibliothek, MS hebr. oct. 12, fol. 1r–v. Unfortunately, it is hard to extract any historical details from this source, other that the date of the appeal.

[12] Birnbaum, "The Cluj Manuscript," 67-69.

cooperated with the lepers and even initiated the conspiracy. However, he did this only after he was presented with additional information that supported this idea in the beginning of July.

A more convincing document relating to the persecution of Jews suggests that the Jews of Tours may have been detained as early as 11 June: a 1324 record of the city officials' attempts to estimate monetary damage caused to a local farmer named Morice Sadan due to the expulsion of Jews from the town. Three of the witness statments in this document claim that the Jews were taken around the day of St. Barnabas, i.e. around 11 June. A fourth witness testified that the Jews were taken away "around the day of Trinity", 14 June. Interestingly, one of the witnesses states that the Jews were taken "by the king", which may suggest that he had a very vague recollection of the events.[13] The king did not officially order the arrest of the Jews until the end of July, and certainly not before 21 June. There may have been an earlier, unofficial order, but it could not have been published before 19 June. If the persecution against Jews in Tours was sanctioned by the king, it could not have happened so early. A more likely explanation is that royal officials in Tours acted independently against the Jews, as the royal officials of Combecrose did against the lepers. It is clear that the Jews in the area of Tours were eventually executed, and their property confiscated by royal officials, but this probably happened later.[14]

The first conclusive evidence for royal acceptance of well-poisoning accusations against Jews is a letter sent to the major *baillis* and *sénéschals* of the realm on 26 July.[15] According to the

[13] "Juifs furent pris environ la Saint-Barnabé l'an 21", "il [les Juyfs] furent pris environ la Trenité ensuf", "Juyfs furent pris de par le Roy nostre sire à la Saint-Barnabé prochain ensigant ou environ" - Lucien Lazard, "Les Juifs de Touraine," *REJ* 17 (1888): 232-234; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 311.

[14] *Chronique parisienne anonyme*, 59; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 44, 48-49; Lazard, "Les Juifs de Touraine," 231-234; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 64; Roberts, "Charity and Hospitality," 351-353. Even if there was a royal order to confiscate Jewish property, its execution could have taken a long time and have been quite complicated. Indeed, the property taken from the Jews of Touraine is mentioned in royal records only after 16 April 1322: Jules Viard, ed., *Les journaux du trésor de Charles IV Le Bel* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1917), 93, no. 434, 107-108, no. 497, 234-235, no. 1288.

[15] Charles Victor Langlois, *Registres perdus des archives de la Chambre des comptes de Paris* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1917), 253-256. The surviving copy of the letter was meant for the *sénéschal* of Carcassonne, but contains

letter, by this date the king had already ordered the arrest of all the Jews throughout the kingdom since they were suspected of cooperating with the lepers, and for other unspecified crimes. Specifically, the letter claimed Jews supplied the lepers with the poison for the plot, and paid them a large sum of money to execute it.[16] The king asked his officials to investigate the Jews held in detention immediately. He emphasized that they should extract as much information from them about other Jews or lepers who participated in the plot, under pain of torture, if necessary. Once the officials finished the interrogation, they were to execute any of the suspects who confessed or were convicted. Those who did not confess were to remain under arrest until further evidence came to light. The property of the convicted Jews was to be confiscated for the royal treasury. The king warned his men that the Jews tend to hide their property, and emphasized that the officials should make sure that none of it was forgotten or lost.[17] Overall, this document suggests that the royal actions against the Jews were quite similar to those taken against lepers who were accused of well poisoning. In both cases the king ordered general arrests followed by rigorous investigations which included torture, and in both cases, only those who were convicted were to be executed and their property confiscated.

This letter provides important information about how the investigation against the Jews was conducted, but does not explain why the king became convinced of their guilt. In order to

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a list of 27 other *sénéschals* and *baillis* who received a copy of it. The letter was registered in the *Chambre des comptes* on 6 August 1321.

[16] "Comme nous aiens faict prendre tous les Juis de nostre roiaume pour certaines causes et plusieurs cas, malefices et excez les et orribles qu'il ont faictz, especiaument pour ce que il sont tuit coupables et suspecionnez, participans et en tout consentans, des congrégations et conspirations que les meseaus ont faict longtemps a, et de mettre et admenistrer et procurer a mettre poisons mortiex en puis et en fontaines et en autres lieus par plusieurs et diverses manieres pour faire mourir le pueple et les subgiez de nostre roiaume; et ont baillé et admenistré lesdicts poisons et grandes sommes d'argent pour ce faire et accomplir, et pour venir a leur entente et accomplir leur mauveses volontez, si comme l'en dit;" - Langlois, *Registres perdus*, 253.

[17] Langlois, *Registres perdus*, 254-255; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews", 311-312. The king may have been thinking about the problems the Crown face while attempting to confiscating the property of the Jews expelled in 1306: Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, 1:307, no. 297; Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 200-213.

understand the king's motivation for sanctioning persecution of the Jews, it is useful to turn to the chronicles. According to several of these, Jean Larchevêque, the lord of the city of Parthenay in northern Aquitaine, was instrumental in swaying the king's opinion. He sent the king a confession allegedly made by a leper who said that a certain rich Jew incited him to poison the wells. The Jew paid the leper ten *livres* for the act, and promised him much more if he convinced other lepers to join the plot. The confession also included a report about the composition of the poison and the method of distributing it. These details are roughly similar to the ones that eventually appeared in the royal letter of 26 July, and so it is likely that this confession indeed convinced the king that Jews were involved in the plot.[18] The information from the lord of Parthenay probably reached the king sometime between 15 and 20 June, when he was in Poitiers for the meeting with the cities' representatives.[19] One chronicle reports that the king learned of the Jews' role in the plot during the council, and that they were arrested soon after, on 19 June.[20] The Jewish scholar Kalonymus ben Kalonymus reported that "a governor, acting in good faith, listened to someone gossiping [about] the Jewish community, and [the governor] falsely accused them". This governor may have

[18] Compare the report of the lord of Parthenay with the letter of 26 July: "dicitur dominum de Pernayo circa istud tempus regi scripsisse sub sigillo suo, confessionem cujusdam magni leprosi in terra sua capti; qui, ut dicitur, recognovit, quod quidam judœus dives induxerat eum ad hœc maleficia facienda, et sibi tradiderat potiones, et datis sibi decem libris, promisit sibi quod ad caeteros corrumpendos leprosos sibi copiosam pecuniam ministraret." - *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 32; "Comme nous aiens faict prendre tous les Juis de nostre roiaume pour certaines causes et plusieurs cas, maléfices et excez les et orribles qu'il ont faictz, especiaument pour ce que il sont tuit coupables et suspecionnez, participans et en tout consentans, des congrégations et conspirations que les meseaus ont faict longtemps a, et de mettre et admenistrer et procurer a mettre poisons mortiex en puis et en fontaines et en autres lieus par plusieurs et diverses maniérés pour faire mourir le pueple et les subgiez de nostre roiaume; et ont baillé et admenistré lesdicts poisons et grandes sommes d'argent pour ce faire et accomplir, et pour venir a leur entente et accomplir leur mauveses volontez, si comme i'en dit." - Langlois, *Registres perdus*, 253.

[19] *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 32; Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 132; *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 56; *Chronique de Saint-Denis*, 704; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 44-45; Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems," 5; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 65; Langlois, *Registres perdus*, 253.

[20] *Chronique parisienne anonyme*, 59.

been the lord of Parthenay, as Kalonymus, who lived in the South of France, stated that "the trouble started in the north".[21]

We can thus construct an estimated timeline for the beginning of the persecution according to these sources. The Jews were first arrested in Tours around 11 June, and a few days later the lord of Parthenay informed the king, who was staying at Poitiers, of their involvement in the plot. As a result, arrests of Jews in other locations started on 19 June. Parthenay is located only about 20 miles away from Poitiers and about 40 miles from Tours. Thus, it is quite possible that first, the Jews in Tours were arrested and this news traveled to Parthenay, where it could have served as an inspiration for the confession document. Then, the lord of Parthenay transmitted this confession to the king in Poitiers, helping to convince him of the Jews' involvement in the plot.

However, though the king may have known that the Jews were suspected of poisoning as early as mid-June, there are reasons to believe he was not yet convinced of their guilt at that time. In his letter from 26 July, he wrote that the Jews were "culpable and suspected" of involvement in the plot, which may suggest that he was not sure whether the Jews were indeed culpable, or only suspected. He added that he "would very much like to know the truth about all of these things [the accusations against the Jews]".[22] Thus, it is likely that at the end of July, the king was still undecided on the issue, despite the testimony presented to him by the lord of Parthenay, and possibly by other lords and officials. Indeed, even the Jewish writer Kalonymus ben Kalonymus believed that King Philip had been manipulated by bad counsel to act against the Jews:

[21] "וזאת שנית הוה על הוה, מצפון תפתח [,] מושל הקשיב עלינו לתומו הולך רכיל עדת בני ישראל ושם לה עלילות דברים" - Kalonymus ben Kalonymus, *Eben Bochen* (Lemberg: J. M. Stand, 1865), 103. For background about Kalonymus and the dating of the text, see: Theodor Dunkelgrün, "Dating the *Even Bohan* of Qalonymos ben Qalonymos of Arles: A Microhistory of Scholarship," *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 7 (2013), 39-72.

[22] "il sont tuit coupables et suspecionnez"; "Nous qui desirons molt savoir la vérité de toutes ces choses" - Langlois, *Registres perdus*, 253-254; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews", 311.

Our enemies, being that they are so many, were envious of us in the face of the king [,] and spread slander about the Jews [.][23] *And they told him [the king][: "]we found evil waters and deadly land,*[24] *[and] this is all because of the crime of Jacob [the Jews][.]*[25] *Indeed, the people of Israel conspired together to kill people who do not deserve to die,*[26] *and they were joined by any of our [Christian] brothers who was diseased or afflicted.*[27]*["] These things were said by [a person or people] with a tongue that spoke great things [,]*[28] *[and who] knew how to spread slander like Hamman.*[29] *And as they were speaking to him [the king] every day*[30] *the voice grew louder and louder.*[31] *And the [common] people believed the words of the king, [as, eventually,] an order came out of his mouth to seek the truth [.] [But] he could [only] judge after the sight of his eyes, and [only] decide according to what his ears heard [,]*[32] *because kings of flesh and blood [human, as oppose to God] do not have the ability to do more than that[.] [And so] the people of the land swallowed us alive [killed us, the Jews]*[33] *in their unjustified hatred [,] and the king and his throne be guiltless.*[34]

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[23] According Rashi on Daniel, 3:8.

[24] Kings 2, 2:19.

[25] Micah, 1:5.

[26] Ezekiel, 13:19.

[27] Numbers, 5:2.

[28] Psalms, 12:4.

[29] BT, Megila, 13b.

[30] Esther, 3:4; Genesis, 39:10.

[31] Exodus, 19:19.

[32] Isaiah, 11:3.

[33] Psalms, 124:3 .

[34] Samuel 2, 14:9; Kalonymus ben Kalonymus, *Eben Bochen*, 103:

"אויבינו כי רבו קנאנו במלך ואכלו קורציהון דיהודאי ויאמרו לו מצאנו מים רעים והארץ משכלת בפשע יעקב, כל זאת [,] הנה עם בני ישראל נועצו לב יחדו להמית נפשות אשר לא תמותנה, ואתם בקרב אחינו כל צרוע וכל זב, אלה דברי לשון מדברת גדולות ידע לאשתעויי לישנא בישא כהמן, ויהי כדברם אליו יום יום והקול נשמע הולך וחזק מאד, ויאמן העם דברי מלך שלטון יצא מפיו לבקש האמת למראה עיניו ישפוט למשמע אוזניו יוכיח כי אין יכולת במלכי בשר ודם ביותר מזה גויי הארץ חיים בלעונו לשנאת חינם והמלך וכסאו נקי."

This source reaffirms the notion that the persecution of Jews was not originally initiated by the king. Kalonymus insists that unknown advisors, possibly the lord of Parthenay or other nobility who attended the meeting in Poitiers, pressured the king to accept the idea that the Jews were involved in the plot. The king was reluctant to do so, but when he finally ordered an investigation of the accusations, probably in the letter of 26 July, mass persecution erupted. As "the people of the land" heard about the suspicion that the Jews poisoned wells, they attacked the Jews without waiting for the formal results of the investigation.

It may be possible to corroborate the description of the persecution presented by Kalonymus using the works of contemporary Christian chroniclers. Jean de Saint-Victor states that: "because many Jews were found guilty of this deed [well poisoning], in many regions, all of them were burned, without distinction; but in Paris only the guilty ones [were executed]."[35] The anonymous writer who continued the chronicle of Guillaume de Nangis presents a similar report.[36] Both texts suggest that in Paris, where royal control was stronger, the orders the king gave in his letter of 26 July were respected. Thus, an investigation against the Jews was performed by the officials, and only the convicted were executed. However, in other places, which the chronicler does not mention, people ignored these orders, and burned all of the local Jews. Also a chronicle that was written in Paris mentions that the Jews were arrested, investigated and their property inventoried throughout the whole kingdom. In particular, it states that the Jews of the Duchy of Burgundy suffered this fate; as we will see, this fact can be supported by other documents. Yet, it

[35] "Et quia multi Judei sunt inventi culpabiles in hoc facto in pluribus partibus omnes sine differentia sunt combusti; Parisius autem soli culpabiles." - Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 133.

[36] "Parisius vero, solum inventi culpabiles sunt combusti, alii vero perpetuo exilio condemnati" - *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 35. This chronicle and the one of Jean de Saint-Victor are part of the chronicle tradition of Saint-Denis, and were written around the same time, so it is not surprising that they present a similar account: Spiegel, *The Chronicle Tradition*, 98-126.

insists that the Jews were executed in large numbers mostly in Provence and Carcassonne.[37] A chronicler from Flanders reports that: “the common people executed this just act [burning the Jews] without appealing to any provost or *bailli*.”[38] These descriptions line up with Kalonymus’ report and with the analysis of the royal letter, and suggest that the king never supported the mass killing of Jews, only a formal investigation against them. Yet, he was unable to prevent popular violence against them.

This description of royal policy forces one to re-evaluate another supposed manifestation of the king’s hostility towards the Jews: a royal decree forcing the Jewish communities of France to pay the Crown 150,000 *livres*. Some historians have interpreted this demand as a fine imposed on the Jews for their involvement in the plot, and suggested that this was the first royal action against them in summer 1321.[39] Indeed, there are reasons to accept this interpretation, primarily since it is supported by some of the chronicles.[40] Moreover, the amount involved seems too large to be an ordinary act of taxation: when the Jews returned to France in 1315, they were required to give the Crown 22,000 *livres* as initial payment, and another 10,000 *livres* every year, for the next twelve years. Thus, the sum that the king demanded from the Jews in 1321 was about as large as

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[37] “le vendredi devant la feste de la Nativité saint Jehan-Baptiste, furent tous les Juifz par le royaulme de France pris et emprisonnez, et leurs biens saisis et inventoriés. […] Et lez Juifz, ainssi emprisonnez, du ballif de Bourges, du duc de Bourgongne Eude, le jendre du roy de France et de Navarre, en Prouvence, en Carcassonne et en aultres lieux, furent questionnez et mis à raison des forfaiz des meseaux eus, ès quieux, si comme l'en dist, ilz furent convaincus, et tantost ars et ramenez en pouldre.” -*Chronique parisienne anonyme*, 59. For additional information about the persecution of Jews in Burgundy, see: Holtmann, “Implantation et expulsion,” 148-152; Annegret Holtmann, *Juden in der Grafschaft Burgund im Mittelalter* (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2003), 302-317.

[38] “et faisoit le commun peulle celle justice, sans apeller ne provost, ne bailliu” - Robert de Béthune, *Chronique*, 325. This chronicle is associated with Count Robert III of Flanders, who did in 1322. The last event mentioned in this source is the death of Philip V, and so it is likely that it was written very shortly after the events of 1321: ibid, 291, 327.

[39] Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 44-45; Lazard, “Les Juifs de Touraine,” 220-222.

[40] Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 44-45; Lazard, “Les Juifs de Touraine,” 220-222; Barber, “Lepers, Jews and Moslems,” 5; Brown, “Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews,” 303-306, 312-313; Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 101-102; Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 133; *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 56; *Chronique de Saint-Denis*, 705; *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 35.

the entire sum that they agreed to pay the Crown over the whole period of the agreement. Since the king required such an unusually great payment, it is likely that he was trying to initiate a general confiscation of Jewish property, similar to the one performed before their expulsion in 1306. And so, one can assume that when he made this demand, he already knew about the plot, and decided to expel the Jews from France again as a punishment.[41]

However, a more detailed review of the evidence puts this interpretation into question. First, the chronicles which present the payment as the first step towards expulsion of the Jews were written only in retrospect, and they are not completely consistent with each other about this point.[42] The archival documents which refer to this payment do not define it as a punishment for the involvement of the Jews in the plot. One of them describes it as "taxation", and the other as a compensation for Christian citizens for the usurious activity of the Jews.[43] Dating the royal order regarding this payment could clarify its connection to well-poisoning accusations, but as Brown shows, this is not easy to do. Some historians have suggested that this order was issued in the middle of June, but this seems very unlikely.[44] The king did not mention the Jews in his edict against the lepers issued on 21 June, the first known official royal document on this matter.[45] In fact, there is no evidence that the king initiated any action against the Jews before the end of July.

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[41] For the value of this amount involved, see: Joseph Shatzmiller, *Shylock Reconsidered: Jews, Moneylending, and Medieval Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 8-9. For the agreement and the confiscation of 1306: Laurière, *Ordonnances des roys de France*, 1:595-597; Gustave Saige, *Les Juifs du Languedoc antérieurement au xive siècle* (Paris: Picard, 1881), 103, 243-334; Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 200-213, 239-241; Jordan, "Home Again," 27-31; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 298-299; Barber, "The Pastoureaux," 163-165.

[42] Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 303-306.

[43] Nicolas Brussel, *Nouvel examen de l'usage général des fiefs en France pendant le XIe, XIIe, XIIIe et le XIVe siècles* (Paris: Prudhomme et Robustel, 1727), 1:608; also printed in R.H.G, 22:758; Langlois, *Registres perdus*, 264-265.

[44] For the problem of dating the fine, see: Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 312-313, n. 49. Lazard mistakenly dated it to 14 or 15 June, and Ginzburg followed him: Lazard, "Les Juifs de Touraine," 221; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 49. Based on: Brussel, *Nouvel examen de l'usage général des fiefs*, 608.

[45] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 64-65; Duplès-Agier, 'Ordonnance de Philippe le Long contre les lépreux,' 265-272.

Thus, in the middle of June the king probably had still not heard about the involvement of the Jews in the plot, and surely did not order their punishment. Moreover, even after the king had ordered the investigation of allegations that Jews were poisoning wells, a royal letter issued in October still does not refer to the payment as punishment for these crimes. Instead, the letter justifies the payment as a fine for usury practiced by the Jews against the common people of the realm.[46] And so, the official documents suggest that the order to fine the Jews was issued sometime before the end of October 1321. But more importantly, they give reasons to suspect that this payment was not directly connected to well-poisoning accusations.

Still, if the royal order to fine the Jews was not a punishment for their alleged involvement in the plot, how can one explain this sudden change in the Crown's policy? In order to do so, it is important to note that the French kings used their power on different occasions during the early fourteenth century to extract massive amounts of money from the Jews. King Philip was definitely in need of money in spring 1321, and organized a meeting with local representatives of the South in Poitiers to increase taxation. In the meeting, his subjects strongly opposed this initiative, and expressed their objections to new taxation. The king had to turn to another source of income, and thus issued the order to fine the Jews sometime in the following months.[47] This interpretation is supported by a document which has not recived much scholarly attention, a letter that King Philip sent the duke of Burgundy on 17 June. In this letter, the king responds to the duke's complaint that the *bailli* of Sens confiscated and inventoried the property of the Jews of Burgundy in the name of the king. According to the duke, the Jews of the area were obligated to pay him 2000 *livres* every

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[46] Langlois, *Registres perdus*, 264-265; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 313-314.

[47] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 48-50, 55, 60-61, 64-65; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews", 309-311; Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 240, 244-245; Jordan, "Home Again," 37-38; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 716-718; Taylor, "French Assemblies, 223-224, 242; Brown, "Subsidy and Reform," 421-430; Lehugeur, *Histoire de Philippe le Long*, 2:429-433.

year, but since their property was now under the *bailli*'s control, they could not meet this obligation. Therefore, the duke asked that the king cover the losses he was suffering due to the *bailli*'s actions, and the king agreed to do so. Thus, it seems that by 17 July, probably before the king even heard about the plot, royal officials were already confiscating Jewish property. A chronicle from Paris suggests that the duke of Burgundy eventually arrested, questioned and executed Jews for involvement in the plot. However, there is no reason to think that this happened at the same time when their property was confiscated by royal officials. The documents which refer to the confiscation of Jewish property do not state that the Jews were arrested, and obviously do not mention the lepers' plot.[48] The most likely explanation is that the king attempted to solve some of the Crown's monetary problems by taking over Jewish property during the month of June. The association of this action with the well-poisoning plot happened only in hindsight, and thus appears only in the chronicles, not in official documentation.

Just as it is difficult to characterize and date the royal action against the Jews, it is not easy to map the persecution against them in summer 1321. It is possible to use the list of officials to whom the royal letter of 26 July was addressed as a guide. However, while the orders of the king to investigate Jewish involvement in the plot probably reached every part of the kingdom, we have already seen that they were followed in a very different manner in different regions. In some places, only the Jews found guilty of well poisoning were executed, and they may have been very few, while in other locations, whole communities may have been annihilated. Alternatively, one can try to turn to the chronicles in order to assess the spread and magnitude of the persecution of Jews in 1321. As we have seen above, a chronicle from Paris insisted that the areas in which mass

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[48] Ernest Petit, *Histoire des ducs de Bourgogne de la race capétienne avec des documents inédits et des pièces justificatives* (Dijon: Darantière, 1903), 8:257, no. 6919-6920; *Chronique parisienne anonyme*, 59; Holtmann, "Implantation et expulsion," 150-151; Holtmann, "Le massacre des Juifs à Chinon en 1321," 80-81; Holtmann, *Juden in der Grafschaft Burgund*, 305-306; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews", 311, n. 46.

persecution of Jews happened were Provence and Carcassonne. Other chroniclers pointed out Aquitaine as the center of persecution, but only mentioned two particular incidences: in Chinon, a castle near Tours, and in the town of Vitry in Champagne.[49] The overall picture as it appears in the chronicles is somewhat unclear: if the persecution of Jews indeed happened in the South, namely, Aquitaine, Provence and Carcassonne, why did the chroniclers mention only two specific cases, which happened in the North? The issue becomes even more problematic when one examines the sources which were composed in the South. None of the relevant chronicles mentions involvement of the Jews in the lepers' plot, and neither do any of the records of the inquisition of lepers.[50] It is always risky to present conclusions based on lack of sources, but it is alarming that the only evidence for the persecution of Jews in the South in 1321 originated in the North. It is possible the chroniclers assumed that the Jews were accused of well poisoning in the South since they knew that the lepers were already convicted of this crime there. Since these chroniclers already accepted the idea that the lepers and the Jews acted together, they may have concluded that in places where lepers were widely executed, the Jews probably suffered a similar fate.

Later Jewish sources present a somewhat different version of these events. Three Jewish chronicles from the first half of the sixteenth century mention the persecution of Jews in 1321, and present the same basic story. This leads to the conclusion that they were based on one earlier

[49] *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 35-36; *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 56-57; *Chronique de Saint-Denis*, 705; Holtmann, "Le massacre des Juifs à Chinon," 82-89.

[50] Bernard Gui, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 163-164; Manteyer, "Chronique d'Uzerche," 412-413; Raymond Bernard de la Mote, *Chronique de Bazas*, 39; Combarieu and Lacombe, *Le Te igitur*, 65-66; Felip Sánchez, "La persecució d'un collectiu marginat," 35-42; Rivière-Chalan, *La Marque infâme des lépreux*, 47-50; Jacques Fournier, *Le Registre d'Inquisition de Jacques Fournier,* 135-147; BnF, Coll. Périgord, vol. 93, ff. 85-87.

source, or on each other.[51] According to these sources, well-poisoning accusations against lepers and Jews started as a result of a major plague which hit France at this time. All of the Jews in the country were arrested on suspicions of cooperating with the lepers. They were kept under arrest for nine months, during which a thorough investigation of the accusations was conducted. This investigation included an experiment in which the alleged poisoned water was given to dogs, who suffered no illness as a result. Thus, local physicians, and even the king himself, understood that the accusations were false. However, since they hated the Jews and were angry that they were unwilling to convert to Christianity, the authorities convicted five thousand of them and sentenced them to death.[52] This narrative has a kernel of truth, as it is very likely that the Jews were indeed arrested and investigated throughout the country. The details, however, are very questionable. First, almost none of the fourteenth century sources states that a plague occurred in the summer of 1321.[53] In addition, while some of the fourteenth-century chronicles describe an experiment testing the potency of the poison, these contemporaries write that the poison was found to be very powerful. In any case, it is clear that the king ordered his officials to focus on gaining confessions from suspects. He probably based his opinion about the veracity of the accusations on these

[51] The three relevant sources are: Shelomoh Ibn Ṿirgah, *Sefer Sheveṭ Yehudah* (Jerusalem: Mosad Byaliḳ, 1947), 117; Samuel Usque, *Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*, trans. Martin A. Cohen (Jewish Publication Society of America: Philadelphia, 1965), 190-192; Joseph Ha-Kohen, *Sefer 'Emeq Ha-Bakha*, ed. Aaron Faust (Krakow: Fischer, 1895), 77-78. Joseph Ha-Kohen explicitly cites Usque as one of his sources. Usque and Ibn Ṿirgah probably used a late fourteenth-century historical essay by Profiat Duran (Isaac ben Moses ha-Levi, known as Ha-Efodi) which may have been titled "Ma'amar Zichron Ha-Shmadot": Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews", 295. Baer, introduction in: Shelomoh Ibn Ṿirgah, *Sefer Sheveṭ Yehudah*, xii; Isaac Abrabanel, *Sefer Yeshu'ot Meshiḥo* (Koenigsberg: Gruber and Langrien, 1861), 46a-b.

[52] Shelomoh Ibn Ṿirgah claims that fifteen thousand were executed: Shelomoh Ibn Ṿirgah. *Sefer Sheveṭ Yehudah*, 117.

[53] One source reports about "mortality": Guigue, "Fragment d'une Chronique Lyonnaise," 296; however, an anonymous chronicle from Tours states that "by divine virtue, no Christian suffered death or sickness from drinking the water" (sed virtute divina nullus christianus ex potatione aquarum mortem sustinuit, neque malum.) - *Chronicon Turonense Abbreviatum*, 198. Also see: Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems," 11, n. 35; Lehugeur, *Histoire de Philippe le Long*, 2:424.

confessions, rather than the experiment.[54] And finally, it is quite clear that only a few Jews were arrested for as long as nine months, and the motivation for their arrest was probably to force them to pay the Crown.[55] In contrast to these later sources, the few fourteenth-century Jewish sources which refer to these events mention only torture and mass executions of Jews. The general arrest of Jews is not mentioned at all, and is certainly not presented as a major part of the persecution. Also, these sources do not state that the Jews had any option to convert in order to avoid execution.[56] Thus, it is likely that the later Jewish sources present a narrative of the events of 1321 that was heavily influenced by the description of other catastrophic events in Jewish history, such as the massacres during the First Crusade or the Black Death.[57]

The persecution of Jews in France - Chinon and Vitry - historical documentation or literary fiction?

Based on the analysis above, one has to conclude that most of the available chronicles, both Jewish and Christian, are not very reliable. They do not allow us to reasonably map the persecution of Jews, or deduce its results. In order to get better information about the persecution of the Jews in 1321, it is necessary to turn to other techniques. First, there is one case in which it is possible to confirm the information in the chronicle based on other sources, namely the massacre in Chinon.

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[54] *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 56; *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 32-33; Langlois, *Registres perdus*, 253-255.

[55] Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews", 311-324.

[56] Kalonymus ben Kalonymus, *Eben Bochen,* 103-104; *Livnat Ha-Sapir* (Jerusalem: Azri'el, 1913), 25a; Ishtori Ha-Prachi, *Kaftor V'Pherach*, Yosef Blumenfeld, ed. (New York: Hadar, 1958), 355-357 – It is very difficult to decipher this source, but it seems that while it presents the death of the Jews of Chinon as *Kiddush Ha-Shem*, i.e. martyrdom, it does not clearly state that they had the option to convert. Todros ben Isaac, *Tosafot Le-Maseḥet Nazir*, 596-597, does not say much about the fate of the Jews of France.

[57] For a similar argument about the reconstruction of Jewish "historical" texts, see: Lucia Raspe, "The Black Death in Jewish Sources: A Second Look at 'Mayse Nissim'," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 94 (2004), 471-489.

The anonymous writer who continued the chronicle of Guillaume de Nangis described this event in detail:

> *And so one day in the bailliage of Tours, in a certain royal castle called Chinon, one hundred and sixty [Jews] of both sexes were burned, [in] a very large pit that was made [and] very big fire was created in it; and even in this [situation], so many of them [male and female] were singing, and as if they were invited to a wedding, jumped into that fire. Indeed, many widowed wives threw their own children into the fire, so they would not be snatched and baptized by the Christians and nobles present there.*[58]

The first striking detail in this account is the reported number of Jews executed. One hundred and sixty Jews could represent a small community, and it seems that whole families, men, women and children, were burnt. Thus, some historians believe that the whole Jewish community of Chinon was executed.[59] However, some of the evidence points toward a different explanation. The castle at Chinon served as a royal prison in the beginning of the fourteenth century. The leaders of the Templars, for example, where kept there during most of the long trial against them.[60] It is very possible that Jews from all of Touraine were imprisoned there while the investigation against them took place. The fact that "nobles", maybe royal officials, were present during the execution also

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[58] "Unde et in baillivia Turonensi, in quodam castro regis quod dicitur Chinon, una die, facta quadam fovea permaxima, igne copioso in eam injecto, octies viginti sexus promiscui sunt combusti; unde et multi illorum et illarum cantantes, quasique invitati ad nuptias, in dictam foveam saliebant. Multae vero mulieres viduae fecerunt filios proprios in ignem projicere, ne ad baptismum a christianis et nobilibus ibidem assistentibus raperentur" - *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 35. A short reference to the same event also appears in: *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 56.

[59] Holtmann, "Le massacre des Juifs à Chinon," 85-87; Henri Grimaud, "Le Quartier juif à Chinon au XIVe siècle," *Bulletin de la Société archéologique de Touraine* 10 (1895-1896), 141; Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 324, n. 57.

[60] Barbara Frale, "The Chinon Chart: Papal Absolution to the Last Templar, Master Jacques de Molay," *Journal of Medieval History* 30 (2004), 125, 128.

suggests that this was an official act.[61] One chronicler reports that “other [Jews] who were rich were spared”, and the king collected his large fine from them.[62] It is possible that the chronicler meant that some of the rich Jews who were arrested in Chinon were speared, which would indicate that an organized execution took place, but this is doubtful.[63] Still, it seems that despite the large number of victims, it is possible that at least most of the Jews executed in Chinon were convicted of well poisoning.[64] If this was indeed the case, it may explain why the chroniclers chose to report about this incident in particular, even though Chinon was not a particularly central town.[65]

Ishtori Ha-Prachi, a Jewish scholar who wrote his major work shortly after the events of 1321, offers some information which supports this interpretation. He included a short tribute to his great teacher, Rabbi Eliezer ben Joseph of Chinon. According to this source, Rabbi Eliezer was executed by fire with other Jews in his home town, most likely in the same event described by the Christian chroniclers.[66] Ishtori gives a clue regarding the Hebrew date of this event, the second day of Elul in the year 5081, which corresponds to 27 August 1321.[67] This date actually fits well

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[61] For the arrest of the Jews of Touraine: Lazard, “Les Juifs de Touraine,” 231-234; Viard, *Les journaux du trésor de Charles IV Le Bel*, 93, no. 434, 107-108, no. 497, 234-235, no. 1288; Langlois, *Registres perdus*, 253-256; Holtmann, “Le massacre des Juifs à Chinon,” 80-81; Brown, “Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews”, 310-312.

[62] “(Unde et in baillivia Turonensi, in quodam castro regis quod dicitur Chinon, una die) octies viginti Judaeorum sexus promiscui comburuntur: alii quidem ditiores reservati; rex ab ipsis centum quinquaginta millia librarum dicitur habuisse.” - *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 56.

[63] Note that another chronicles insist that these rich Jews were spared from exile, not execution: Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 133-134; *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 35; Brown, “Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews”, 302-305.

[64] Holtmann considers this possibility, but tends to reject it: Holtmann, “Le massacre des Juifs à Chinon,” 85-87; Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems," 5.

[65] The Jewish community in Chinon was economically successful in the thirteenth century, but local Christians protested against the presence of the Jews. Also, Jewish communities in Anjou were quite small even before the expulsion of 1306: Grimaud, “Le Quartier juif à Chinon,” 137-141; Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 60, 245-246.

[66] "הבאתי את זה מדברי רוח הקודש מורי כי עגמה נפשי לקדושתו ולנשרפים בגזרתו" - *Ishtori Ha-Prachi, Kaftor V'Pherach, 355.*

[67] Interpretation of the phrase “יום שני אל הכסא” - *Ishtori Ha-Prachi, Kaftor V'Pherach, 355*. I prefer here David Kaufmann’s opinion over Leopold Zunz’s interpretation, who reads this phrase as referring to the second day of the new Jewish year, which corresponds to 25 September. Kaufmann seems to explain better the fact that the phrase includes the word “אל”. David Kaufmann, “R. Eliezer B. Joseph et le Martyre de Chinon,” *REJ* 29 (1894), 298-301; Holtmann, “Le massacre des Juifs à Chinon,” 84-85.

with the idea that the Jews who were executed in Chinon were arrested and investigated long before their execution. As we have already seen, the arrests started in June and continued into July.[68] Thus, the Jews of Chinon could have been under arrest for about a month or two before they were executed, until the official investigation ended. This seems more reasonable than the idea that the mass execution in Chinon was a popular attack against the local Jewish community. Rumors about the involvement of Jews in the well-poisoning plot had circulated in the Touraine since the beginning of June.[69] If an angry mob was planning to kill all of the local Jews without a trial, it had no reason to wait for more than two months after the accusations were made public in order to do so. In addition, Ishtori states that the Jews killed in Chinon were like "the ones killed in Lod".[70] This is a reference to a medieval interpretation of a Talmudic story about two brothers, Papos and Lulianos, who admitted to killing the daughter of a Roman governor. They confessed, and were executed, even though they were innocent, in order to protect the Jewish community from the wrath of the Romans.[71] The fact that Ishtori considered this story similar to the one of the Jews of Chinon is very revealing: First, he probably saw the Jews who were executed at Chinon as ones who were convicted of a crime that they did not commit, in this case, well poisoning. Second, he most likely saw their death as a result of an official execution, rather than popular rage. And finally, he suggested that the death of the Jews at Chinon somehow protected the rest of the Jewish community, thus making them saints. Therefore, this short reference strongly supports the

[68] Lazard, "Les Juifs de Touraine," 231-234; Langlois, *Registres perdus*, 253-256; Holtmann, "Le massacre des Juifs à Chinon," 80-81; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 310-312.

[69] Lazard, "Les Juifs de Touraine," 232-234; *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 32; Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 132; *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 56; *Chronique de Saint-Denis*, 704; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 44-45; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 65.

[70] "היו בחטאינו מאד, מהרוגי לוד" - *Ishtori Ha-Prachi, Kaftor V'Pherach, 355.*

[71] Rashi on BT, Baba Batra, 10:2; BT, Ta'anit, 18:2.

idea that the killing of the Jews at Chinon was an official execution of people convicted of well poisoning, rather than popular massacre of a community.

However, one must admit that all of the sources which refer to the events at Chinon are not entirely clear, and that their reliability is questionable. Moreover, the notion that mostly convicted Jews were executed at Chinon does not seem to fit well with the last part of the account. If indeed the victims were mostly people arrested for a long period and then convicted and punished, one wonders why there were Jewish children present. The fact that Jewish children were allegedly thrown into the fire by their mothers seems to suggest that whole families were executed together. It is possible to think of several scenarios which mights explain this seeming contradiction, but the evidence is not conclusive enough to allow us to choose between them. Thus, it seems that most of the sources support the idea that the Jews in Chinon were executed, rather than massacred, but this conclusion is still questionable.

It is even more difficult to decipher what happened in the town of Vitry, the other location in which a persecution of Jews took place according to some chroniclers. There are three versions of this story, all quite similar.[72] Allegedly, forty Jews were held prisoners in "the king's prison"[73] in Vitry, since they were suspected of involvement in the lepers' plot. As they were convinced that they were about to be executed, they decided to commit suicide in order to avoid being killed by Christians. Thus, they appointed two men, one young and one old, to kill all of them, and then

[72] *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 36; *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 57; *Chronique de Saint-Denis*, 705; Holtmann, "Le massacre des Juifs à Chinon," 78. In an article in the Encyclopaedia Judaica, Bernhard Blumenkranz presents a different narrative of the events in Vitry. He claims that first 77 of the local Jews were massacred, while others escaped, and only later were the 40 Jews mentioned in the chronicles were imprisoned: Bernhard Blumenkranz, "Vitry," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2007), 20:562. He bases this idea, at least partly, on: Charles-Maxime Detorcy, *Fragments tirés d'un manuscrit contenant des recherches chronologiques et historiques sur l'ancienne ville de Vitry-en-Partois* (Paris: Pougin, 1839), 24-26. Unfortunately, not all of the details in these accounts line up, and the sources which support them are very questionable.

[73] "in regis carcere haberentur" - *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 36; "carcere regis detenti" - *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 57; "Juifs fussent emprisonné" - *Chronique de Saint-Denis*, 705.

commit suicide. After the two men completed their task, the young man killed the old one, and tried to escape the prison. However, the improvised rope he was using tore while he was still climbing down, and so he fell, was injured, and was eventually executed. Modern historians have not been convinced that this account reports the events as they happened. Lehugeur calls this narrative “a fable”, and Barber tends to agree.[74] They do not exclude the possibility that the Jews of Vitry were indeed persecuted in 1321, but remain reluctant to accept any of the details presented in the chronicles. It seems that they had good reasons to be suspicious. The same chroniclers present a very similar story when they describe the mass suicide of Jews who were besieged by the *Pastoureaux*.[75] These descriptions may have been influenced by the description of the suicide of the Jews of York in 1190, as recorded by William of Newburgh.[76] He, in turn, was very influenced by similar scenes which appear in Josephus’ *The Jewish War*.[77] It is also possible that the chroniclers who described the events in Vitry were influenced directly by *The Jewish War*, which was available in Latin and extremely popular during the Middle Ages.[78] For example, the number of the Jews who allegedly committed suicide in Vitry, forty, is similar to the number of

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[74] Lehugeur, *Histoire de Philippe le Long*, 2:433; Barber, “Lepers, Jews and Moslems,” 5-6.

[75] *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 26-28; *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 54-55; *Chronique de Saint-Denis*, 703; Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 129-130; Passerat, *La Croisade des Pastoureaux*, 86-94; Bauchau, “Science et racism,” 26; Barber, “The Pastoureaux,” 147, 156. The similarity between these chronicles in this case, as well as in the description of the mass suicide in Vitry, is not surprising, as they were all part of the chronicle tradition of Saint-Denis: Spiegel, *The Chronicle Tradition of Saint-Denis*, 98-126.

[76] William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum anglicarum*, Hans Claude Hamilton, ed. (London: English Historical Society publications, 1856), 2:24-29.

[77] William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum anglicarum*, 2:27; Nicholas Vincent, “William of Newburgh, Josephus and the new Titus,” in *Christians and Jews in Angevin England: The York Massacre of 1190, Narratives and Contexts,* ed. Sarah Rees Jones and Sethina Watson (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2013), 57-91. Other sources, mostly biblical, also influenced this account. Also see: Josephus, *The Jewish War*, book 3, ch. 8, ph. 6-8; book 4, ch. 1, ph. 10; book 7, ch. 8, ph. 6-7, ch. 9. In order to examine the text in a Latin version that is close to the ones common during the Middle Ages, I used the last edition that was printed solely based on Latin manuscripts (rather than Greek ones): Flavius Josephus, *Flavii Iosephi Opera* (Basel: Johannes Frobenius, 1524), 715-717, 739, 846-850 (chapters and paragraphs do not match modern editions). For the different Latin editions, see: Franz Blatt, ed., *The Latin Josephus* (Aarhus: Universitetsforlaget: 1958), 22-24, 117.

[78] Vincent, “William of Newburgh,” 57-58; Blatt, ed., *The Latin Josephus*, 17-117 (introduction); Karen M. Kletter, “The Uses of Josephus: Jewish History in Medieval Christian Tradition” (PhD dissertation, University of North Carolina, 2005), 100-119, 161-259.

Jews who did so on one occasion in Josephus' account. The method of the suicide was also similar, as in both cases the Jews were said to make a pact to kill each other by the sword. In addition, in both cases the last man to survive ignored the pact and tried to save himself.[79] Therefore, it is very likely that this literary tradition led the chroniclers to simply re-use a familiar story about Jews when they had to describe the events at Vitry. And so, the details of this particular narrative can teach us more about the perception of the Jews in medieval culture than about the historical events that took place.[80] Still, one can learn something about the events in Vitry by contrasting them to the descriptions of Jewish suicide in the Shepherds' crusade, and in the writings of Josephus and William of Newburgh. When looked at closely, there are details in the account about Vitry that are absent from these earlier sources, and therefore were probably altered to reflect this specific event. First, the location of the story, in the town of Vitry, is probably reliable. The *Pastoureaux* attacked Jewish communities mostly in south-western France, and not in Champagne. Also, while there was a well-established Jewish community in Vitry, it was not one of the major ones in fourteenth-century France.[81] Thus, it seems that the chroniclers had a good reason to describe the persecution of Jews in this specific location, namely, that something unusual indeed happened there. In the same manner, the situation of the Jews in Vitry is described as significantly different from the ones that led to cases of mass suicide in the past. Josephus, William of Newburgh and the chroniclers who described the violence of the Shepherds all agreed that Jews committed suicide only when they were besieged. In all past cases, the Jews allegedly barricaded themselves in a tower, fortress

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[79] Josephus, *The Jewish War*, book 3, ch. 8, ph. 1, 6-8; Barber, "The Pastoureaux," 147, 156.

[80] Historians have paid little attention to the description of the events of 1321 as they discuss Christian perceptions of Jewish Martyrdom in the Middle Ages, despite their relevancy to the debate: Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 108-305; Mary Minty, "Kiddush ha-Shem be-Einei Notzrim be-Germania be-Yemei ha-Beinaym." *Zion* 59 (1994), 209-266.

[81] For the *Pastoureaux*, see: Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 45-46; Bériac, "La persécution des lépreux," 209; Passerat, *La Croisade des Pastoureaux*, 68, 77-98. For the Jewish community in Vitry: Blumenkranz, "Vitry," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 20:256.

or a cave in order to hold back an armed group that attacked them, whether it consisted of Romans, Crusaders or the Shepherds.[82] In the accounts about Vitry, there is no mention of a mob trying to break in and kill the Jews. Indeed, the chroniclers report that the Jews "thought that they were about to be killed", but there is no indication that they were expecting popular attack rather than official execution.[83] Moreover, the Jews were said to be incarcerated in "the kings' prison," that is, under official arrest. And thus, the chroniclers chose to refer to the place in which the Jews were held as a "prison", rather than "tower" or "castle" as appears in the older versions of the story.[84] Therefore, it is plausible that an official arrest of Jews took place in Vitry, maybe in a similar manner to the one carried out in Chinon. These Jews may have committed suicide or were executed, but most likely died a violent death.

In addition to the reports of the chroniclers, official documents suggest that a formal investigation against Jews took place around Chinon and Vitry. On 8 February 1322, the *Parlement* of Paris wrote a letter to the *baillis* of Tours, Vitry and Chaumont, discussing confessions made by Jews and lepers, in which they accused other Jews of participating in the plot.[85] The fact that the *Parlement* expected to find such confessions in these particular areas indicates that a formal

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[82] *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 26-28; *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 54-55; *Chronique de Saint-Denis*, 703; Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 129-130; William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum anglicarum*, 2:24-29; Josephus, *The Jewish War*, book 3, ch. 8, ph. 6-8; book 4, ch. 1, ph. 10; book 7, ch. 8, ph. 6-7, ch. 9.

[83] "jam se morti proximos aestimarent" - *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 36; *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 36; "ils sentissent que briefment les conviendroit mourir" - *Chronique de Saint-Denis*, 705.

[84] Compare: "quamdam turrim regis Franciae fortem et altam, ad quam judaei propter ipsorum metum undique confugerant" to "in regis carcere haberentur" - *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 26, 36; and "quamdam turrim regis fortem et altam, ad quam Judai confugerant" to "carcere regis detenti"- *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 54, 57; and "senfuirent en une tour" to "Juifs fussent emprisonné" - *Chronique de Saint-Denis*, 703, 705. In the other chronicles, for events before 1321: "Tandem ad quodam castrum in quo turris erat alta et fortis cum multitudine venientes, et a custode castri, quod erat regi Francie, protectionis auxilium postulantes, in turri dicta de ejus licentia sunt recepti." - Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 129; "Judaei obsidebantur in turri regia" - William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum anglicarum*, 2:24.

[85] Edgard M. Boutaric, ed., *Actes du Parlement de Paris*, (Paris: Plon, 1867), 2:420, no. 6661. The *bailli* of Tours also sent the royal treasury large sums confiscated from local Jews a couple of months later, another indication of the persecution in the area: Viard, *Les journaux du trésor de Charles IV Le Bel*, 93, no. 434, 107-108, no. 497, 234-235, no. 1288.

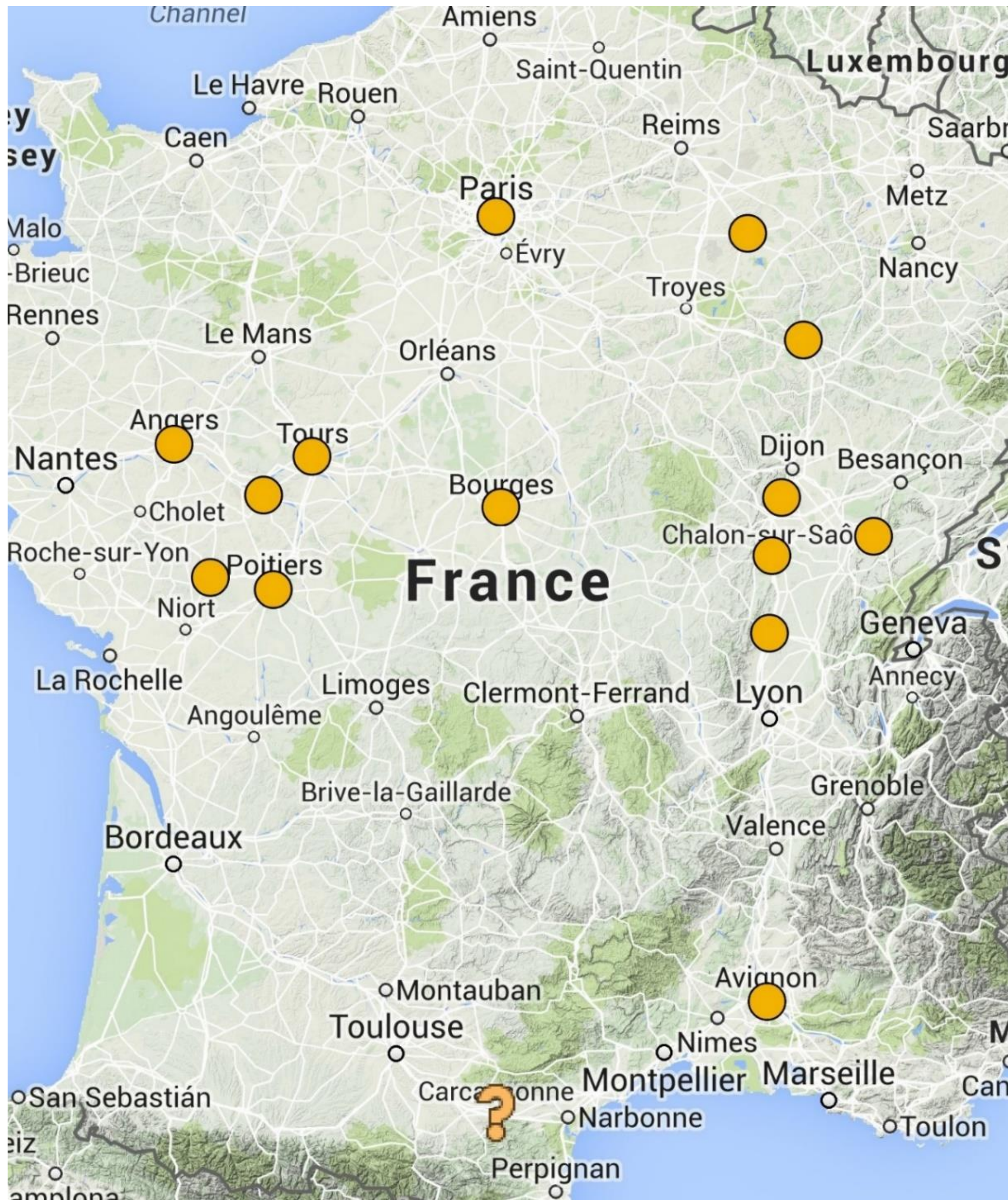
investigation, which included a documentation of the confessions, took place there. Thus, this document confirms that the chroniclers were correct in pointing out the Touraine and Champagne as the main areas in which Jews were arrested. Indeed, the chroniclers focused on Chinon and Virty, but Tours and Chaumont are not far away, and it is very possible that Jews were arrested in whole counties. We should add to this picture the trials of Jews in Paris, and also the arrests of Jews in Bourges and the Duchy of Burgundy.[86] Another document that mentions inventories of the property of convicted Jews suggests they were only prosecuted in some areas, despite the fact that the king ordered arrests throughout the land in his letter of 26 July.[87] It is not surprising that when the Crown acted to confiscate the property of Jews who were convicted during the plot, Tours and Bourges provided the most income.[88] The overall picture, even if it is only based on a few sources, suggests that the Jews were arrested and investigated mostly in the Touraine, Champagne, Paris, Bourges and the Duchy of Burgundy, that is, in relatively central and northern areas of France. This fits well with the idea that the orders that the king gave in his letter were mostly followed in areas where the authority of the Crown was stronger, namely, closer to Paris.

[86] Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 133; *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 35; *Chronique parisienne anonyme*, 59; Holtmann, "Implantation et expulsion," 148-152; Holtmann, *Juden in der Grafschaft Burgund*, 302-307; Petit, *Histoire des ducs de Bourgogne,* 8:257, no. 6919-6920; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews", 311-312, n. 46 and 48.

[87] Langlois, *Registres perdus*, 253-256 (26 July), 268 (17 February): "Juifz que aucuns des dis baillis avoient justiciez" for analysis: Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews", 312, n. 48.

[88] Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews", 312, n. 48; Viard, *Les journaux du trésor de Charles IV Le Bel*, 93, no. 434, 107-108, no. 497, 234-235, no. 1288.

Location of persecution against Jews in summer 1321



The persecution of Jews in France - Fears, fabrications and false evidence of well poisoning

Even before royal officials took action against the Jews in the locations mentioned above, rumors of the well-poisoning plot stirred unrest in other areas. Around the end of June, about a month before the king ordered the arrest of the Jews, such rumors already triggered violence against them

in the county of Anjou. Philip of Valois, count of Anjou (later King Philip VI), described the events in a letter he sent to Pope John XXII shortly after they occurred.[89] He wrote that 26 June was a particularly ominous day. A major solar eclipse was seen in the counties of Anjou and Touraine, turning the sun red as blood. This report is reliable, as it can be corroborated by several independent sources, as well as astronomic data.[90] However, Philip also reported that on this day, thunderstorms and earthquakes struck, fire rained down from the sky and even a dragon flew through the air and killed many with his foul breath. These claims suggest that Philip understood the eclipse as an apocalyptic sign, and expected other such signs to appear simultaneously.[91] He was probably not the only one who held such beliefs, as he stated that "the inhabitants of the land believed that the end of the world had just come".[92] According to Philip, this panic made some of the people of Anjou suspect that local Jews had something to do with these ominous signs: "On the next day [27 June], in the county mentioned above [Anjou], our people began to attack the Jews, because of sorcery that they performed against Christianity."[93] These suspicions of sorcery may have been related to well-poisoning accusations, which were already widespread in the Touraine, very close

[89] The letter written by Philip of Valois was cited in full in a letter by the pope, who used the accusations against Jews and Muslims as evidence supporting the need for a new crusade: John XXII, *De bello sarracenis inferendo*, in *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova, et Amplissima Collectio*, ed. Giovan Domenico Mansi, vol. 25 (Venice: Antonius Zatta, 1782), coll. 569-572; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 45-47; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 65-66.

[90] *Chronicon Turonense Abbreviatum*, 198; *Anniversaria Ecclesie Sancte Crucis Lungdunensis*, 297; *Chronique parisienne anonyme*, 59; *Annales Colbazenses*, M.G.H SS, 19:717. For the astronomic data, I used: http://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/SEsearch/SEsearchmap.php?Ecl=13210626 accessed: 25 February 2015.

[91] According to biblical tradition, a solar eclipse was indeed a major sign of the apocalypse: Revelation, 6:12, 8:12, 9:2, 16:8-10. Also see: Lehugeur, *Histoire de Philippe le Long*, 2:414-417; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 45; Passerat, *La Croisade des Pastoureaux*, 21-27.

[92] "crederent habitatores terrae, esse in novissimo fine mundi" - John XXII, *De bello sarracenis inferendo*, 570.

[93] "Interea in crostino illius diei, in comitatu memorato, nostrae gentes coeperunt Judaeos propter imprecations, quas contra Christianitatem perpetrarunt, invadere" – ibid. Jews had an important role in the Christian apocalyptic narrative: Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 283-297; Andrew C. Gow, *The Red Jews: Anti-Semitism in an Apocalyptic Age 1200-1600* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 37-130.

to Anjou.[94] However, Philip insists that evidence for the involvement of Jews in the well-poisoning plot was found only when suspicious Christians "examined very carefully the houses of specific Jews," probably in a search for signs of sorcery.[95] Allegedly, in the house of a Jew named Bananias[96], these men found a letter intended for Muslim rulers, calling them to further support the well-poisoning plot organized by the Jews. Philip stated that the letter was originally written in Hebrew, and carried an image of a Jew or a Muslim turning his buttocks towards a crucifix. This image, and the fact that a sum of money was found with the letter, rasied the suspicion of the Christians who found it, and they asked two Jewish converts to interpret it. The alleged content of the letter led to the arrest of Bananias and six other Jews, who were tortured until they confessed that the letter was indeed authentic. Then, three clerics trained in theology translated the letter into Latin, and produced the version that Philip of Valois sent to the pope. The result was a very peculiar document. Purportedly, the letter was intended for Amicedich, the king of thirty-one kingdoms, Zabin, the Sultan of Azor, King Jodab of Abdon and Semeren and all their subjects.[97] The letter describes how the prophets Enoch and Elijah appeared to the Saracens and how the biblical lost ark was re-found on Mount Sinai. Face with these miracles, the Saracens decided to convert to Judaism. They promised the Jews that they would give them the holy land, if the Jews would deliver the kingdom of France to them in return. Thus, the Jews tried to use the lepers to poison the wells, but the plot was only a partial success. The lepers were caught and revealed the role that the Jews played in the affair, and the influence of the poison was not powerful enough. Bananias

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[94] Lazard, "Les Juifs de Touraine," 232-234; *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 32; Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 132; *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 56; *Chronique de Saint-Denis*, 704; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 44-45; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 65.

[95] "inscrutantes diligenter domos ipsorum Judaeorum" – ibid.

[96] Probably a distortion of the Jewish name Hananiah.

[97] Clearly, a biblical reference: Joshua, 11-12.

asked the Saracen kings to send him more money, through the kingdom of Granada, so the Jews could try destroying Christianity on another occasion.[98]

Obviously this letter was a fabrication intended to justify well-poisoning accusations and persecution against Jews. First, the mere fact that the letter was "translated" by converts and clerics, who were often hostile to the Jews, should raise some suspicion. Indeed, one wonders whether the original letter was not simply a regular communication with Jewish communities in the East, or if it existed at all. Second, the details of the letter suggest that it was a clerical forgery. The names of "Muslim" kingdoms and kings in the letter are based totally on biblical descriptions of Canaanite kings, mainly from the book of Joshua, with the kingdom of Granada as the only exception.[99] This is an indication that the writers of this letter, probably the three clerics who "translated" it, were so ignorant regarding the Muslim kingdoms in the East that they could not even name any Muslim territories or leaders. Thus, they turne to the one description of the East that they actually knew well, i.e. the Bible. In contrast, the letter presents a clear description of well poisoning by Jews and lepers, not very different from the one presented in contemporary chronicles.[100]

The fact that this letter was so clearly forged is actually very useful for understanding of the development of well-poisoning accusations against Jews in northern France. If we can trust Count Philip on this point, it seems that in Anjou rumors about Jewish sorcery led to popular violence against the Jews even before any official action was taken against them. The "evidence" of their involvement in the plot was only fabricated after the Jews were attacked. The fabrication

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[98] John XXII, *De bello sarracenis inferendo*, coll. 570-572; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 45-47; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 65-66.

[99] Joshua, 11-12.

[100] John XXII, *De bello sarracenis inferendo*, coll. 571-572.

itself, however, was part of an official process, which required the involvement of officials, investigators and translators. Allegedly, the letter was first reviewed by two converts, then its content was corroborated by the confessions of the seven Jews who were investigated, and next it was translated into Latin by the three clerics. Finally, it was sent by the count to the pope himself, and presented to the cardinals in the Curia. This was a process in which very dubious rumors were transformed into seemingly solid facts, backed up by evidence from different sources, and accepted by political and religious leaders. Again, as in the case of the confession that was presented to King Philip by the lord of Parthenay, nobles and officials seemed to play a major role in this transformation.[101]

This analysis can also shed some light on similar documents which appeared only a few days later, on 2 July, in the town of Mâcon, in the Duchy of Burgundy. As we have already seen, Burgundy was one of the centers of the persecution against Jews, and so it may not be surprising that such documents originated there. In this case, there are two letters written in French, with a Latin appendix by a doctor who allegedly translated them from Arabic.[102] The first letter is from the king of Granada to a Jew named Sanson son of Helias, and to another Jew called Aronle.[103] In this letter, the king offered to further support the plot by supplying the Jews with more money or poison. He wrote that he had been informed that Sanson had already paid the lepers to perform their part, and adds that 115 of them already agreed to do so. Next, he asked that the lepers use the poison which was already sent to them to infect the water sources. He suggested that Jews and

[101] *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 31-32; Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 132; *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 56; *Chronique de Saint-Denis*, 704; *Chronique parisienne anonyme*, 59; Kalonymus ben Kalonymus, *Eben Bochen*, 103; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 44; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 65.

[102] The original letters are in: Archives Nationales, J 427, no. 18, and were printed in: Vidal, "La poursuite des lépreux en 1321," 512-514.

[103] Ginzburg suggests that the original Jewish names were "Samson son of Elias" and "Aaron": Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 47-48.

Muslims should stay united, and promised that he would return the holy land to their control. He added that he was also "sending something else, which you [Sanson] should throw in the water that the king uses and drinks".[104] The writer of the letter clearly meant to suggest that the Jews were conspiring to poison the king himself. In the second letter, from the king of Tunis to unknown Jews, the Muslim ruler also offered money to aid the plot, and in addition to protect Jewish children who were sent to him. He pointed out the fraternity between Jews and Muslims, and reminded the Jews that they agreed to cooperate to destroy Christianity. This agreement had been made on the previous Easter, with 75 Jews and lepers present. The king stressed the need to complete the plot as quickly as possible, without concern for the cost.[105]

These letters are suspiciously similar to the one sent to the pope by the count of Anjou. The emphasis on the unity of Muslims and Jews, the transfer of money between them and even the idea that the Jews would return to the holy land appear in both cases. Yet, it seems unlikely that the details of the first letter spread from Anjou to Mâcon so quickly.[106] A more reasonable explanation is that rumors regarding the involvement of the Jews in the plot already circulated throughout northern France by this time, and reached both places. The Latin appendix to the letters can provide some insights into how and why these rumors were edited into officially accepted evidence against the Jews. This appendix contains the declaration of a physician named Petrus de Aura, in which he attests that he faithfully translated the letters from Arabic into French. This declaration was made in the presence of the *bailli* of Mâcon, Franconis de Aveneriis, and a judge from Lyon, Petri

[104] "Et je vous envoye autre chose que vous giteraiz en l'eau que boit et use li roix" - Vidal, "La poursuite des lépreux en 1321," 512.

[105] Vidal, "La poursuite des lépreux en 1321," 512-513; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 47-48; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 66; Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems," 9-10; Rivière-Chalan, *La Marque infâme des lépreux*, 41-42.

[106] Philip of Valois' letter could not have been written before 27 June, and if one assumes that the investigation of the Jews and the translation of the document took a few days, it was probably sent to Avignon around the same time when the documents from Mâcon were compiled - John XXII, *De bello sarracenis inferendo*, coll. 570.

Maiorelli. Several other nobles and royal officials signed this declaration, which was drafted by a notary. One wonders why this elaborate formal procedure of authenticating the documents was necessary. The most likely answer is that they were meant to be used as formal evidence proving the guilt of the Jews. The fact that the documents found their way to Paris, and that they mention the poisoning of the king, may suggest that they were made in order to be sent to the royal court in the first place.[107] It seems that the officials of Mâcon used the bureaucratic mechanism under their control to produce the evidence required to convict the Jews in well poisoning, and made sure that the evidence reached the king. And so, the similarities between these letters and the one sent by Count Philip to the pope seem more reasonable, as these documents were produced by similar procedures, for similar purposes. It is quite possible that these documents, and others like them, inspired the king to order the general arrest of the Jews a few weeks later.

From the fact that the documents above were created in Burgundy it is clear that the authorities there supported the accusations and persecution against Jews. And indeed, there are some sources which suggest that Jews were executed in this area.[108] In addition to the general statements, two papal letters that were written many years after the events shed some light on these executions. In these letters, two different popes gave a mandate to absolve monks who participated in the executions of Jews in eastern France.[109] The first letter was sent in January 1332 by Pope John XXII to the abbot of the Cistercian monetary in Chalon-sur-Saône, approving the absolution of a monk named Petrus of Nuits-Saint-Georges. Petrus was present when the Jews of Nuits-Saint-Georges, in the Duchy of Burgundy, were executed, and added two pieces of wood to the pyre on

[107] Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 47-48; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 66.

[108] *Chronique parisienne anonyme*, 59; Holtmann, "Implantation et expulsion," 148-152; Petit, *Histoire des ducs de Bourgogne,* 8:257, no. 6919-6920; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews", 311, n. 46; Holtmann, *Juden in der Grafschaft Burgund*, 302-307.

[109] Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, 1:366-368, nos. 348 and 350.

which the Jews were burnt. According to the letter, this event happened "once, when some Jews were examined for crimes and had to be consumed by fire in Nuits-Saint-Georges. They were burnt after they were condemned by the secular justice."[110] The execution of Jews in this location was the conclusion of an organized legal procedure. Only some Jews, who were investigated and condemned by the authorities, were executed. The letter does not specify the date of the executions, but it is almost certainly 1321. The Jews of France fled the country in the months following the persecution, and so there were few, if any, Jews left in Burgundy after 1322.[111] Thus, the letter from 1332 probably refers to the last event of persecution before the expulsion of the Jews, namely the well-poisoning accusations of 1321. A similar argument can also be made for the second letter, sent in 1335 by Pope Benedict XII[112] to the archbishop of Besançon, granting him the right to impose penance on and absolve the monk Vivetus Grossed de Poligny. This monk was a fifteen-year-old boy when he was present at the execution of Jews in the village of Arbois, not far from Nuits-Saint-Georges.[113] According to his confession, he carried wood to help build the pyre on which they were burnt. This source contains fewer details than the other letter, but the fact that the pyre was organized in advance may suggest that it also refers to an official execution rather than popular violence. This is not to suggest that popular hatred towards the Jews did not play an

[110] "olim, dum quidam Iudei eiusdem loci de Nuciaco, qui eorum demeritis exigentibus ut igne comburi deberent, condempnati fuerant per secularem iusticiam, cremarentur" - Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, 1:366-367, no. 348.

[111] While many historians referred to the fact that the Jews left the country in 1322 as an "expulsion", it is not clear that an official royal decree ordering their banishment was ever issued. However, there is an agreement that very few Jews, if any, were left in France after 1322: Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 294-329; Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 246-248; Jordan, "Home Again," 38-39; Holtmann, *Juden in der Grafschaft Burgund*, 308-317; Susan L. Einbinder, *No Place of Rest: Jewish Literature, Expulsion and Memory of Medieval France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 2-3, 68-70.

[112] Pope Benedict XII was none other than Jacques Fournier, who presided at the investigation of Guillaume Agassa when he was the bishop of Pamiers.

[113] Arbois is located in the Franche-Comté, that is the County, rather than Duchy, of Burgundy. They Jews in this area escaped the expulsion of 1306, but were certainly persecuted in 1321, and forced to leave in 1322: Holtmann, "Implantation et expulsion," 139-159; Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 216-222; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 326-329; Holtmann, *Juden in der Grafschaft Burgund,* 302-317.

important part in the events. The two monks said that they acted out of "zeal of faith" and "to obtain merit", suggesting that they saw the executions as religious commandment.[114] However, while they were eager to assist the executions, it seems that they only supported the action of the authorities. Thus, these two letters, in addition to the documents from Mâcon, suggest that the Jews of Burgundy suffered the full extent of violence sanctioned by law in 1321.[115]

But while the acts of violence against the Jews in Burgundy were committed by the authorities, they were driven, at least to some degree, by rumors and anonymous accusations. To better understand this dynamic, it is necessary to examine the popular culture which supported the accusation. Fortunately, one source which attests to this culture survives, a section from a famous satirical poem which describes the persecution of lepers and Jews in 1321. This poem, *Roman de Renart le Contrefait*, was written by a clerk from Troyes, in Champagne, shortly after the persecution.[116] The hero of the poem, the fox Renart, uses the Jews as a symbol of treachery, and presents their plot to poison the wells as proof of their duplicity. While he justifies the conviction and execution of the lepers, he focuses his attention on the Jews, and sees them as the main conspirators:

The Jews gave the poisons

To those who threw them in the water,

And the Jews took those [poisons] they had

From the Saracens who promised them

To give for this bargain

[114] "zelo fidei," "meritum obtinere" - Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, 1:366-368, nos. 348 and 350.

[115] An additional papal letter also suggests that this was the case: "leprosi et quidam ex Iudeis eorum demeritis, ut communiter dicebatur, comburebantur per iustitiam secularem" - Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, 1:365, no. 347.

[116] *Le Roman de Renart le contrefait,* ed. Gaston Raynaud and Henri Lemaitre (Paris: H. Champion, 1914), 206-207; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 305-306.

The Promised Land;

The Saracens would come here [to France]

And the Jews will go there [to the Promised Land][117]

This source presents a similar narrative to the one promoted by the fake letters from Anjou and Mâcon. Allegedly, the Jews had an agreement with the Muslims to poison the Christians, and they convinced the lepers to help them. The Jews would be rewarded for betraying France to the Muslims by receiving the Holy Land in return. The fact that this detail appears in all of these sources, which were created in different areas, suggests that this narrative was quite popular. And indeed, according to Renart the guilt of the Jews was common knowledge:

Everybody knew and understood

As they suffered from the death

That the Jews had deceived them

And also that the poisons were made by them.[118]

The satirical nature of this source may raise some suspicion that its author was exaggerating, and not "everybody" accepted the accusations against the Jews. Still, he was clearly expecting his readers to know about the plot, and to understand how Renart uses it as an example of treachery.[119] Therefore, it is likely that the accusations against the Jews were not limited to formal procedures, but were accepted in popular culture as well.

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[117] "Li Juif les pousons baillerent / A ceulz qui es iaux les giterent, / Et li Juif pris les avoient/ Aus Sarradins qui leur devoient / Baillier par ceste ocission / La terre de Promision; / Li Sarredin sa venissient / Et li Juif la alisient;" - *Le Roman de Renart le contrefait,* 207.

[118] "Tuit connurent et connoissoient / Conme de la mort angoissoient / Que Juïf lor avoient bailliés / Itieux pouissons a ce tailliés. – ibid.

[119] This expectation was probably reasonable in 1322, but in later editions of this text this section was abridged and edited, maybe because the readers did not remember the events of 1321 and thus found it unclear: Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 305-306; *Roman de Renart le contrefait,* 206.

However, this observation does not solve the basic question of causality: were the authorities influenced by popular accusations against Jews, or was the formal investigation a reason for popular hatred? In most cases, it is impossible to conclude. We have seen that Philip of Anjou claimed that unsanctioned attacks against the Jews led to the emergence of evidence against them. However, his testimony is questionable as it was meant to back up a fabricated document.[120] Yet, in one case it is possible to follow every step in the dynamic that led from popular fear to official accusations. The source is again a letter, sent in 1331 by Pope John XXII to the abbot of the Cistercian monastery in Chalon-sur-Saône, Burgundy.[121] It gave the abbot a mandate to absolve one of his monks, Gaufridus de Demigny, for his part in the violence of 1321. However, unlike in the cases presented above, Gaufridus played a much more significant role in the development of the persecution. According to his confession, one night in 1321 he was sitting in a tavern in the area of Chalon-sur-Saône, when he noticed a group of suspicious characters. Gaufridus noticed that these people were not drinking in the tavern. One of them walked outside and buried a sack of unidentified seeds in the ground. Then, after this man came back, the group drank and left the tavern together. The mysterious man did not forget to dig the sack out of the ground and take it with him. At this point, we can find a description of the interpretation of these events by Gaufridus: "because of these actions [the behavior of the suspicious men], [Gaufridus] recalled that the common people in these areas were talking about the existence of potions."[122] Thus, he asked the advice of "a certain artisan" who "told him that he truly believed that these people were evil and that they carried potions in order to poison the water."[123] Based on this belief, Gaufridus notified

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[120] John XXII, *De bello sarracenis inferendo*, coll. 570.

[121] Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, 1:365-366, no. 347.

[122] "ad que advertens Gaufridus antedictus, ex hiis motus, que de facto potionum in illis partibus vulgariter dicebatur" - ibid.

[123] "quodam fabro ad se vocato, dixit eidem, quod ipse vere credebat, quod illi homines essent mali et quod portabant potiones ad aquas inficiendas" – ibid.

the local secular authorities about these events, and they proceeded to arrest the suspects. The one who carried the sack tried to hide it again, but failed. In his investigation, he confessed that the seeds in the sack could cause a person to fall asleep if they were mixed in his wine. The suspect carried the sack around hoping to mix its contents into the drink of a random victim in the tavern, so he could steal the target's possessions as he was sleeping. Therefore, he was sentenced to be hanged, while the other travelers in his group, who apparently had nothing to do with his scheme, were set free. In retrospect, Gaufridus was worried that turning this man in to the authorities could be seen as participating in his killing, and thus confessed his sin many years later.

This story can lead to a few important conclusions. First, that suspects of well poisoning could be people who were not lepers or Jews, at least as far as Gaufridus saw fit to mention. This may explain why in this case, the accusations ended with only one suspect convicted, and not exactly for poisoning. But more importantly, it reveals that during the period of well poisoning panic, strange behavior in a public place could easily cause a person to be suspected of this crime. The artisan that Gaufridus consulted may have been a doctor or a public figure in his community, but there is no indication that he held any official position. In these circumstances, even a simple conversation between two laymen at a tavern could trigger a formal investigation. This case shows how popular rumors could turn into official accusations. Gaufridus and his friend probably heard about the well-poisoning plot as local gossip, maybe supported by expressions of popular art like the *Roman de Renart le Contrefait*. When they happened to notice the unexplained behavior of strangers, they were quick to suspect that they were involved in this plot, and turn them in to the authorities. After that, things were out of their hands. The suspects were investigated, sometimes under torture, and pressured into confession. In some cases, their confession could be used to support fabricated evidence, as in Anjou and Mâcon. It is possible that Gaufridus did not intend

for this to happen, and may have truly regretted the part he played in this dynamic, but he could not change the verdict.

The persecution of Jews in France - Conclusion

The study of the persecution of Jews in France in the summer of 1321 provides several new insights on the issue of well poisoning. First, it is now clear that the Jews were persecuted mostly in Touraine, Champagne, Anjou, Paris, Bourges and Burgundy. This stands in contrast to the persecution of lepers earlier that year, which took place mostly in south-western France. In addition, in most cases the persecution of Jews took the form of legal violence. It included arrests of multiple suspects, official investigations, sometimes under torture, and organized executions by fire. The evidence gathered, or fabricated, in these investigations was sometimes sent to the king or the pope to justify the violence. This was necessary, since at least some of the persecution, especially in Touraine, Anjou, and Burgundy, took place before the king had published an official order to investigate the plot, on 26 July. Thus, it seems that the nobility and officials of these areas tried to pressure the king to condemn the Jews, an effort that was eventually successful. Yet other cases, most notably in Chinon, happened significantly later and could have been a response to the king's decree.

More complicated conclusions can be presented regarding the dynamic that caused the accusations. It seems that at least in some cases, rumors and popular beliefs in the veracity of the accusations led nobles and officials into action. The public identified suspects and turned the authorities against them, and then the evidence for their guilt was produced by the bureaucratic system which judged them. This system forced suspects into providing confessions or verifying false evidence against them. Next, a process of formulating the evidence into official documents

took place, and they were used to drive further persecution in other areas. And so, even if popular culture played an important part in the dynamic that produced well-poisoning accusations against Jews in France, the violence against them should be seen as legal in nature. Without the actions of nobles, royal officials, judges, notaries and translators, these accusations would probably have produced limited violence, not mass persecution. In that respect, the violence against the Jews of France in 1321 adheres to the same patterns which characterize most cases of medieval anti-Judaism in this area, that is, incidents of legal violence. Despite the relatively large scale of the persecution, it is less comparable to events of mass popular violence against the Jews, like the massacres committed by the *Pastoureaux* in the previous year.[124]

The persecution of Jews in Aragon

Well-poisoning accusations against the Jews of Aragon were much less common than in France, and did not result in wide-spread violence. Nirenberg has analyzed these events in detail, and there is little point in repeating his work here.[125] Still, it is worthwhile to compare and contrast the persecution of Jews in Aragon with the one of the Jews of France. In both cases, the king did not react to the accusations immediately. As we have seen, King Philip received the first report claiming that the Jews participated in the plot around mid-June, and still did not issue an official decree in the matter until 26 July.[126] Similarly, King Jaime II knew at the beginning of June that

[124] For a review of violent incidences against the Jews of France: Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 17-22, 45-47, 110-112, 190-194, 219-221. For the *Pastoureaux*: Passerat, *La Croisade des Pastoureaux*, 77-98; Barber, "The Pastoureaux," 147, 150-156; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 43-51; Lehugeur, *Histoire de Philippe le Long*, 2:419-421.

[125] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 108-110, 113-118.

[126] Langlois, *Registres perdus*, 253-256; *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 32; Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 132; *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 56; *Chronique de Saint-Denis*, 704; *Chronique parisienne anonyme*, 59; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 44-45; Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems," 5; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 65.

the Jews of Avignon were suspected of well poisoning, but did not mention this in his letters to his officials at that time.[127] Like King Philip, he was forced to refer to well-poisoning accusations against Jews only when his officials acted on such accusations without his permission. On 10 July the king wrote to the vicar of Barcelona, since he had heard that he issued orders "that Jews may not enter any houses of Christians in which there are wells, unless certain precautions are taken." The vicar ordered this procedure "so they [the Jews] will not be able to infect the water."[128] The king thought that this order was unnecessary, and that there was no real danger that local Jews would poison wells. Still, it is possible that the vicar had reasons to be more suspicious. As we have seen, at the beginning of July he was involved in the investigation of several potential well poisoners from areas around Barcelona.[129] It is possible that one of these suspects tried to shift some of the blame to the Jews, and suggested that they were the real poisoners. Yet, it seems that the vicar did not arrest or interrogate any Jews, so it is possible that he issued his orders only to protect them from the possibility of future well-poisoning accusations against them. In any case, unlike King Philip, King Jaime did not change his policy regarding the local Jews who were under his protection. However, he did not fully trust foreign Jews who had recently entered his kingdom. In a letter sent to the vicar of Barcelona on 13 July, the king stated that many foreign Jews had entered Aragon since the rumors about well poisoning began. Presumably, most of these Jews were fleeing the persecution in France, and some people in Aragon suspected that they indeed

[127] Finke, *Acta Aragonensia*, 3:390-391, no. 178/1; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 93-95; Nirenberg, "Violence and the Persecution of Minorities," 327-330; also see: Ch. 2, 99-100.

[128] "Cum intellexerimus quod vos ordinastis seu ordinare intenditis preconitzacionem fieri ut judei non intrent domos aliquas xristianorum ubi aliqui sint putei nisi certa cautela adhibita, et quod ad hoc procesistis seu procedure intenditis ut aquas non possent inficere." - Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 115; Nirenberg, "Violence and the Persecution of Minorities," 118-119.

[129] Nirenberg, "Violence and the Persecution of Minorities," 330-333; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 97-98; ACA, Cancillería, Registros, no. 246, f. 233r-v; ACA, Cancillería, Registros, no. 173, f. 197r-v. As far as these sources specify, none of these suspects was Jewish.

played some part in the plot. Thus, "to remove all suspicion," the king ordered his officials to banish these newcomers from his kingdom immediately, and close the borders to any Jews.[130] This order was probably in effect until the following year, and may have caused some trouble for the Jews who left France at the time.[131] But overall, when it came to protecting local Jews, King Jaime held his positions strongly where King Philip surrendered to his nobles and officials.

The only two documented cases in which Jews were accused of well poisoning in the kingdom of Aragon actually show that officials there usually adhered to this royal policy. In a letter of 22 July, the king ordered the bailiff of Lleida to surrender to local officials a Castilian Jew who was suspected of selling potions to the lepers. The king stressed that "since the said Jew was a foreigner, and the potions of the lepers were methodically prepared [to be used] against the Christians, and at their own [the lepers'] expense, we assert that the said vicar and *paers* [local officials], and not you [the bailiff], should investigate the said matters."[132] The king had two reasons to order his representative, the bailiff, to leave the matter to local officials. First, the suspect was a foreigner, a Jew from Castile, and therefore did not deserve royal protection like local Jews. In fact, if the king expected the bailiff of Lleida to follow the same orders he gave the vicar of Barcelona on 13 July, this Jew was supposed to be expelled from the kingdom even if he had nothing to do with well poisoning. Second, the king pointed out that the local lepers were the major suspects in the plot, and they were the ones who bought and intended to use the potions. Thus, he stated that the investigation should not focus on the Jews, who were under royal protection, but on

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[130] "Nosque ad tollendam omnem suspicionem eosdem a terra nostra eici velimus." - Nirenberg, "Violence and the Persecution of Minorities," 333-334; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 115-116.

[131] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 116-118.

[132] "quia dictus judeus extraneus est et pociones leprosorum ordinate erant fieri contra xristianos et in eorum dispendium, intendimus quod dicti vicarius et paciari et non vos debeant cognoscere de predictis." - Nirenberg, "Violence and the Persecution of Minorities," 240-241, n. 54; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 116, n. 60. Most of the original letter is transcribed in these two footnotes. However, in both places it appears with the wrong folio number (ACA, Cancillería, Registros, no. 246, f. 242r instead of f. 243r).

the lepers, who were under the jurisdiction of local officials.[133] Thus, the reasons that the king presented for his decision to withdraw from protecting this Castilian Jew show that he had no intention of relinquishing his authority over the local Jews. This case was unusual since the accused was a foreigner, and in any case his involvement in the plot was limited. And so, while the king allowed the local officials of Lleida to act independently in this case, his policy of protecting Aragonese Jews remained unchanged.

A different sequence of events happened in the village of Rubielos, not far from Teruel. On 29 July, local officials of the town of Teruel accused a man named Diego Perez of Daroca of throwing poisonous powders into fountains around Rubielos, Mora, and Valbona. He claimed that two rich Jews from the nearby village of Sarrión cooperated with him. These two Jews, and a few others from the area, were soon arrested on the orders of judges and council members of Teruel. The two Jews who were accused by Perez, Simuel Famos and Yaco Alfayti,[134] were interrogated and tortured several times, but never admitted their guilt. Perhaps as a result, the lieutenant of the bailiff of Teruel opposed these actions, and suspected that Perez was lying. He pointed out that the suspect changed his testimony during the investigation, and at first accused "a Breton" of involvement in the plot. In addition, the lieutenant claimed that the Jews of the area held a royal privilege which allowed only the king or the local bailiff to judge them. Therefore, the officials of Teruel had no jurisdiction to arrest, investigate or punish the Jews. Eventually, Perez was manipulated to admit that he falsely accused the Jews because local officials promised to set him free if he would do so. Still, one of the arrested Jews, Simuel Famos, was given by the council to

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[133] For royal protection and jurisdiction over the Jews of Aragon, see: Nirenberg, Communities of Violence, 21-22, 28, 32, 35, 71-77, 222; Yom Tov Assis, The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry (Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 1997), 9-48; Mark D. Meyerson, *Jews in an Iberian Frontier Kingdom: Society, Economy, and Politics in Morvedre, 1248-1391* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 60-63, 82-84, 90, 98-107, 121-129.

[134] According to Nirenberg, the correct names are Samuel Famos and Yaco Alfayto - Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 109.

unknown people who killed him, though he had never been officially convicted. On 18 August, the lieutenant reported these events to the king, and stressed that Simuel was unjustly killed, since he never confessed, and that his property should have been handed over to the Crown. Thus, he concluded that the council of Teruel intervened in a case that was under the bailiff's jurisdiction, tortured and killed innocent Jewish suspects, and confiscated property that belonged to the king.[135]

The document which describes the events presented above focuses on the argument between royal and local officials over the jurisdiction to investigate and punish Jews who were suspected of well poisoning. This kind of conflict was not unique to Aragon; it happened also in France during investigations of well-poisoning plots. For example, we saw that in Combecrose, royal and local officials struggled to achieve jurisdiction over the local leper house, and over its property.[136] The difference is that in France both local and royal institutions eventually agreed that well poisoning indeed took place, and that at least some of the Jews (and lepers) were responsible. In Aragon, it seems that royal officials were determined to protect local Jews, in accord with the king's decision that they were not involved in the plot. The only three cases in which we hear about well poisoning suspicions against Jews in Aragon happened when the local officials acted without royal consent. The vicar of Barcelona issued his order to secure water sources from local Jews before the king stated specifically that they were not involved in the plot. The local officials of Lleida acted against a foreign Jew, who was not entitled to royal protection. And finally, the judges and council members of Teruel acted against the Jews despite clear opposition by the lieutenant of the local bailiff. Moreover, Nirenberg suggests that they were able to do so only because the

[135] A letter by the lieutenant of the bailiff of Teruel to King Jaime from 18 August 1321: Baer, *Die Juden im Christlichen Spanien*, 1:224-228; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 50-51; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 108-110. For more about the tension between the council of Teruel and local Jews: Meyerson, *Jews in an Iberian Frontier Kingdom*, 65.

[136] Roberts, "Charity and Hospitality," 352-358.

political position of this lieutenant was particularly weak at this time.[137] In any case, there is no evidence that royal officials in Aragon ever supported well-poisoning accusations against Jews, or neglected their commitment to defend them against such accusations. And so, it may not be surprising that other than these three isolated cases, there is no further evidence of well-poisoning accusations against Jews in Aragon in 1321.

Well-poisoning accusations against Muslims

Muslims were mentioned often in the different sources which documented the events of 1321 in France. They were presented as the ones who supported, financed, and sometimes initiated the actions of the lepers and the Jews. However, none of these documents mentions any Muslim individuals who were arrested or investigated regarding well poisoning in France. This fact may not seem unusual, as there was no official presence of Muslims in the kingdom at this time. If any Muslims ever entered the country from Aragon, they probably disguised their identity. And so, the Jews were usually presented in contemporary descriptions of the plot as middlemen between the Muslim kingdom of Granada and the lepers who poisoned the water in France.[138] However, in a few cases the Muslims were said to cooperate with the lepers directly, without the involvement of the Jews. Some representatives of the Muslims allegedly entered the kingdom and met with the lepers to promote the plot.[139] Still, we have no evidence that anyone was accused of being one of these representatives, or of being a Muslim and supporting the plot in general. This fact calls for

[137] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 108-109.

[138] *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 33-34; Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 133; *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 56; *Chronique de Saint-Denis*, 704-705; John XXII, *De bello sarracenis inferendo*, coll. 570; Vidal, "La poursuite des lépreux en 1321," 512-514; *Le Roman de Renart le contrefait,* 207.

[139] Felip Sánchez, "La persecució d'un collectiu marginat," 35-42; Jacques Fournier, *Le Registre d'Inquisition de Jacques Fournier*, 137-145; Raymond Bernard de la Mote, *Chronique de Bazas*, 39; Vidal, "La poursuite des lépreux en 1321," 513.

some explanation, since we saw that when local officials in France wanted to convict lepers or Jews, they had no difficulty extracting confessions and evidence which allowed them to do so. One must conclude that either evidence for the presence of Muslim conspirators indeed existed and was lost, or, more likely, that these officials had little interest in developing concrete accusations against Muslims. Several historians have suggested that the Muslims merely played a symbolic role in the accusations against Jews and lepers.[140] The Muslims clearly represented the major enemies of Christianity, and the notion that lepers or Jews cooperated with them suggested that they were not different. The involvement of the Muslims was only evoked in an attempt to justify the attacks against lepers and Jews. Therefore, there was no point in producing evidence for Muslim involvement in the plot, unless they could be connected directly to specific lepers or Jews.

However, in Aragon the circumstances were completely different. Muslim communities and individuals lived under Christian rule for centuries, and were accepted as part of Aragonese society.[141] There was nothing symbolic about well-poisoning accusations against them. Such accusations were aimed against specific individuals, and led to actual investigations and punishment. For example, Pedro de Queralto, the lieutenant of the procurator in Valencia, arrested a Muslim from Murla named Raro on suspicion of well poisoning. He reported the incident to the king, who instructed him that "if you [Pedro] find him [Raro] culpable, you should punish him

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[140] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 110; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 51-52; Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems," 9-12; Bauchau, "Science et racism," 27-28; Pichon, "Quelques Réflexions," 27-28.

[141] A major Muslim population lived in the kingdom since the major conquests of Jaime I during the first half of the thirteenth century: Assis, *The Golden Age*, 2-4; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 21-26. This is not to suggest that their social position was always stable: Meyerson, *Jews in an Iberian Frontier Kingdom,* 10, 24-33, 60-63, 80-81, 118-119; Elena Lourie, "Anatomy of Ambivalence: Muslims under the Crown of Aragon in the Late Thirteenth Century," in *Crusade and Colonisation; Muslims, Christians and Jews in Medieval Aragon* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1990), ch. 7, 1-77; Robert Ignatius Burns, *Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Crusader Kingdom of Valencia: Societies in Symbiosis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 52-125; Brian A. Catlos, *The Victors and the Vanquished: Christians and Muslims of Catalonia and Aragon, 1050-1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 123-326.

severely."[142] Also in Lleida some Muslims were accused of well poisoning, and sometime at the end of July the local vicar tried to force two nobles to surrender them to his control. Local bailiffs intervened to support the nobles who held the suspected Muslims, and the king had to intervene in the dispute. As Nirenberg points out, it is not at all clear what the circumstances were surrounding this dispute, or whether these Muslims were actually convicted of poisoning.[143] Still, only a few days earlier, on 22 July, the king had ordered his bailiff in Lleida to surrender a Castilian Jew accused of well poisoning to the vicar and local officials.[144] It is possible that this Jew tried to shift the blame to local Muslims, and triggered a wider investigation. In any case, it seems that the vicar, and probably also other officials, took well-poisoning accusations seriously, and suspected that members of minority groups were more likely to be involved in the plot.

Still, one wonders whether these cases indeed represent a widespread notion that Aragonese Muslims as a group were involved in the well-poisoning plot. This interpretation can be supported by a letter sent by the king on 4 August to the officials of Zaragoza, as well as to other officials in Aragon. The king acknowledged that he had previously received a letter from the officials of Zaragoza regarding "the issue of potions which were said to have been thrown in the water by certain Muslims who were led by the lepers to do so."[145] It seems that these officials believed that some Muslims cooperated with the lepers and took active part in poisoning water sources. The king, however, was less convinced. He stated that he did not think that the arrested

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[142] "Cum ad nostrum pervenerit auditum quod Raro sarraceno [Murla?] est pocionator. [...] si eum culpabilem inveneris pena debita fortiter puniveris." – letter from 20 July, ACA, Cancillería, Registros, no. 246, f. 244r. It seems that Nirenberg is referring to the same letter, but has the wrong date and folio number: Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 111, n. 47.

[143] Document transcribed in: Nirenberg, "Violence and the Persecution of Minorities," 321-322. Also see: Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 111, n. 48.

[144] Nirenberg, "Violence and the Persecution of Minorities," 240-241; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 116.

[145] "super facto pocionum que per sarracenos aliquos in aquis ad induccionem leprosorum immiti dicebantur" - Nirenberg, "Violence and the Persecution of Minorities," 336-337.

Muslims were involved in the plot, yet since some of them had already confessed, he allowed the officials to punish them severely. This suggests that the original letter sent from Zaragoza contained some of the confessions extracted from the arrested Muslims. The fact that the king allowed the officials to use torture to investigate another Muslim suspected of well poisoning may indicate that the confessions which were sent to the king were extracted using similar methods. And so, it seems that while the king doubted the involvement of Muslims in the plot just like he doubted the guilt of the Jews, he was much less eager to defend the former. When it came to the Muslims under his rule, he was much more willing to allow local officials to use torture against suspects and punish them harshly if they confessed. However, the king ordered his officials to make sure that no innocent Muslims would be accused of poisoning as they continued their investigation in the matter. In addition, the fact that the king sent the letter not only to Zaragoza but also to other officials in his kingdom suggests that he intended this statement as a general order.[146] Thus, it seems that while King Jaime was not inclined to defend individual Muslims who were accused of well poisoning, he was decisive in his decision to prevent such an accusation from spreading.

This policy seems to have been a partial success. Other than the events in Zaragoza, there is no evidence for organized persecution against Muslims in Aragon. It is possible to find additional cases of individual Muslims who were suspected of being lepers and even participating in the plot, but there seem to have been no mass arrests.[147] On the other hand, fears regarding Jews and Muslims did not disappear completely after the summer of 1321. In a letter to his officials in Valencia, written in November 1321, King Jaime responded to reports about an alleged plot of

[146] Nirenberg, "Violence and the Persecution of Minorities," 336-337; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 111.
[147] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 111-113; Nirenberg, "Violence and the Persecution of Minorities," 343-345.

sorcerers. He stated that "several people, Christians, Jews and Saracens, moved by a diabolical spirit, performed many evil things in the kingdom of Valencia. [They] were using magical experiments, maleficent necromancy and even potions."[148] The king considered these crimes to be especially heinous, and so he ordered his officials to continue their investigation and punish harshly all those found guilty. The king did not explain what "evil things" the sorcerers hoped to achieve by using magic, and did not indicate that this was a new case of alleged water poisoning. Still, one should consider the fact that this incident happened only about three months after the wave of well-poisoning accusations in Aragon subsided. At this time, the idea that Jews, Muslims and disloyal Christians would conspire to use black magic seemed reasonable to royal officials and to the king himself.[149]

The persecution of Muslims accused of well poisoning during the summer of 1321 is an example of the basic ambivalence of the Christian majority towards the Muslim minority in Aragon. As several historians have noted, Muslims were officially protected by law, but were sometimes considered more likely to plot against the Christian public. While the same was true also for the Jewish minority, political and economic reasons caused the kings to be more inclined to protect the latter.[150] This difference in royal attitude was quite significant in determining the outcome of well-poisoning accusations against these two minorities. In both cases, some local officials accused members of these minorities of participation in the plot. When Aragonese Jews were involved, the king stated that the accusations were false and ordered his officials to protect

[148] "non nulli tam xristiani tam judei quam sarraceni, spiritu diabolico agitati, cum experimentis magicis et cum maleficiis nigromancie et cum pocionibus etiam, [Nirenberg transcribes: est] multa mala et orribilia operantur infra regnum Valencie" - ACA, Cancillería, Registros, no. 246, f. 306r. Transcribed (with the wrong folio number) in: Nirenberg, "Violence and the Persecution of Minorities," 337-338.

[149] Meyerson, *Jews in an Iberian Frontier Kingdom*, 93.

[150] Lourie, "Anatomy of Ambivalence," 51-69; Assis, *The Golden Age*, 9-18; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 21-40; Burns, *Muslims, Christians, and Jews*, 39-51, 80-108, 172-192, 204-206; Catlos, *The Victors and the Vanquished,* 123-326; Meyerson, *Jews in an Iberian Frontier Kingdom,* 24-33, 60-63, 80-81, 118-119.

them. However, when it came to Muslims, the king sometimes accepted the accusations, and in any case tended to allow local officials to act as they saw fit. Nirenberg is probably right when he concludes that the Muslims of Aragon suffered more than the Jews from legal persecution during the events of 1321.[151] In any case, it seems that both minorities did not face an organized investigation like the lepers of Aragon. In addition, as far as the sources reveal, they did not suffer mass executions like the Jews of France. The persecution of Jews and Muslims in Aragon usually consisted of isolated incidents, rather than organized wide-spread persecution.

Persecution of Basques and Italians?

Nirenberg suggests that two other minorities, Basques and Italian foreigners, were also persecuted in Aragon during the summer of 1321, and speculates that these groups may have been suspected in participation in the plot.[152] Since this chapter aims to examine the transfer of well-poisoning accusations from one minority group to another, this idea should be evaluated further. If the accusers indeed targeted Basques and Italians, it may indicate that once well-poisoning accusations were accepted as truth, it was easy to direct them against any minority group. Neither Basques nor Italians played a significant role in the narrative that justified the persecution in France, and if they were persecuted in Aragon, one must conclude that this narrative continued to evolve.

In the case of Basques, the evidence suggests that a few individuals may have been associated with the plot. On 10 August in Barbastro, two Basques were arrested for unspecified reasons and were sent to the vicar of Barcelona.[153] Two weeks earlier, another Basque, Ponç de Rayes, asked the king for a letter stating that he was not involved in well poisoning, and could

[151] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 110.
[152] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 98-101.
[153] "duas vascones" - ACA, Cancillería, Registros, no. 246, f. 254v.

travel as he wished. The king granted his request.[154] About a year later, a doctor called Amonaut received permission from the king to move from the Basque country (i.e. the French Basque country) to Aragon, despite rumors that he was from a family of lepers.[155] However, these pieces of evidence are inconclusive in supporting the idea that Basques were associated with well poisoning. First, there is no reason to think that the two Basques who were arrested in Barbastro were accused of well poisoning. Ponç de Rayes and Amonaut feared the possibility that they would be suspected of such crime, but they were probably never arrested. Thus, there is not clear evidence that any Basques were ever arrested for poisoning wells. Moreover, even if individual Basques were indeed arrested, there is no reason to think that Basques as a group were associated with the plot. Indeed, it may be reasonable to conclude that if Ponç de Rayes and Amonaut asked for a letter of protection from the king they had some reason to fear arrest. Still, this reason was not necessarily tied to their Basque origin. As we have seen, already in June the king had ordered his officials to arrest any foreigners who entered his kingdom, especially those coming from France.[156] Thus, any travelers who passed the Pyrenees in the months following this order should have expected some confrontation with royal officials. And so, other travelers also asked for letters of protection from King Jaime, whether or not they were Basques.[157]

Nirenberg also supports the notion that Basques were suspected of well poisoning with circumstantial evidence. As we have seen, in south-western France the lepers were sometimes associated with people called *Cagots*, who were also segregated based on this association. This phenomenon was especially common in the area of Béarn, which is at the center of the French

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[154] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 98.

[155] McVaugh, *Medicine Before the Plague*, 220; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 99; Nirenberg, "Violence and the Persecution of Minorities," 209-210.

[156] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 94-95; Nirenberg, "Violence and the Persecution of Minorities," 328-330; Finke, *Acta Aragonensia*, 2:934, no. 605.

[157] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 98, n. 13.

Basque country.[158] One chronicler reported that the *Cagots* were also accused of well poisoning in 1321, and probably suffered the same fate as the lepers.[159] Therefore, Nirenberg suggested that Basques who crossed the border into Aragon in 1321 were suspected of being *Cagots*, and were more likely to be accused of involvement in the lepers' plot.[160] While this idea certainly makes sense, it is not supported by the sources. The only actual evidence for well-poisoning accusations against *Cagots* comes from Lisle-sur-Tarn and Montauban, almost 100 miles away from Béarn.[161] This is not very surprising, since *Cagots* lived in different locations in south-western France in the fourteenth century, and not only in Basque territories.[162] Indeed, we have no reason to think that cases of persecution against *Cagots* did not also happen closer to the border in 1321. Still, the association between Basques, *Cagots*, and well poisoning seems far from certain.

The case of the persecution of Italians is quite different. There is no doubt that immigrants from northern Italy resided in both France and Aragon, and that they were often suspected of disloyalty, for both political and economic reasons. Aragon was in a continuous commercial rivalry with Genoa, and so Genoese merchants were not always welcome there.[163] Nirenberg presents one document which indicates that a general arrest of Genoese took place in 1321, a letter sent from the king to the city of Elx in October 1322. According to the letter, a Genoese man was arrested in Elx by the power "of [the king's] universal mandate […] regarding the seizure of all Genoese men

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[158] Guerreau and Guy, *Les cagots du Béarn*. 32-38, 75-105; Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 260-265, 272-283; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 38-39.

[159] *Chronique parisienne anonyme*, 57. And maybe also: *Chronique de Saint-*Denis, 704-705.

[160] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 98-99. Sánchez suggested a similar idea: Sánchez, "La persecució d'un collectiu marginat," 35-42.

[161] Rivière-Chalan, *La Marque infâme des lépreux*, 44-47; Sánchez, "La persecució d'un collectiu marginat," 35-42.

[162] Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 260-268, 272-283.

[163] Burns, *Muslims, Christians, and Jews*, 110, 113-114, 117-118. For bibliography, see: Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 99-100, n. 15.

and their goods, which they managed to get or took in this area."[164] Another letter, discussing the arrest of two Florentines in Valencia, led Nirenberg to believe that Italians were targeted during the well poisoning investigations in Aragon.[165] However, this conjecture is far from proven. Both documents were created several months after the persecution, and it is unclear when exactly the arrests of the Italians occurred. But even if these arrests indeed happened at the same time as the persecution of the lepers, the connection between the two events is doubtful. Neither documents mentions well poisoning, or indicates in any other way that the Italians were involved in the plot. While Italians in Aragon may have faced legal violence in 1321, there is no reason to think that they were accused of poisoning wells.

Still, one wonders what led to the general arrest of Genoese in Aragon, which may have happened around this time. If the French example can serve as an indication, it seems that the Crown had reasons to arrest Italians independently of well poisoning suspicions. During the beginning of the fourteenth century, immigrants from northern Italy, often called "Lombards", became more significant to French economy. They often took over the economic role previously held by the Jews, after the latter were expelled from the country in 1306. The Jews regularly provided credit and financial instruments to support urban economic activity, a function which was necessary for merchants, artisans and common citizens. After they were forced to leave, others had to supply these services. The Italians, who often came from cities that were the commercial and financial centers of Europe at the time, had the needed skills. However, interest loans, as useful as they may have been to urban economy, were considered usury, a sinful practice. As the Italians became more involved in providing such loans, they were also associated with the negative

[164] "Mandati nostri universaliter vobis et aliis officiales nostris dictae partis facti super capiendis quibuscumque januensem et eius bonis qui in dicta parte invenirent seu degerent." - Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 99-100, n. 16. Original in: ACA, Cancillería, Registros, no. 176, f. 276 r-v.

[165] ACA, Cancillería, Registros, no. 172, f. 202 r-v; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 100.

attributes they represented, namely, greed, selfishness and dishonesty. The fact that they were foreigners contributed to the hostility towards them, and put them in a vulnerable political position.[166] And so, like the Jews, Italians were often a target for additional royal taxation and regulation. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, French kings initiated a specific tax on foreign merchants, usually Italians, and especially on ones who were involved in interest loans. Also, the crown occasionally demanded random payments from Italians to cover unexpected fiscal needs, and required monetary "gifts" for the continuation of royal privileges.[167] King Philip V, who had to face a series of economic problems during his reign, was particularly active in this respect. In 1317 he condemned the economic practices of the Italian merchants and ordered that those guilty of such practices pay the Crown a fine of 5% of their goods.[168] This fine soon became a permanent tax levied on foreign merchants.[169] In the middle of June 1320 "all of the Lombard usurers were arrested", and much of their property was confiscated by the Crown.[170] The king did not stop there, and in April 1321 cancelled royal privileges which were previously given to Italian merchants.[171] The actions that the king took against Italians and Jews, and in particular the confiscation of property, were common knowledge. When he tried to initiate new taxation in 1321, the Parisian townsmen protested and asked: "What has happened to the royal revenues […] and

[166] Kathryn L. Reyerson, *Business, Banking and Finance in Medieval Montpellier* (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Author, 1985), 67-72, 83-85; John B. Henneman, "Taxation of Italians by the French Crown (1311-1363)," *Mediaeval Studies* 31 (1969), 15-17; Myriam Greilsammer, *L'usurier chrétien, un juif métaphorique? Histoire de l'exclusion des prêteurs lombards, XIIIe-XVIIe siècle* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2012), 38-41, 54-63, 69-71.

[167] Henneman, "Taxation of Italians," 15-43.

[168] Laurière, *Ordonnances des roys de France*, 1:630-631.

[169] Henneman, "Taxation of Italians," 21-24.

[170] "Furent pris tous les Lombars usuriers" - Brussel, *Nouvel examen de l'usage général des fiefs*, 608; R.H.G, 22:758. Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews", 312-313, n. 49.

[171] Laurière, *Ordonnances des roys de France*, 1:749-750; For dating: Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews", 312-313, n. 49.

exactions from Jews and Lombards?"[172] Thus, one can conclude that Italians, like Jews, were often a target for extraction and legal violence by the Crown. Their compromised social and political status probably led to their arrest, the confiscation of their property and the revoking of their privileges in 1320 and 1321. It had nothing to do with well-poisoning accusations.

Similar reasons, namely royal attempts to secure funds, may have caused the arrests of Italians in Aragon in 1321.[173] The two Florentines arrested in Valencia had to pay royal officials a large sum of money in order to be finally released.[174] King Jaime's decree against the Genoese included an order to confiscate all of the property that they gained from their activity in his kingdom.[175] There is more evidence, then, to suggest that Italians were arrested for their "sinful" economic activity than for poisoning wells. As in the case of the Basques, royal legislation and popular prejudice against foreigners may have put them in danger of arrest in 1321, but none of them were convicted of well poisoning, and it is unlikely that they were associated with such a crime as a group.

Conclusions from the comparison of well-poisoning accusations against different minorities

The conclusion that Basques and Italians were probably not accused of well poisoning in 1321 is more important than it may seem at first sight. It supports the idea that there was nothing trivial

[172] "Quest devenue la rente du royaume et les dismes et les anneulz des benefices dont il a eu les rentes du premier an et la subvention des Juifs et des Lombards?" - *Chronique de Saint-Denis*, 705; *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, 8:361; Taylor, "French Assemblies," 242. Jews and Lombards are mentioned together as usurers also in other sources, for example: *Chronique Rimée attribuée à Geoffroi de Paris*, R.H.G., 22:153; Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 220-221; Greilsammer, *L'usurier chrétien,* 54-57.

[173] At this time, the king was trying to increase the incomes of the Crown in order to finance his war in Sardinia, including by additional taxation of Jews: Meyerson, *Jews in an Iberian Frontier Kingdom*, 133-134, 194-196.

[174] ACA, Cancillería, Registros, no. 172, f. 202 r-v; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 100.

[175] "Mandati nostri universaliter vobis […] super capiendis quibuscumque januensem et eius bonis qui in dicta parte invenirent seu degerent." - Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 99-100, n. 16; ACA, Cancillería, Registros, no. 176, f. 276 r-v.

about transference of these accusations from one minority group to another. The Basques were a culturally distinct minority group that lived at the center of the area in which lepers were persecuted. Italian merchants filled the same economic role as the Jews in France, and thus were often branded as usurers and suffered from royal action. Yet, unlike the lepers and the Jews, these groups were likely not accused of well poisoning. Not all minority groups were equally likely to be associated with well poisoning, even if their members found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The accusations originally focused on lepers, and to same degree also on *Cagots*, who were persecuted in both France and Aragon. The transference of the accusations from the lepers to the Jews in France required some effort from nobles and officials: they had to initiate arrests and investigations, produce evidence and confessions, and convince the king and the pope. This process did not happen spontaneously, as the dynamic of the persecution in Aragon shows. When Aragonese officials suggested that local Jews may have been involved in the plot, King Jaime ordered them to drop the matter. Rumors about the involvement of the Jews in the plot probably crossed the border into Aragon, but popular fear without official support was not enough to drive persecution. Even in the case of the Muslims, who received less royal protection from the accusations, it seems that no mass violence erupted. And so, this comparison emphasizes the critical role that the nobles and officials of central and eastern France played in the shifting of the accusations from lepers to Jews. Naturally, the next question is why they did so.

Reasons for targeting the Jews as well poisoners

In general, the political, social and economic status of the Jews of France was much compromised even before the events of 1321. In 1306, King Philip IV ordered their expulsion from the country,

and took over much of their property in the process. The Jews fled mostly into the kingdoms of Aragon, Navarre, and Majorca, and the lands east of the river Rhône, but also to other locations.[176] Yet in 1315 they were invited to return to France by King Louis X. King Louis was in a great need of additional income, and hoped to raise some of it from the returning Jews. He asked Jewish leaders to organize a large payment as a condition for his agreement for their return, among other conditions. First, an additional annual payment to the crown was due. Second, Jews were only allowed to inhabit places in which a Jewish community existed before 1306, and only the exiles and the families could return. Third, Jews had to wear a distinctive badge on their clothing, and their religious and economic activity was restricted. Most importantly, the agreement with the Crown was limited in time. After twelve years, royal permission for the Jewish presence was to expire, unless the king decided to renew it.[177] And so, the Jews who indeed returned to France faced major legal, political and economic limitations, and even their presence was temporary by definition. Why would any Jews agree to come back to France under these conditions? Most of them did not. The number of Jews in the kingdom after 1315 was about a third of their number prior to 1306, according to Jordan's assessment.[178] While many of the exiles fitted easily into their new communities, others did not find their place. They lamented the expulsion, and saw themselves as a distinct minority within their new environment.[179] When the opportunity to return

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[176] Note that Provence was not yet part of France and had well established Jewish communities, so it became a major destination for Jewish exiles: Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 200-238; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 297-298; Einbinder, *No Place of Rest*, 1-3; Yom Tov Assis, "Juifs de France réfugiés en Aragon XIIIe-XIVe siècles," *REJ* 142 (1983), 291-309.

[177] Laurière, *Ordonnances des roys de France*, 1:595-597; Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 239-241; Assis, "Juifs de France réfugié," 309-310; Jordan, "Home Again," 27-31; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 298-299; Barber, "The Pastoureaux," 163-165.

[178] Jordan, "Home Again," 28.

[179] Einbinder, *No Place of Rest*, 37-83; Assis, "Juifs de France réfugié," 302-310; Kalonymus ben Kalonymus, *Eben Bochen,* 102; Jordan, "Home Again," 31.

to their old home was suddenly presented, they were not willing to reject it, despite the limitations posed on their presence.

The attempt to reincorporate the Jews back into the country faced major problems from the very beginning. One Parisian chronicler expressed confusion, and maybe even disapproval, regarding the sudden change in royal policy: "And in this year [1315], the Jews that King Philip the Fair drove out of his kingdom were called back to Paris and were returned to the kingdom of France by the son of the very same king."[180] This chronicler was probably not the only one to think that King Louis essentially recreated a problem that his father had already solved. Before their expulsion, the Jews were an isolated, and often abhorred, religious minority in the kingdom, and their legal status had to be constantly renegotiated. Throughout the thirteenth century, kings had to either limit their religious privileges, economic activity and political influence, or protect them from popular rage. Many were happy to see the Jews leave in 1306, and were displeased to witness their return.[181] Others may have hoped that the return of the Jews would improve their economic position and allow them to receive loans in more convenient conditions, but they were not necessarily the majority.[182] The royal edict demanded that the Jews "work with their hands", that is, that they not engage in moneylending.[183] This demand was probably presented since the king acknowledged that Jewish economic activity was seen as sinful and usurious, and he expected popular opposition to their return to work as moneylenders. Still, there were exceptions to this rule,

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[180] "Et en cest an les Juis que le roy Phelippe le bel avoit chaciés de son royaume, yceli roy son fils les rapella a Paris et fist revenir en son royaume de France." - *Chronique de Saint-Denis*, 697; *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, 8:320; Jordan, "Home Again," 32.

[181] Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 91-199; Jordan, "Home Again," 28-32; Assis, "Juifs de France réfugié," 309-311; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 297-298; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 48-51; Shatzmiller, *Shylock Reconsidered*, 58-62; Elliott, "Jews 'Feigning Devotion'," 169-175.

[182] *Chronique Rimée attribuée à Geoffroi de Paris*, 118-119; Shatzmiller, *Shylock Reconsidered*, 104-118.

[183] "II laborront de leurs mains" - Laurière, *Ordonnances des roys d1e France*, 1:596; Jordan, "Home Again," 29.

which allowed the Jews to engage in some forms of credit supply, as they indeed did.[184] The fact that the Jews returned to their old sinful ways (or seemed to do so) was a sources of resentment towards them, which was aggravated by a certain royal privilege given to them. When the Jews were expelled from France in 1306, outstanding debts to them became debts to the Crown. However, these were not always easy to find and collect, and many Christian debtors escaped payment. When the Jews returned, the king allowed them to collect these lost debts, under the condition that one third of the money go to the Jews, and two thirds to the royal treasury. Thus, the king made the Jews into informal debt collectors, and used their presence to raise additional incomes for the Crown, in what could have been seen as an act of indirect taxation.[185] And so, the Jews quickly returned to the same legal status that they left behind in 1306: an isolated and alienated minority, dependent on the good will of the king.

Indeed, King Louis acted to guarantee the protection of the Jews by negotiating an agreement with the local nobility in the places where the Jews were to resettle.[186] Yet, this agreement quickly proved to be less then reliable. The relations between some of the nobles and the Crown were tense, as King Louis inherited the crown soon after his father overpowered a rebellion of provincial aristocrats. Despite the agreement, some of the nobles were less than thrilled to recive the Jews back into their domains. Even royal officials were not always willing to protect the Jews against popular resentment, despite official royal policy.[187] Things only got worse when famine struck the northern parts of the kingdom in summer 1315. The Jews were perceived as

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[184] Jordan, "Home Again," 29, 32-35; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 299-300; Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 242-243; Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 110-111, 170; Shatzmiller, *Shylock Reconsidered*, 43-55, 62-70; Barber, "The Pastoureaux," 164-165; Lehugeur, *Histoire de Philippe le Long*, 2:434-435.

[185] Jordan, "Home Again," 32-33; Laurière, *Ordonnances des roys de France*, 1:596; Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 240-241; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 48-50. King Philip V changed this part of the agreement on August 1316: Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 298-299, 325.

[186] Laurière, *Ordonnances des roys de France*, 1:595-597; Jordan, "Home Again," 27-28.

[187] Jordan, "Home Again," 33; Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 239-242.

using the crisis to increase their profits, and as adding to the already growing hardship. Moreover, due to the economic crisis they were a target for additional taxation by the nobility, and were also required to supply more credit.[188] In addition, in the middle of 1316 king Louis died unexpectedly, less than a year after the return of the Jews, and so the promised royal protection was suddenly very doubtful. In contrast with his brother, the new king, Philip V, had a record of abusing the Jews rather than protecting them. Only a few weeks before King Louis allowed the Jews to return, Philip had seized the Jews of the towns of Vesoul and Gray in the Franche-Comté, which were under his control.[189] Some of the Jews may have been concerned that the new ruler would choose to follow in the footsteps of his father, who expelled the Jews, rather than his brother.[190] Yet, Philip quickly reaffirmed royal protection for the Jews, under conditions which were quite similar to those presented by King Louis.[191] The Jewish presence in France survived its first significant challenge, but the inherent problems which put this presence at risk were far from resolved.

During the five years that passed from the beginning of his reign to the persecution of the Jews in 1321, King Philip had to address several challenges regarding their legal status. In October 1317 the king responded to complaints from the area of Montpellier, and stressed that the Jews were not allowed to give usurious loans. Also, he insisted that the Jews should wear badges to distinguish them from Christians, mainly to prevent them from consorting with Christian women.[192] It seems that the integration of the Jews in this area was problematic, and the king

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[188] Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 62, 110-111, 155-156; Jordan, "Home Again," 34-37.

[189] The Jews of the Franche-Comté, that is the County of Burgundy (and not the Duchy of Burgundy), were not expelled in 1306. Philip gained control over this territory through the dowry of his wife, Jeanne: Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 299, 316, especially n. 67, 326-329; Holtmann, "Implantation et expulsion," 139-145, 147; Holtmann, *Juden in der Grafschaft Burgund*, 293-300.

[190] Philip IV allowed the Jews to return to France in 1311, but immediately expelled them again. Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 298-299; Jordan, "Home Again," 33-34, 36.

[191] Document from 29 August 1316, printed in: Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 325; Lehugeur, *Histoire de Philippe le Long*, 2:431-433.

[192] Laurière, *Ordonnances des roys de France*, 11:447; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 299-300.

accepted the grievances of local Christians in this case. On the other hand, in April 1318, the king issued an order to his officials to stop harassing the Jews of the kingdom. Apparently, royal officials were unusually harsh as they forced Jews to pay excessive fines, arrested them for minor offenses and prevented them from engaging in lawful economic activity.[193] In this case, the king acted to protect the Jews. Still, in the same year he published another two decrees against their usurious economic activity.[194] The king was probably trying to address these complaints in a way that would satisfy his Christian subjects, but also protect the Jews. Still, the king himself also added to the tension between Jews and Christians, since his insistence on collecting old Jewish debts for the royal treasury continued to arouse opposition, especially in the South.[195] However, not all the complaints focused on the "sinful" economic activity of the Jews. In February 1320, the king responded to complaints of friars and local officials from Troyes, who claimed that Jews interrupted Christian rituals and showed disrespect to Christian ideas and traditions.[196] Sometimes, such objections to Jewish irreverence towards Christianity were directly connected to the idea that they were incorrigible usurers. In a letter sent to the king sometime before February 1321, communities from the area of Carcassonne protested several aspects of royal policy, including the presence of the Jews. As in many of the other cases reviewed, they denounced the Jews for lending money with interest and other illegal economic practices. Yet, they also presented this activity as a growing danger for the public good, claiming that: "the voracity of the Jews devoured the citizens

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[193] Laurière, *Ordonnances des roys de France*, 1:645-647; Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 241-242. For dating, see: Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 300, n. 12.

[194] Laurière, *Ordonnances des roys de France*, 1:682-683. It is difficult to date this document accurately: Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 300, n. 14; Jacme Olivier, *Le livre de comptes de Jacme Olivier, marchand narbonnais du XIVe siècle,* Alphonse Blanc, ed. (Paris: Picard, 1899), 800-802.

[195] Jacme Olivier, *Le livre de comptes*, 809-817.

[196] Philippe Guignard, "Mandement de Philippe le Long relatif aux Juifs de Troyes," *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 10 (1849), 413-15.

of the kingdom and impoverished them in many ways."[197] Beyond the regular complaints, the Jews were accused of using their position as lenders to have intercourse with poor Christian women. Another charge was that on several occasions, the Jews accepted the Eucharist, namely, a consecrated host, from lepers or other Christians. Allegedly, the Jews wanted to desecrate the host, and the lepers, or other Christians who were alienated from the general society, were willing to help.[198] Considering the fact that the same document also called for the segregation of lepers, the connection made here between these two minorities may not be surprising.[199] In any case, the drafters of the document had a clear solution in mind for the problems allegedly caused by the Jewish presence in their midst. They called on the king to re-expel all of the Jews from his kingdom, this time for good.

The protest of the communities of Carcassonne, like the other documents presented above, did not change significantly the royal policy regarding the Jews. The king indeed stressed that they should not engage in usury and continued to demand additional taxes from them, but he did not withdraw the basic agreement made with them by King Louis X until the end of 1321. This royal policy may have led some Christians to take action against the Jews in ways much more aggressive than a petition to the Crown. A review of the records of the *Parlement* of Paris reveals several cases in which violence, mostly legal violence, was aimed at the Jews of France in the years leading up to 1321. Sometime before 5 May 1317, a Christian boy was murdered in Chinon, in the

[197] "judeorum voracitas devoret ac depauperet regnicolas multis modis" - Compayre, *Etudes historiques*, 256. For more about this document, and other similar to it, see: Rivière-Chalan, *La Marque infâme des lépreux*, 55; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 37; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 308-309; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 53; Georges Passerat, "Les Juifs de Toulouse entre deux expulsions," in *Philippe le bel et les Juifs du royaume de France (1306),* Danièle Iancu-Agou, ed. (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2012), 170.

[198] "cum pluribus pauperibus mulieribus christianis sua pignora redimere volentibus inhumaniter ac nefando carnaliter promiscendo et Eucaristiam quam sepe convicti sunt a manibus leprosorum et aliorum christianorum nequiter habuisse, vilipendendo in detrimentum altissimi creatoris, atque alia horibilia nequiter comitendo frequenter in eternalis magestatis offensum et despectum fidei ortodoxe" - Compayre, *Etudes historiques*, 256-257.

[199] For the discussion of the same document in the context of the segregation of lepers, see: Ch. 2, 137-139.

Touraine. The local *bailli* responded by arresting several Jews on suspicion of committing this crime. He investigated four of them under torture, and two of them confessed and were hanged. The other two were kept in prison until other Jews appealed to the king, who acted to protect "his Jews". He stressed that the he knew well that the Jews were innocent, and ordered local officials to make sure that they were released and their property returned to them. The authorities continued to investigate this crime, and indeed arrested a group of Christians for the murder a couple of months later.[200] In October, the *bailli* of Vermandois arrested a Jewish doctor named David in the town of Saint-Quentin. David was accused of poisoning many Christians, including a priest to whom he owned money. His brother-in-law, Abraham, was accused of assisting him with the poisoning, and also with clipping coins. It is possible that in this case the monetary crimes, avoiding payment of a loan and currency manipulation, led to a more significant accusation, i.e. poisoning.[201] In March 1318, the Jews of Château-Thierry in Champagne asked the *bailli* of Vitry to arrest a group of Christians. According to the Jews, these Christians entered the local synagogue by force, broke the ark, and took the Torah scrolls which were in it. This act was contrary to the royal privileges given to the Jews, and so they demanded that the royal official to act to protect them.[202] About a year later, the *Parlement* ordered the *baillis* of Meaux, Tours, Orléans and Bourges to find and arrest another band of outlaws who acted against the Jews. In this case, the offenders lied to local Jews and claimed that they had a royal mandate to collect gold from them for the Crown. The *Parlement* directed the *baillis* to report the results of the investigation to the royal treasury, which may suggest that it anticipated some income for the Crown. It is possible that

[200] Boutaric, *Actes du Parlement de Paris*, 2:180, no. 4827, 191-192, no. 4936.

[201] Ibid, 2:201, no. 5023.

[202] Ibid, 2:222, no. 5230. For royal commitment to protect synagogues and Jewish books: Laurière, *Ordonnances des roys de France*, 1:596, nos. 8-9.

the officials were intended to make sure that the money collected by the bandits would indeed end up in the royal treasury rather than be returned to the Jews. In this case, they considered the crime to be mostly against the Crown, and were less interested in protecting the Jews or compensating them.[203]

When considering these anti-Jewish incidents as a precursor to the events of 1321, one should pay attention to their location. As we have seen, the Touraine, and Chinon in particular, was one of the major centers of persecution in 1321. Another center was in Champagne, where Château-Thierry is located.[204] Thus, it seems that at least in some cases anti-Jewish attacks in 1321 took place in areas which had a recent history of such attacks. It is tempting to speculate that the *baillis*, or other officials, had particularly anti-Jewish sentiments in these areas. However, in both cases it seems that the *baillis* who had to deal with the attacks in the period between 1317 and 1319 had been already replaced by 1321.[205] A more likely explanation would be that the general population in these areas was opposed to the presence of the Jews and encouraged local officials to act against them. As we have seen, in some cases citizens were eager to attack the Jews or to assist the authorities in acting against them.[206] One can safely assume that the same people who accused the Jews of murder or poisoning in 1317 were more willing to accept well-poisoning accusations against them in 1321.

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[203] Boutaric, *Actes du Parlement de Paris*, 2:274, no. 5713.

[204] Boutaric, *Actes du Parlement de Paris*, 2:420, no. 6661; *Chronique parisienne anonyme*, 59; *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 35-36; *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto*, 56-57; *Chronique de Saint-Denis*, 705; *Le Roman de Renart le contrefait*, 206-207; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 44, 48-49; Lazard, "Les Juifs de Touraine," 231-234; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 64; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 305-306, 311; Holtmann, "Le massacre des Juifs à Chinon," 82-89.

[205] The *bailli* of Vitry in 1318 was Pierre le Jumeau, and he was replaced by Jean de Macheri in 1320. The situation in Touraine is less clear, as some sources suggest that Jean de Vaudringhem was the *bailli* from 1317 to 1325 and others claim that four different *baillis* held the position during this period: R.H.G 24, 165, 170.

[206] John XXII, *De bello sarracenis inferendo*, 570; Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, 1:366-368, nos. 348 and 350.

The best example of such an anti-Jewish popular movement is, of course, the *Pastoureaux* (shepherds' crusade) of 1320. This movement started in the North, made its way to Paris, and from there to Aragon through the western parts of France. On their way, the shepherds systematically attacked Jewish communities, forcing thousands (if the chroniclers can be trusted on this point) to baptize or die.[207] Yet, one wonders what made the *Pastoureaux* so anti-Jewish, and how the attacks served the purpose of the movement. The first reason for this tendency was the crusading mentality of the movement. The shepherds saw themselves as crusaders, and wished to fight the enemies of Christianity. They never came close to reaching any Muslim territory, and so turned against the Jews, which were considered the only anti-Christian minority in France.[208] Another issue was the social and economic status of the *Pastoureaux*, who, as their name suggests, came mostly from the lower classes of the society. They suffered the most from the famine and the economic crisis which struck the kingdom, and were probably the most upset with the Jews, who allegedly worsened the situation.[209] Finally, as Nirenberg suggested, these two tendencies were heightened by the anti-royal ideology that fueled the movement. There is no evidence that the shepherds were violent at the early stages of their campaign for a new crusade. However, when they reached Paris to demand that King Philip lead them, they were disappointed to discover that the king had no such intention, despite his early promises.[210] Instead, his officials tried to prevent the *Pastoureaux* from entering the city, and even captured some of their leaders. These actions triggered the violence of the

[207] Barber, "The Pastoureaux," 143-166; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 43-46; Lehugeur, *Histoire de Philippe le Long*, 2:417-421; Passerat, *La Croisade des Pastoureaux*,43-109. Passerat also published almost all of the relevant primary sources at pp. 117-150, other than: Kalonymus ben Kalonymus, *Eben Bochen*, 102-103.

[208] Barber, "The Pastoureaux," 144-149; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 46-48; Tyerman, "Philip V of France," 16-17, 29; Passerat, *La Croisade des Pastoureaux*, 21-45, 70-71.

[209] Barber, "The Pastoureaux," 144-148, 158-164; Jordan, "Home Again," 34-37; Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 62, 110-111, 155-156; Lehugeur, *Histoire de Philippe le Long*, 2:412-415, 418-419; Passerat, *La Croisade des Pastoureaux*, 71-76.

[210] Tyerman, "Philip V of France," 16-17, 29; Barber, "The Pastoureaux," 145-146. This was not the first "popular crusade" in the history of medieval France: Passerat, *La Croisade des Pastoureaux*, 29-39, 43-45, 76-77.

shepherds, who attacked the officials and liberated their men by force. From this point, the movement abandoned any hope of cooperating with the king, and took on anti-royal and violent tendencies. The "crusaders" saw the Jews as royal agents, probably with some degree of justice. As we have seen, the king used the Jews to extract more income from his subjects, and granted them special protection. In many ways, attacking the Jews was a clear action against the Crown, but still carried less risk than a direct attack on royal officials.[211] Many of the social tensions which were created by presence of the Jews in France after 1315 were manifested in the *Pastoureaux*.

Despite the fact that the king clearly objected to the actions of the shepherds, royal officials, city councils and local nobles in south-western France often allowed them to attack the Jews. In most cases they simply let the attackers enter the town, or did not put up much of a fight against them. Sometimes, they even helped them to find and capture Jews.[212] This fact is less than surprising when one considers the repeated complaints of the same people and institutions against the presence and the actions of the Jews in the years that preceded the events of 1320. As we have seen, many of them were displeased with the fact that the Jews came back to the kingdom and returned to their old ways. When King Louis allowed them to enter the kingdom, he promised his nobles that the Jews would not engage in unlawful economic activity and suggested that they might convert in the future.[213] However, the Jews did not stop giving loans at interest, and did not convert to Christianity. Still, the King Philip did not expel them the kingdom, even though his brother had declared that their presence was meant to be temporary to begin with. This royal policy only added to the frustration of many with the fact that the king defaulted on his promise to start a new crusade

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[211] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 48-51; also see: Passerat, *La Croisade des Pastoureaux*, 98-104.

[212] Barber, "The Pastoureaux," 147, 150-156; Lehugeur, *Histoire de Philippe le Long*, 2:419-421; Passerat, *La Croisade des Pastoureaux*, 77-98.

[213] Jordan, "Home Again," 32; Laurière, *Ordonnances des roys de France*, 1:595-596. Considering the mistrust toward Jewish converts, it is unclear whether French nobles were actually hoping for such mass conversion: Elliott, "Jews 'Feigning Devotion'," 169-175.

and with his recurring attempts to raise additional taxes.[214] Thus, the *Pastoureaux* were probably considered as a movement which aimed at reforming royal policy and acted to achieve what the king was unable to do by himself: expel or covert the Jews and start a popular crusade without additional taxation. Royal officials, city councils and local nobles were probably hoping to promote these goals when they allowed the shepherds to act freely in their territories, particularly against the Jews.[215]

However, the *Pastoureaux*, like other attacks or official complaints against the Jews, failed. The king continued to protect the Jews despite his awareness of the growing resentment against them. This was the political and social situation which preceded the transformation of well poisoning accusation from lepers to Jews. As we have seen, royal officials and local nobles had to act vigorously to implicate the Jews and force the king to acknowledge their "guilt". It is likely that they did so since they saw an opportunity to change royal policy towards the Jews, as they had failed to do in the past. In June 1321, the king accepted the guilt of the lepers and gave royal confirmation that a well-poisoning plot indeed took place.[216] The actions of local officials in the South-West against the lepers, even if they were taken before the king acknowledged the plot, were justified in retrospect. Some of the nobles and officials of the kingdom probably hoped that the same thing could be achieved also in the case of the Jews, if they were able to implicate them in the plot. So, they fabricated the necessary evidence to prove the involvement of the Jews, and pressured the king to allow them to "investigated". Once he did so, on 26 July, local officials and nobles throughout the kingdom had a justification to arrest the Jews, torture, convict, and execute

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[214] Tyerman, "Philip V of France," 15-24; Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 240, 244-245; Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 167-171; Jordan, "Home Again," 37-38; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 60-61; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 714-718; Brown, "Subsidy and Reform," 399-431; Taylor, "French Assemblies," 217-244; Passerat, *La Croisade des Pastoureaux*, 43-45.

[215] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 48-51.

[216] Duplès-Agier, 'Ordonnance de Philippe le Long contre les lépreux,' 265-272.

them.[217] This chain of events also explains why the alleged role of the Jews in the plot seems like an afterthought. In almost all of the Christian accounts which discuss their crime, they were said to be the middlemen between the Muslim rulers and the lepers of France.[218] However, the original narrative of the plot did not require such middleman, and in some of the early accounts the Muslims were said to contact the lepers directly.[219] Therefore, it seems that only after the initial success of changing the royal policy towards the lepers by using well-poisoning accusations, nobles and officials decided to use the same tool against the Jews. This was indeed successful, as the king had to accept the alleged involvement of the Jews, and so did later chroniclers.[220]

This conclusion, however, still does not account for the fact that Jews were persecuted mostly in the central and eastern parts of France, rather than the South-West. Supposedly, if the action against the Jews was based on well-poisoning accusations which were originally directed against lepers, it should have prospered in the same areas, but this was not the case. There are three factors that may explain this. First, it is possible that the attacks of the *Pastoureaux* against the Jews of south-western France caused local lords to be less concerned with their presence a year later. Many of the Jews of the area were killed by the shepherds, others converted to Christianity, and more fled to other areas.[221] By the summer of 1321, many of the Jews who returned to south-

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[217] Langlois, *Registres perdus*, 253-256.

[218] John XXII, *De bello sarracenis inferendo*, 570-572; Vidal, "La poursuite des lépreux en 1321," 512-514; *Le Roman de Renart le contrefait,* 206-207; *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 32-34; *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto,* 56; *Chronique de Saint-Denis,* 704-705; Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 133. There is only one exception: Robert de Béthune, *Chronique*, 325.

[219] Felip Sánchez, "La persecució d'un collectiu marginat," 35-42; Jacques Fournier, *Le Registre d'Inquisition de Jacques Fournier*, 137-147; Raymond Bernard de la Mote, *Chronique de Bazas*, 39.

[220] Langlois, *Registres perdus*, 253-256; *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, 32-34; *Chronicon Girardi de Fracheto,* 56; *Chronique de Saint-Denis,* 704-705; Jean de Saint-Victor, *Vita Joannis XXII*, 133; Robert de Béthune, *Chronique*, 325.

[221] Barber, "The Pastoureaux," 146-156; Kalonymus ben Kalonymus, *Eben Bochen,* 102-103; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 300-301; Passerat, *La Croisade des Pastoureaux*, 77-98, 104-105. Still, there may have been cases in which Jews who were forcibly converted returned to Judaism: Elliott, "Jews 'Feigning Devotion'," 169-175.

western France in 1315 were no longer there (or, at least, were not Jews anymore). This is not to suggest that there was no Jewish presence in the area whatsoever, or that local officials were happy with it, but this issue was probably more pressing in the North. If the property confiscated from Jews following the events of 1321 can serve as an indication, it seems that more Jews resided in the Touraine, Champagne and Burgundy, which were also the main centers of the persecution against them.[222] Another possible cause for the fact that the persecution of Jews took place mostly in the North and East of France was the famine. As we have seen, the Jews were accused of using the crisis for their own profit, by encouraging speculation in the grain market and offering more expensive loans. These accusations heightened the tensions between Christians and Jews, and were probably one of the factors that caused the persecution of 1321. Therefore, since the famine struck mostly the northern parts of France, it may not be surprising that the Jews were persecuted mostly there.[223] The third possible factor that differentiated between the North and the South was the tradition of legal and popular violence against Jews. As we have seen, most of the official petitions against the presence of the Jews in France in 1315 to 1321 came from the South-East. However, most of the violent attacks against them originated in the North. The *Pastoureaux* are the only possible major exception to this rule, but one must remember that this movement also originated in the North.[224] Thus, one may conclude that the people of the North were more hostile towards the Jews, and so were more willing to support well-poisoning accusations. It is difficult to prove

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[222] Passerat, "Les Juifs de Toulouse," 167, 169-172; Passerat, *La Croisade des Pastoureaux*, 75; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 312, n. 48, 315-320; Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 209-212, 244-247; Lazard, "Les Juifs de Touraine," 231-232; Viard, *Les journaux du trésor de Charles IV Le Bel*, 93, no. 434, 107-108, no. 497, 234-235, no. 1288. Unfortunately, the data from the South is more complete than from the North. However, it seems that the proportionate size of the incomes collected the South-West in 1322 was smaller than in 1306: Saige, *Les Juifs du Languedoc*, 103, 243-334.

[223] Jordan, "Home Again," 34-37; Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 7-39, 62, 110-111, 155-156; Larenaudie, "Les Famines en Languedoc," 37-38.

[224] Barber, "The Pastoureaux," 144-146; Passerat, *La Croisade des Pastoureaux*, 68-77.

this idea based solely on the limited evidence from the short period after the return of the Jews in 1315. Still, a review of the history of Christian hostility towards the Jews of France before the expulsion of 1306 teaches that indeed most of the incidents occurred in the North.[225] And so, it seems that the Jewish population was larger in the central and northern areas of the kingdom, and their social position there more challenged due to the famine and traditions of hostility. Thus, these areas were the centers of persecution against Jews in 1321, and not the South-East.

To conclude, the review of the social, economic and political status of the Jews in the kingdom prior to 1321 makes clear that many wished to see them expelled again, or even executed. Since their return in 1315, their presence had been defined as temporary and conditional in strict adherence to economic and religious limitations. The king was the one who allowed their return against the wishes of many of his subjects, and so the Jews were constantly dependent on royal protection. When the economic situation worsened due to the famine, the position of the Jews became even more vulnerable, and their original protector, King Louis X, was replaced by his brother. Indeed, until 1321 King Philip defended the Jewish presence against several political challenges and popular attacks. Still, the fact that lords, city councils and even royal officials initiated such challenges and allowed the attacks shows that they truly believed that they could pressure the king to turn against the Jews. Until 1321, their efforts were in vain, but after the Jews were implicated in involvement in the well-poisoning plot, the king had to concede to their demands.

[225] Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 17-22, 45-47, 110-112, 190-194, 219-221; Burns suggests that this might be a manifestation of a general difference between northern Europe and the Mediterranean world: Burns, *Muslims, Christians, and Jews*, 126-127.

Conclusion

Most of the historians who have studied the events of 1321 read the transference of well-poisoning accusation from lepers to Jews as a spontaneous occurrence: both groups were alienated and marginalized, and so it was natural that they would be accused of cooperating against the majority which mistreated them.[226] Nirenberg presented a more complex version of this idea, and suggested that lepers and Jews played a similar role in the "moral economy" of France, i.e. both represented the moral failures of the king. Many thought that the king neglected his duty as a Christian king by his attempts to raise taxes and his reluctance to launch another crusade. At the same time, he chose to protect the lepers and the Jews who represented an opposition to Christian values. And so, violent attacks against both lepers and Jews were actually an act of protest against royal policy, and it is no wonder that both groups were persecuted at the same time.[227] However, careful mapping of the accusations and the persecution shows that even this sophisticated explanation is not completely convincing. In south-western France and in Aragon, where the lepers were vigorously persecuted, it is difficult to find more than isolated cases of well-poisoning accusations against Jews, or against other minorities. In contrast, in central and eastern France, where the persecution of lepers was limited, Jews were executed systematically. Moreover, it seems that the persecution of Jews started only after the violence against the lepers was almost over. Thus, it seems that lepers and Jews were attacked in two waves of violence, separate both chronologically and geographically, and that it would be difficult to present one explanation for these two incidents. Instead, this chapter has examined all the known cases of well-poisoning accusations against non-lepers in order to explain their development and interconnection. Based on the existing sources, it

[226] Lehugeur, *Histoire de Philippe le Long*, 2:421-423, 429-430; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 37-39; Resnick, *Marks of Distinction,* 132-136; Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems," 5-6.
[227] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 56-65.

is possible to conclude that lords and royal officials in central and eastern France were very willing to support well-poisoning accusations against Jews. They accepted rumors and popular allegations as truth, and even went as far as fabricating evidence to convict the Jews. They also made sure that the king would acknowledge the accusations, and eventually justify the violence against the Jews. A comparison of this dynamic with the events in Aragon further supports this interpretation. Jews and Muslims were marginalized in Aragon, and rumors about their involvement in the plot reached the kingdom. However, while some of the officials there were willing to believe the accusations, most of them acted to protect these minorities. The fact the King Jaime II insisted on this policy probably prevented the violence from spreading. In comparison, King Philip IV avoided dealing with the crisis until he was forced to do so by his nobles, and then he was pressured to accept their position and allow them to investigate the Jews. The role that nobles and officials played in the development of the persecution is even clearer after examining the case of well-poisoning accusations against Italians and Basques. As Nirenberg points out, the social circumstances of these minorities in medieval France and Aragon made them into likely targets for hostility in general, and well-poisoning accusations in particular. However, since lords and officials did not promote an investigation against them, they never suffered such allegations. Thus, the next logical step was to examine the reasons why magistrates and nobles redirected well-poisoning accusations from the lepers to the Jews. The Jews returned to France in 1315 based on a temporary agreement which included strict limitations on their social, economic, and religious life. Still, their presence led to many official complaints from local leaders, and also aroused popular violence against them. The king was able to reject the complaints and punish the attackers, including the *Pastoureaux*, until summer 1321. However, after he acknowledged the existence of a plot and was presented with "evidence" for the involvement of the Jews, he had to concede. He ordered his officials to

investigate and punish the Jews, and practically justified the actions already taken against them. From this point forward, lords and officials were free to arrest, investigate, and execute Jews, as well as confiscate the property. And so, less than a year after these events, most of the Jews of France were forced into exile again.

The last two chapters have analyzed the first major wave of well-poisoning accusations, in France and Aragon in 1321. They have shown that these accusations were accepted by many, and could be used as a powerful political weapon against minority groups, in specific circumstances. However, such accusations were very rare for the next 27 years, until spring and summer 1348. At this time, the Black Death appeared in south-western Europe, and with it well-poisoning accusations, this time directed mostly against paupers, foreigners and vagabonds. Again, after about two months, the accusations were transferred to the Jews. This development leads to a series of questions: What was the connection between the appearance of the plague and the return of the accusations? Did people remember the events of 1321 and see a reason to believe the charges? Were the same agents active in creating and spreading the accusations? Under what circumstances were the allegations again transferred from marginalized Christians to Jews? Why and how did the accusations spread to new locations? The next chapter will review the reappearance of well-poisoning accusations in Languedoc, Provence, Aragon, the Dauphiné and Savoy in 1348, and will provide answers for these questions.

Chapter 4: The Plague and the Reemergence of Well-Poisoning Accusations in Southern Europe

Well-poisoning accusations died out after the summer of 1321. In the next 27 years no episodes of persecution caused by such accusations occurred in Languedoc or in Aragon, at least as far as the sources reveal.[1] This is not very surprising, as it was much harder to find the main victims of the accusations, the lepers and the Jews, in the Kingdom of France. Many of the lepers had been executed, and the others were restricted in their contacts with the general population. In addition, the overall number of lepers in Europe was declining during this period, and many leprosaria housed fewer lepers, or were even empty. There were fewer lepers in the South, and those who were still around were more segregated, thus their political and economic importance diminished.[2] As for the Jews, after the events of 1321, almost all of them left France. There was probably no official expulsion, but in 1322 many of those who survived the persecution decided, or were forced, to leave. As we have noted, the Jews were admitted to France in 1315 based on a temporary royal decree, which expired automatically after twelve years. Even if some Jews remained in France despite the hostility of local nobles and the collapse of their communities, they were officially banned from the kingdom after 1327. By 1348, there were probably no Jews left.[3] It seems that the accusations of 1321 were quite effective in forcing their victims into exile or social isolation, at least in France. Yet, once the potential targeted minorities were gone, so too were the allegations.

Well-poisoning accusations were indeed gone, but not forgotten. At the beginning of 1348, the Black Death reached the ports of Provence, Languedoc and Aragon, and soon after, well-

[1] Events of anti-Jewish violence took place, for example, in 1328 in Navarre and 1331 in Girona, yet there is no evidence that they were motivated by such accusations: Nadia Marin, "La matanza de 1328, testigos solidarios de la Navarra Cristiana," *Principe de Viana* 59 (1998), 147-155; Menahem ben Aaron ibn Zeraḥ, *Zedah la-Dereḥ* (Sabbioneta: Vincenzo Conti, 1567), 16; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 200-230.

[2] Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 139-184; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 294-300; Brodman, "Shelter and Segregation," 41-42.

[3] Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 294-329; Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 246-248; Jordan, "Home Again," 38-39; Einbinder, *No Place of Rest*, 2-3, 68-70.

poisoning accusations reemerged there. Clearly, the plague induced fear, anxiety, and social tension wherever it appeared. Still, one wonders why in some areas these feelings were manifested in well-poisoning accusations against minorities, while in others they were displayed in other ways. Moreover, we will see that even when well-poisoning allegations emerged, they took on different characteristics in different areas. In some cases, foreigners or beggars were the main victims, in others Jews. In some places the persecution was driven by popular unrest, and in others by the actions of local nobility. Sometimes whole communities were attacked, and in other cases only a few suspects were put on trial. This chapter studies and offers explanations for the regional variation in well-poisoning accusations in 1348. It focuses on Provence, Languedoc, Aragon and the counties of the Dauphiné and Savoy in the period from March to September 1348. It opens with a theoretical discussion about the connection between the Black Death and well-poisoning accusations. Then, it studies the first emergence of well-poisoning accusations in Provence and Languedoc, in April and May. It then turns to well-poisoning accusations in the Kingdom of Aragon, and compares that region to the other locations. Next, it examines the spread of the accusations from Provence to the counties of the Dauphiné and Savoy and analyzes the different dynamics which characterized them in these areas.

Historiographical discussion: plague, persecution and well-poisoning accusations

Many historians have noted the connection between the plague and the persecution of minorities, mostly Jews. Some suggested that as the people of medieval Europe faced the terrible catastrophe of the plague, they turned to look for someone to blame for the disaster. The hated Jews, who were perceived as enemies of Christianity, were an obvious target, and thus were accused of causing the

plague through well-poisoning and persecuted.[4] Many of the historians who present such arguments do so as part of a general discussion regarding the social and cultural status of the Jews in medieval Europe. They offer important context for understanding anti-Jewish mentality, and discuss interesting concepts regarding human reaction to a natural catastrophe.[5] It is not my intention to present their work as a historiographical "straw man" by simplifying all their arguments into a schematic "scapegoating" model.[6] Some of their insights are essential for understanding the sources describing particular events of persecution. However, all general explanations regarding the connection between the plague and the persecution of minorities must account for regional differences in the reaction to the disaster. As we will see in this chapter and the next, in many areas of Europe Jews were indeed the main victims of well-poisoning accusations. In contrast, in Italy and Castile no violence seems to have erupted against minorities, despite extensive mortality.[7] A general explanatory model is hard pressed to account for such significant regional variations in the connection between plague and persecution.[8]

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[4] Inter alia: Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 63, 68; Langmuir, *History, Religion and Antisemitism*, 126, 267, 301-303; Poliakov, *The History of Antisemitism*, 1:108-110; Baron, *A Social and Religious History*, 11:160-161, 164; Jean Delumeau, *La peur en Occident (XIVe-XVIIIe siècles): Une cité assiégée* (Paris: Fayard, 1978), 129-133; Klaus Bergdolt, *Der Schwarze Tod in Europa: Die Große Pest und das Ende des Mittelalters* (München: Beck, 1995), 119-120; Steven Rowan, "The *Grand Peur* of 1348-1349: The Shock Wave of the Black Death in the German Southwest," *Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association* 5 (1984), 120-23; Élisabeth Carpentier, "Autour de la peste noire: Famines et épidémies dans l'histoire du XIVe siècle," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 17 (1962), 1068-1069. See also Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 231-232.

[5] Ginzburg and Delumeau discuss the accusations of 1348-1350 as part of general studies of European culture and mentality in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period. Langmuir and Poliakov consider them a representation of medieval antisemitism, and Baron mentions them as a major event of Jewish history. Bergdolt and Carpentier review these events as part of an analysis of the social reaction to the Black Death. All of these perspectives are valid.

[6] Nirenberg rejects general scapegoating models as a useful tool to explain particular events of persecution, since they ignore major differences between these particular events: Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 241-243.

[7] Angel Vaca Lorenzo, "La Peste Negra en Castilla. Aportación al estudio de algunas de sus consecuencias económicas y sociales," *Voces* 2 (1984), 102-103; Samuel K. Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," *Past and Present* 196 (2007), 7-8. This is not to suggest that no violent incidents occurred during the first outbreak of the plague with no connection to minorities. In southern Italy, some revolted against the Catalans, who controlled some of the area: Michele di Piazza, *Cronaca*, ed. Antonino Giuffrida (Palermo: ILA Palma, 1980), 90-91.

[8] As others note: Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 231-232, 241-243; Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," 35-36.

Moreover, it is not completely clear that Jews were persecuted because of the plague even in areas in which they were clearly accused of poisoning. Iris Ritzmann noted, as did some other historians before her, that in some locations in the Empire the persecution of the Jews occurred *before* the Black Death appeared. Thus, she suggests that the persecution of 1348 was similar to other waves of mass violence against Jews, which were common in the Empire during the first half of the fourteenth century. Also, she points out that the massacres were usually not the actions of terrified mobs, but instead the acts of urban administrators. Based on these findings, she concludes that the idea that the persecution against the Jews was caused by the plague is but a myth, and that the real causes were religious, political or economic.[9] Other historians rejected this argument, pointing out that many sources claim explicitly that the persecution was triggered by well-poisoning accusations and that the plague was caused by infected water.[10] This debate reveals that different scholars may mean different things when they claim that the plague caused the persecution of minorities. Was the persecution the irrational response of people terrorized by the great mortality, or was it an organized attempt to prevent the plague (or the poisoning) from ever reaching their towns? Was it a popular response triggered by religious sentiments flamed by flagellants and preachers, or a series of mass executions orchestrated by political rivals of the Jews?[11] All of these scenarios represent different possible connections between the plague and the persecution; even the historians who agree that such a connection existed do not agree on its nature.

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[9] Iris Ritzmann "Judenmord als Folge des 'Schwarzen Todes': Ein medizinhistorischer Mythos?" *Medizin, Gesellschaft und Geschichte* 17 (1998), 101-124. For more careful versions of this argument, see: Mordechai Breuer, "The 'Black Death' and Antisemitism," 139-151; Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 333-334.

[10] Leven rejected Ritzmann's argument altogether, but his short response is not enough to show that Ritzmann's detailed work is unconvincing: Karl-Heinz Leven, "Schwarzer Tod, Brunnenvergiftung und Judenmord - nur ein medizinhistorischer Mythos?" *Praxis* 89 (2000), 374-376. He is, however, right to point out that there is much evidence that Jews were accused of well-poisoning: Bergdolt, *Der Schwarze Tod*, 127-139. Graus was aware of these cases, of course, but claimed that poisoning accusations were never the direct cause of the persecution, as we will see in the next chapter: Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 305-310, 334-335.

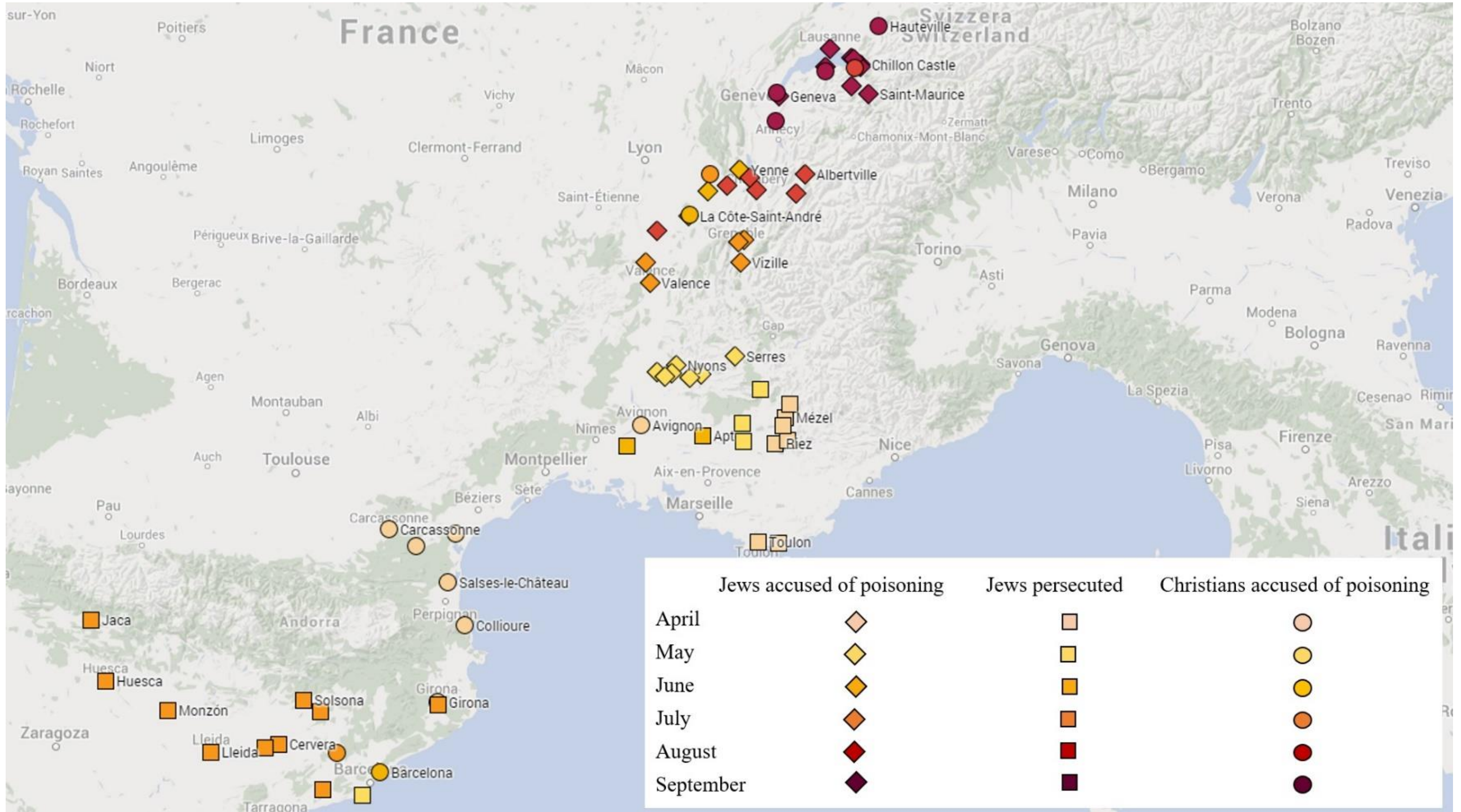
[11] Guerchberg, "The Controversy over the Alleged Sowers of the Black Death," 209-220; Richard Kieckhefer, "Radical Tendencies in the Flagellant Movement of the Mid-Fourteenth Century," *Journal of Medieval and*

To this complicated discussion, one has to add queries regarding the role that the idea of well-poisoning in particular played in these historic developments. Even if one can show that Jews, or other members of minority groups, were persecuted during the plague, it does not necessarily follow that they were accused of poisoning wells. Some people may have exploited the social crisis to act violently against old enemies, without presenting particular accusations. Others may have claimed that the Jews committed sins which aroused divine retribution, and brought the disease over the entire world, rather than physically poisoning water sources.[12] It is not difficult to imagine other ways in which an unprecedented catastrophe like the Black Death could trigger violent acts against unpopular groups. Yet, if we truly wish to understand the dynamic which caused well-poisoning accusations to reemerge, we should not turn to guesswork. Instead, we should examine the accusations as they appear in the primary sources, without assuming that the dynamic was similar in every location. Only then will it be possible to understand the role well-poisoning accusations played in blaming minorities for spreading the Black Death and in inflaming violence against them.

Renaissance Studies 4 (1974), 160-163; Alfred Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 43-76.

[12] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 238-241; Guerchberg, "The Controversy over the Alleged Sowers of the Black Death," 216-217. We will return to this issue in the next chapter.

The persecution of minorities in south-western Europe in 1348



The reemergence of well-poisoning accusations and Anti-Jewish violence in Provence and Languedoc

The Black Death appeared in Provence during the final months of 1347. The first city to suffer from the plague was Marseilles, an important Mediterranean port, well connected to the cities of Italy. It is likely that the disease traveled by sea from one of these cities, probably Genoa, which was already infected earlier that year, to Marseilles. Perhaps due to the winter weather, the plague spread relatively slowly, despite the high urbanization of southern Provence. It reached Aix-en-Provence, only about 20 miles north of Marseilles, at the beginning of December. A month later, it reached the cities of Arles and Avignon, further to the northwest. The disease continued to spread westwards along the Mediterranean shore, striking Montpellier, Béziers and Carcassonne in

February, and Narbonne and Perpignan in March. The Black Death also expanded inland, and Lyon, Toulouse and Montauban were infected in April. Thus, within six months from the first outbreak in Marseilles, the whole of Provence and most of Languedoc were infected.[13]

As in other places, the cities of Provence and Languedoc suffered tremendously during the first outbreak of the Black Death. It is difficult to calculate an exact mortality rate for each town, but indirect evidence suggests that it was substantial. In Marseille, the number of last wills issued by local notaries soared during February, March and April of 1348, the months in which the plague reached full effect. A year later, the city had to issue a new tax over local farmers to compensate for the decrease in urban taxation.[14] Mathias von Nuwenburg reports that the bishop, and the great majority of the clergy and the friars in the city, perished.[15] Wills and other notarial documents from Languedoc suggest that the mortality there was also high, even if there are fewer narrative accounts of the Black Death there.[16] Heinrich Taube of Selbach, who was in Avignon in 1348, mentions that in the middle of March 1,400 people died there every day. As for the mortality in Marseille, he writes that "due to this pestilence all of the people died, so that this place remained

[13] Ole J. Benedictow, *The Black Death, 1346-1353: The Complete History* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004), 96-98, 103-104; Jean Noël Biraben, *Les Hommes et la peste en France et dans les pays Européens et Méditerranéens* (Paris: Mouton, 1975-1976), 73-75, 83. For the speed of the infection in France, see p. 90; Paul Cayla, "L'épidémie de peste de 1348 à Narbonne" (PhD dissertation, University of Montpellier, 1906), 36.

[14] Daniel Lord Smail, "Accommodating Plague in Medieval Marseille," *Continuity and Change* 11 (1996), 12-15; Francine Michaud, "La peste, la peur et l'espoir: Le pèlerinage jubilaire de romeux marseillais en 1350," *Le Moyen âge* 104 (1998), 406-412.

[15] "Marsilie episcopus cum toto capitulo et quasi omnes Predicatores et Minores cum dupla parte inhabitancium perierunt ." - Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, M.G.H SS rer. Germ. N.S. (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Germanicarum, Nova series), 4:463. Mathias was not present in Provence at the time, but had traveled several times to Avignon, and probably had contacts there.

[16] Richard W. Emery, "The Black Death of 1348 in Perpignan," *Speculum* 42 (1967), 611-623; Richard Louis de Lavigne, "La peste noire et la commune de Toulouse: le témoignage du livre des matricules des notaires," *Annales du Midi* 83 (1971), 413-417; Geneviève Prat, "Albi et la peste noire," *Annales du Midi* 64 (1952), 15-25; Cayla, "L'épidémie de peste de 1348 à Narbonne," 84. For a list of French chronicles recording the plague, see: Samuel K. Cohn, *The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance Europe*. (London: Arnold, 2003), 261-263.

as though it was uninhabitable."[17] Louis Heyligen, a musician from Flanders who was present at the papal curia in Avignon during the plague, reports that 62,000 people died in the city from 25 January, when the disease erupted, to 27 April, when he wrote his letter. Many were too scared to bury their dead and paid the poor to do it for them. The pope ordered the performance of mass penitential processions, in which thousands prayed and whipped themselves in a desperate attempt to appease God's wrath.[18] Doctors were too afraid to approach patients, and when they did, they were often helpless.[19] Yet despite these descriptions, which surely capture the fear of the plague in the first months of 1348, society did not break down completely. In Marseille, courts, notaries and local officials continued their work, commerce did not stop (though it slowed down), and most nobles did not flee town.[20] The Black Death hit Provence and Languedoc hard, but the inhabitants did their best to cope with the crisis.

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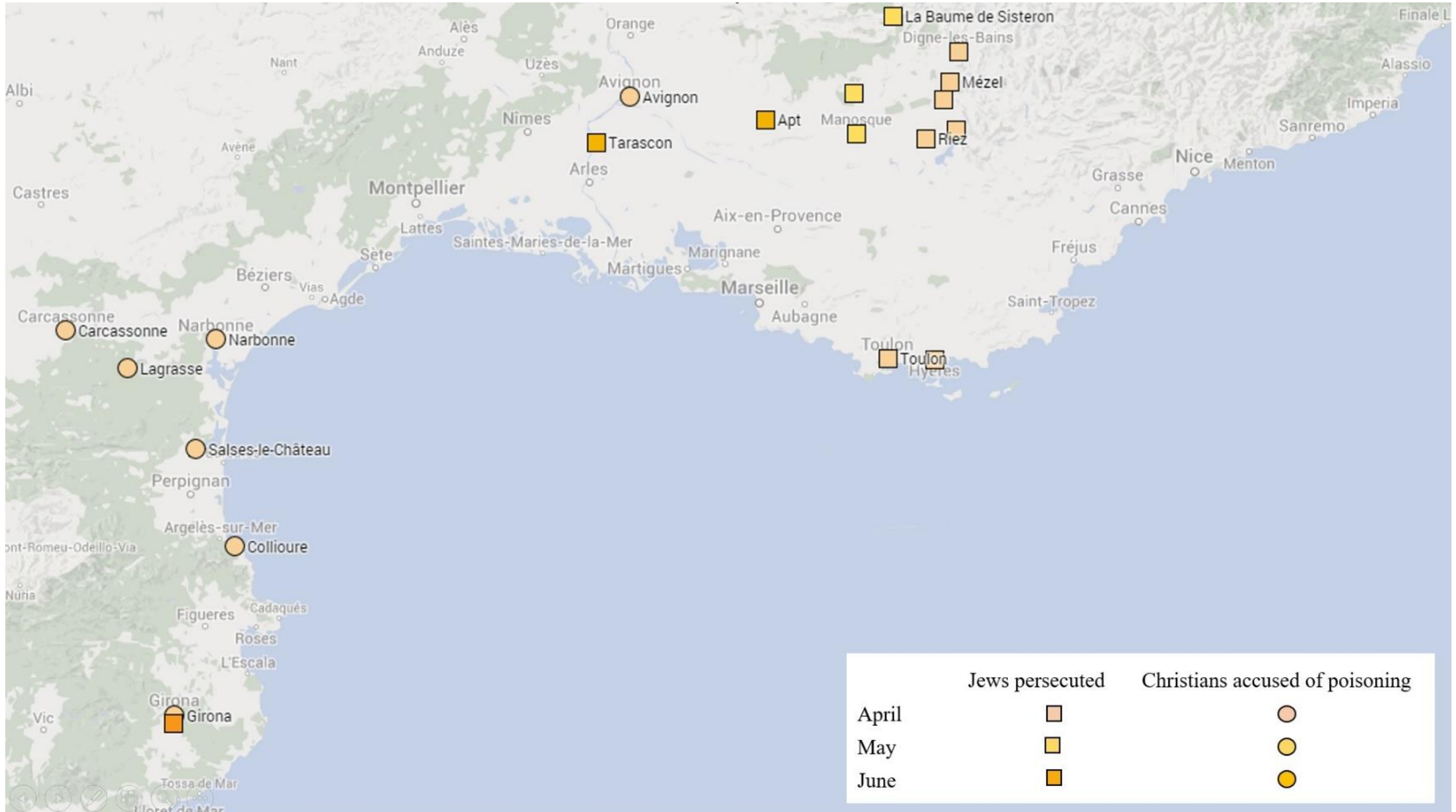
[17] "et Avinione, ubi tunc erat curia Romana, primis diebus a proximis tribus a post dominicam medie quadragesime mille et quadringenti computati homines sepulti fuerunt. Imo dicebatur, quod in civitate Marsyliensi ex hac pestilencia tot homines moriebantur, quod locus quasi inhabitabilis remansit." - Heinrich Taube of Selbach, *Chronica Heinrici surdi de Selbach*, M.G.H SS rer. Germ. N.S. vol. 1 (Berlin: Weidmannsche, 1922), 76. For additional reports about the mortality in this area, see: Michaud, "La peste, la peur et l'espoir," 414-417.

[18] The letter is cited in a chronicle: *Breve Chronicon Clerici Anonymi*, in *Recueil des chroniques de Flandre*, Jean De Smet, ed., vol. 3 (Brussels, M. Hayez, 1856), 14-18. English translation and background Horrox, *The Black Death*, 43-45. For more about tha panic in the papal Curia: Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 264.

[19] Guy de Chauliac, *Inventarium sive chirurgia magna*, ed. Michael McVaugh (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 1:118.

[20] Smail, "Accommodating Plague," 15-22; Emery, "The Black Death in Perpignan," 12-23. Shona Kelly Wray, *Communities in Crisis: Bologna during the Black Death* (Leiden: Brill, 2009) came to similar conclusions regarding the social effect of the first outbreak of the plague in Bologna.

The persecution of minorities in Languedoc and Provence



Well-poisoning accusations probably first reappeared in Languedoc, one of the major areas in France where lepers where persecuted in 1321, but neither they nor the Jews were now the target. Two letters, which survive in the archives of the Crown of Aragon, record well-poisoning accusations against poor people and foreigners there. The first, sent by the governor of Roussillon and Cerdanya to King Pere IV of Aragon, was written in Perpignan on 10 April 1348. The governor reported that he was informed by the *sénéschal* of Carcassonne and the vicar of Narbonne about a mass-poisoning plot which occurred in these cities. The poisoners, unknown men who disguised themselves as pilgrims or religious, allegedly infected mostly water sources, but also spread the poison through foodstuffs and other methods. Some of them were caught, investigated, and confessed (or, most likely, were forced to confess). According to these confessions, the poisoning

was the reason for the unprecedented mortality which struck the towns of Languedoc at that time. The governor added that in the county of Roussillon, in the towns of Collioure and Salses, foreigners in particular were suspected of such acts. He promised the king that he would check each stranger arriving in his county, to make sure that he did not carry any poison, and that he would take any other precautions required for the protection of the kingdom.[21]

One can gather much important information about the development of well-poisoning accusations in 1348 from this short letter. First, it is noteworthy that the accusations that appeared in Carcassonne and Narbonne spread to Aragon quite quickly, indeed more quickly than the plague. The Black Death infected Carcassonne in the middle of February and Narbonne sometime in March, and by the beginning of April, suspects were already arrested and investigated. If in Languedoc the accusations developed within a few weeks, in Catalonia officials knew about them even before the disease reached their territories. For example, the plague reached Perpignan, the largest city in Roussillon, around the end of March, and caused significant mortality only around the middle of April.[22] If indeed, as the letter suggests, poisoning accusations occurred in Collioure and Salses, further south down the Mediterranean coast, before 10 April, they probably started *before* any signs of sickness emerged. The second important piece of information is that the persecution in Languedoc was institutional, and not popular. Suspects were arrested and investigated, formal confessions were recorded, and the information was sent to other officials. This information caused the governor of Roussillon, and maybe other officials as well, to be

[21] ACA, Cancillería, Registros, no. 1128 (Pere III el Ceremonioso, Sigilli secreti 16), ff. 178 r-v; ed. José Coroleu, *Documents històrichs catalans del sigle XIV: colecció de cartas familiars corresponents als regnats de Pere del Punyalet y Johan I* (Barcelona: La Renaixensa, 1889), 69-70. See also Amada López de Meneses, "Una consecuencia de la Peste Negra en Cataluña: El Pogrom de 1348," *Sefarad* 19 (1959), 94-95; John Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse: Confronting Famine, War, Plague, and Death in the Later Middle Ages*. London: Routledge, 2013), 171-172.

[22] Emery, "The Black Death in Perpignan," 612-613; Biraben, *Les Hommes et la peste*, 73-75.

suspicious of foreigners who reached his lands during the time of the plague. When he wrote to the king, he did not report that he found any potential poisoners, but he was certainly looking for them. The king, on his part, was clearly convinced by this report, as he warned other officials against such poisoners.[23]

A second letter, written by Andre Benezeit, the above-mentioned vicar of Narbonne, to the officials of Gerona, in Aragon, reveals even more about the development of well-poisoning accusations in 1348.[24] The letter, written 17 April, was a response to a series of questions sent from the town of Gerona, more than fifty miles south of Perpignan. The officials of Gerona wanted to know whether the plague, which had not yet reached their town, was caused by poisoning. They asked how the investigation was conducted, whether suspects were arrested, whether they confessed, and how they were punished. Finally, the officials wished to know if the investigation revealed who was behind the plot. The fact that they were able to ask these questions at this date is remarkable. Even if we assume that the vicar of Narbonne responded to the letter fairly quickly, it probably took a few days to arrive from Gerona, and thus we must conclude that the officials there knew about the accusations around the middle of April.[25] This shows that by the time that the governor of Roussillon, on Aragon's frontier, reported to the king about the plot, other officials closer to the center of Aragon were already aware of it. Therefore, the accusations must have spread quickly in terms of medieval communication, or evolved in both places independently. The second option is unlikely, even though well-poisoning accusations took place in Aragon in 1321,

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[23] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 236.

[24] A full transcription of the letter can be found in: Christian Guillere, "La Peste Noire a Gerone (1348)," *Annals de l'Institut d'Estudis Gironins* 27 (1984), 141-142. And also in: Jaime Villanueva, *Viage literario a las iglesias de España 14: Viage á Gerona* (Madrid: Imprenta Real, 1850), 270-271. An English translation in: Horrox, *The Black Death*, 222-223. Also see: Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*, 170-171; Cayla, "L'épidémie de peste de 1348 à Narbonne," 73-74.

[25] Renouard, "Information et transmission," 98-104, 110-117.

as we have seen. The officials of Gerona knew to ask the vicar of Narbonne specifically about the plot, which means that they were informed that he was investigating the matter in his town. Thus, we should probably conclude that it took the accusations about ten days to travel from Narbonne to Gerona, a distance of about eighty miles.

The content of the vicar's response is as interesting as the date of the letter. It opens with a description of the plague in Narbonne, Carcassonne and Lagrasse, and repeats a common opinion stating that about a quarter of the inhabitants in this area died.[26] According to the vicar, the smell of the poison which caused the mortality led to the arrest of many beggars and vagabonds, who allegedly carried such substances.[27] This statement suggests that the authorities saw the poor as a source of infection, and probably represents a general distrust towards them during the days of the Black Death, as we will see. The vicar also stressed that the suspects were "beggars and vagabonds of various countries," a remark which shows that foreigners were targeted.[28] They allegedly used poisonous powders to infect water sources, but also houses, churches, and foodstuffs.[29] The suspects were arrested and investigated, sometimes under torture. Some of them confessed that they were paid by people whom they did not know to spread the poison. The vicar assumed that the enemies of the kingdom of France were responsible for the actions of these unknown perpetrators, but could not speculate further.[30] This list of accusations sounds quite similar to the

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[26] The letter refers to "loco de Grassa", which is most likely a reference to Lagrasse, a small town just between Narbonne and Carcassonne, and the site of a big Benedictine abbey. It should not be confused with the town of Grasse, near Nice. Horrox did not clarify the issue clear in her translation, neither did Aberth: Guillere, "La Peste Noire a Gerone," 141; Horrox, *The Black Death*, 223; Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*, 171.

[27] "Et fragrante dictarum potionum seu menzinarum crimine plures reperti et capti extiterunt" - Guillere, "La Peste Noire a Gerone," 141.

[28] "diversarum nationum pauperes et mendicantes portantes" - Guillere, "La Peste Noire a Gerone," 141.

[29] "potiones pulverizatas quas in aquis, domibus, ecclesiis et rebus victualibus ponebant ad finem gentes interficiendi." - Guillere, "La Peste Noire a Gerone," 141. Horrox translated "aquis" as "rivers", but in this context "water sources" seems to be a more likely translation: Horrox, *The Black Death*, 223.

[30] "confitentesque illas se recepisse in diversis locis a quibusdam quorum personas et nomina ignorare diçunt. Sed quod data peccunia ad ponendum potiones mortiferas ipsos inducebant, attamen verisimiliter opinatur quod ista fiant

one set against the lepers of western France in 1321. Again, agents of unknown enemies allegedly paid off some of the marginalized members of society to use poisonous powders to infect the whole kingdom. The memory of the events of 1321 probably led officials to reject the idea that the Black Death was simply a natural occurrence and not the result of poisoning. The vicar was aware of the medical opinion which claimed that the plague was caused by celestial consolations, which many doctors held at the time.[31] He, however, was convinced that natural reasons played only a partial role in causing the disease, and malicious poisoners did the rest.[32]

The officials of Languedoc used their full force against those who confessed to well-poisoning and sentenced them to a series of horrifying tortures before burning them at the stake. The vicar reported that by the time he wrote his letter, i.e. 17 April, four people had suffered such a fate in Narbonne, five more in Carcassonne, and two in Lagrasse. Many others were arrested for the same offence, and it is likely that the executions continued beyond this date.[33] Thus, it seems clear that Languedoc saw a wave of institutional persecution against Christian beggars, foreigners and vagabonds during the first outbreak of the Black Death.

Similar allegations also appeared in Provence, which was not part of the Kingdom of France, around the same time. Louis Heyligen, who reported from Avignon in 27 April, mentions that well-poisoning accusations were already common at this date:

> *Some wretched men were found in possession of certain powders* and *(whether justly or unjustly, God knows) were accused of poisoning the wells - with the result that anxious*

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ex parte inimicorum Francie regni licet adhuc plena certitudo haberi non possit." - Guillere, "La Peste Noire a Gerone," 141.

[31] Guerchberg, "The Controversy over the Alleged Sowers of the Black Death," 208-221.

[32] Note the similarity to the explanation suggested by Alphonso of Cordova, "Epistola et regimen Alphontii Cordubensis de pestilentia," *Sudhoff's Archiv* 3, no. 3 (1909), 223-226.

[33] Guillere, "La Peste Noire a Gerone," 141-142; Horrox, *The Black Death*, 223.

men now refuse to drink water from wells. Many were burnt for this and are being burnt daily, for it was ordered that they should be punished thus.[34]

This short eye-witness testimony reveals a great deal about the reappearance of well-poisoning accusations in Provence. First, Louis did not depict the persecution of alleged poisoners as a single outbreak of popular violence, but rather as an ongoing organized investigation, which led to convictions and executions. Second, while he was unsure about the veracity of the accusations, others were so convinced that they avoided water drawn from wells altogether. And most importantly, Louis did not state that the suspects were Jews, but described them as "wretched men", an expression which generally refers to paupers or beggars.[35] It seems that the patterns of well-poisoning accusations in Avignon were quite similar to those which emerged in Languedoc. Thus, it is plausible that the accusations spread from Narbonne to Provence, in the same way that they reached Aragon.

Heyligen's report and the letters from Aragon show that well-poisoning accusations in Provence and Languedoc were first directed against paupers, beggars and vagabonds. This conclusion can help clarify some of the confusion that other conflicting sources leave about the nature of the persecution in southern Europe in early 1348. For example, Guy de Chauliac, a doctor who worked in Avignon during the plague, recalled the accusations a few years later:

In some places, people believed that the Jews poisoned the world, and therefore killed them. In others, handicapped paupers [were accused] and driven away; in others, nobles, and thus they had to travel through the land. Eventually it came to pass that guards were

[34] "Quidam etiam homines miseri inventi sunt cum quibusdam pulveribus, et, sive juste sive injuste, Deus scit, accusati super crimen quod aquas intoxicassent, nam homines timentes aquas de puteis non bibunt: unde multi combusti sunt et cotidie comburuntnr; imponitur enim eis quod ad hoc conducti sunt." - *Breve Chronicon Clerici Anonymi*, 17-18; English translation: Horrox, *The Black Death*, 45.

[35] "homines miseri" - *Breve Chronicon Clerici Anonymi*, 17.

posted in cities and villages, and did not allow anyone to enter, unless they knew him well. And if they found anyone with powders or ointments, they made him swallow them, since they feared these may be potions.[36]

For Guy de Chauliac it was different groups, including Jews, paupers and nobles (an unusual claim),[37] who were accused of causing the plague in different places. However, the doctor did not specify which minority group was targeted in each location or the exact nature of the accusations. As we will see, in some places Jews were indeed the main target, while in others paupers took the blame. Sometimes minorities were accused of causing the plague directly, either by poisoning wells or by another method, and in other cases they were said to have brought it on by their sins. The fact that Guy de Chauliac tried to include all of these variations in one short report makes it difficult to conclude what exactly he witnessed. However, this text does state clearly that foreigners were rarely trusted during the days of the Black Death, and that at least in some places, the fear of poisoning was genuine.

Other writers highlighted different facts. A French chronicler also reported that both Jews and Christians were accused, but insisted that well poisoning was the only charge.[38] Humbert

[36] "In aliquibus partibus crediderunt quod Iudei venenassent mundum, et ita interfecerunt eos; in aliquibus, pauperes truncati et effugabant eos; in aliis, nobiles, et ideo dubitabant [debitabant?] ire per mundum. Finaliter ad tantum devenit quod tenebant custodes in civitatibus et villis, et nullum permittebant intrare nisi bene notum; et si alicui invenissent pulveres aut unguenta, timentes quod essent pociones, faciebant eos transglutire." - Guy de Chauliac, *Inventarium sive chirurgia magna*, 1:118. English translation in John Aberth, ed. *The Black Death: The Great Mortality of 1348-1350: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 63-66.

[37] The plague certainly intensified class struggle in medieval Europe, but I did not found any cases in which the poor accused nobles of poisoning wells: Samuel K. Jr. Cohn, "Popular Insurrection and the Black Death: A Comparative View," in *Rodney Hilton's Middle Ages: An Exploration of Historical Themes*, ed. Christopher Dyer, Peter Coss, and Chris Wickham, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 194-204; Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," 7-8, 11-31.

[38] A similar tradition was preserved in an anonymous chronicle written around Paris at the beginning of the fifteenth century: "Nam insurrexit quedam vox quod erant aliqui malefici, et speciahter Judei, qui in aquis et fontibus potiones immittebant, cujus occasione pestis predicta sic incrassabatur. Propter quod multi tam christiani quam Judei innocentes et inculpabiles fuerunt cremati, trucidati et alias in personis male tractati" - *Vita prima Clementis VI*, Baluze-Mollat, 1:251-252.

Pilati, notary of the Dauphin Humbert II, wrote that: "In Provence, all the Jews were killed, as they were suspected of infecting and poisoning wells and fountains, and also because a great cry arose, and also a rumor, that the universal mortality, which ruled the world so much that there was never a similar one, had appeared because of poison."[39] Clearly, Hubert insisted that the Jews of Provence were accused of well poisoning, and were thus persecuted. However, we will see that documentary evidence from this area does not support his report. Heinrich of Diessenhofen, a Swiss chronicler, suggested that the persecution of the Jews started rather late, and did not necessarily include explicit poisoning charges:

> *In that year [1348], from the feast of John the Baptist [24 June] to the feast of All Saints [1 November], the Jews in the whole Kingdom of Arles were all burnt. Except in the city of Avignon, which the pope, that is Clemens VI, acquired, and he defended the Jews who endured there. They were killed all the way up to the town of Solothurn [in modern day Switzerland], in which they were also burnt, because of the mortality which arose that year and the next, which was ascribed to the Jews.*[40]

The "Kingdom of Arles" included in 1348 mostly the areas of Savoy and the Dauphiné, even if Heinrich saw Avignon as part of it.[41] We will see that in these areas the Jews were indeed accused

[39] "Omnes Judaei in Provincia ut suspecti de intoxicatione et venenatione puteorum et fontium interfecti, insurgente clamore valido, atque fama , quod Universalis mortalitas, quae tanta regnat per mundum, quod nunquam fuit similis, ex veneno provenit." - Humbert Pilati, *Preuves de l'hisoire de Dauphiné sous Humbert II*, in Jean-Pierre Moret de Bourchenu Valbonnais, *Histoire de Dauphiné et des princes qui ont porté le nom de dauphins* (Geneva: Fabri & Barrillot, 1722), 2:625.

[40] "Anno eodem a festo Iohannis baptiste usque festum omnium sanctorum Iudei per totum regnum Arelatensem, excepta civitate Avinionensi, quam papa comparaverat scilicet Clemens VI, qui Iudeos ibi degentes defendebat, omnes cremati sunt et occisi usque ad oppidum Solodorensem, in quo eciam cremate sunt, propter mortalitatem que viguit predicto anno et sequenti, que Iudeis adscribatur."- Heinricus de Diessenhoven, *Chronicon,* F.R.G (*Fontes rerum Germanicarum*, ed. Johann Friedrich Böhmer (Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta, 1843-1868)), 4:68.

[41] The history of the "Kingdom of Arles" dates back to the tenth century, but in the middle of the fourteenth it was in the final stages of its disintegration. The Dauphiné was added to France in 1349, the county of Savoy was detached from the kingdom in 1361, and in 1378 the last territories remained of the kingdom were given to the rule of the Dauphin of France: Paul Fournier, *Le royaume d'Arles et de Vienne (1138-1378): Étude sur la formation territoriale*

of well poisoning and persecuted, but Heinrich of Diessenhofen wrote nothing about the persecution of Jews in Provence. And so, it seems that different chroniclers had different information, as the persecution of minorities and well-poisoning accusations developed differently in each region. They often assumed that what was true in their territory was also the case in other locations, but were not always right.

The fact that the narrative accounts of the first stages of the persecution of minorities during the Black Death are often conflicting, forces us to rely more heavily on the documentary evidence. In the case of Languedoc and Provence, this evidence includes three letters which agree that paupers and vagabonds, rather than Jews, were the first target of well-poisoning accusations. They also state that allegations appeared around April, and spread quickly around south-western Europe. They report that suspects suffered institutionalized violence, rather than popular attacks. Thus, it is very likely that these were indeed the characteristics of well-poisoning accusations as they first appeared in 1348. And so, we must ask why exactly well-poisoning accusations reappeared at precisely this time, and why the poor might have been the main target.

As for the timing, the plague most likely played a major role. All the reports about the persecution of paupers in Provence and Languedoc present it as a direct result of the plague, as we have seen.[42] But why did the accusations start around April and not immediately when the plague appeared in Provence, around December or January? Perhaps it was because it took a while before people understood that the Black Death was not an ordinary disease. If we take Marseilles, in which the events are fairly well-documented, as an example, the plague appeared around

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de la France dans l'Est et le Sudest (Paris: Picard, 1891), 433-517; Eugene L. Cox, *The Green Count of Savoy: Amedeus VI and Transalpine Savoy in the Fourteenth-Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 71-75.

[42] *Breve Chronicon Clerici Anonymi*, 1:17-18; Guy de Chauliac, *Inventarium sive chirurgia magna*, 1:118; *Vita prima Clementis VI*, Baluze-Mollat, 1:251-252; Guillere, "La Peste Noire a Gerone," 141-142; Coroleu, *Documents històrichs Catalans*, 69-70.

December but caused severe mortality there only in March and April, when the first evidence of acknowledgment that the plague was an unusual event can be found. At the end of March, one burgher called the disease "general mortality", and at the end of April another complained about "a terrible smell of death" in one of the local cemeteries.[43] Before this perception became accepted, there was little reason to suspect a campaign of poisoning. Alphonso of Cordova, a doctor from Montpellier who wrote a short treatise about the plague in 1348, explained the logic behind this development. According to his theory, the first wave of the plague resulted from certain astronomical constellations, and affected mostly the Mediterranean areas of Europe. This kind of natural plague was supposed to disappear by itself after a few months. However, the plague of 1348 did not only last for a long time, but also continued to spread north, into the continent. Therefore, Alphonso concluded that the second wave of the plague (or its continuation after the first months of 1348) was a result of intentional poisoning. He did not specify who the suspected poisoners were, and thought that they probably poisoned the air in order to cause the disease. At the same time, he recommended that people avoid foodstuffs of unknown origin, and warned against drinking stagnant water in particular.[44] This text suggests why suspicions of poisoning might not have arisen immediately after the plague appeared. To be sure, not all doctors, and probably not all people, agreed with Alphonso that the plague must have been the result of poisoning.[45] Still, the more it became clear that the disease was not a regular occurrence, the more his opinion gained supporters.

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[43] "quasi fore generalem mortalitatem", "fetorem mortuorum terribilem", "generalem mortalitatem que in civitate Marssilie currit" - Michaud, "La peste, la peur et l'espoir," 413-414. For mortality and other reactions to it, see: Smail, "Accommodating Plague," 13-15.

[44] Alphonso of Cordova, "Epistola et regimen Alphontii Cordubensis de pestilentia," 223-226.

[45] Guerchberg, "The Controversy over the Alleged Sowers of the Black Death," 208-221, esp. 216-217. Also see a treatise about the plague by the Parisian doctor Simon de Cuiro, who describes the disease as a poison, but at the same time does not suggest that an actual act of poisoning by human agents took place: Emile Littré, "Opuscule relatif à la peste de 1348, composé par un contemporain," *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 2 (1841), 201-243.

Another possible answer for the question of the timing of the reappearance of well-poisoning accusations focuses on the conclusion that they probably started in Languedoc rather than in Provence. As we have seen, the persecution of lepers in Languedoc in 1321 was much more significant than in Provence.[46] This history can explain why the plague did not trigger well-poisoning accusations in Provence in the early months of 1348, but caused such allegations in Languedoc quite quickly. Still, we should also remember that mass-poisoning accusations were also not unheard of in Provence before 1348. As we have seen, a Jew from Manosque was accused of well poisoning in 1306, and another of mass poisoning of bread in 1313.[47] In 1321, lepers and Jews were suspected of well poisoning and persecuted in Avignon.[48] Some people were old enough to remember events that took place in the beginning of the fourteenth century and could testify that suspicions of well poisoning were not new. Thus, it is likely that this history played some part in the fact that well-poisoning accusations first appeared in Languedoc and Provence in 1348, and not elsewhere.

However, if the memory of the 1321 events indeed played a part in the reemergence of the accusations in 1348, it is unclear why did they focused on paupers and vagabonds rather than lepers, Jews or Muslims, who were targeted earlier. Indeed, during that wave of accusations in 1321 foreigners were suspected of involvement in various places, but there is no evidence that beggars or poor people were accused in particular at that time.[49] To answer this question, we should again note that the accusations probably started in Languedoc rather than in Provence, and were

[46] See below: Ch. 2, pp. 91-107.

[47] Shatzmiller, *Recherches sur la Communauté Juive*, 131-135; Ch. 1, pp. 30-32, 79-80.

[48] Mollat, *Jean XXII*, 11:55-56, no. 55412; Raymond Bernard de la Mote, *Chronique de Bazas*, 39; Bériac, "La persécution des lépreux," 213; Finke, *Acta Aragonensia*, 3:390-391, no. 178/1; John XXII, *De bello sarracenis inferendo*, coll. 570; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 93-94; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 40, 45-47. See above: Ch. 2, pp. 102, Ch. 3, pp. 173-175.

[49] See below: Ch. 2, p. 99, Ch. 3, pp. 210-212, 220-224.

shaped by the circumstances there. In fact, there were no Jews or Muslims, and only few lepers in Languedoc in 1348. Several scholars have stated that Jews were persecuted in Narbonne and Carcassonne in spring 1348, but the sources do not support this claim.[50] Moreover, as we have seen, the Jews of France were exiled from the kingdom sometime between 1322 and 1327 and were not yet welcomed back.[51] Therefore, it is unlikely that there were any Jews in Languedoc to persecute at the time, let alone whole communities. In contrast, since many of the Jewish exiles of 1306 and of the 1320s left for Aragon, Provence, the Dauphiné and Savoy, the Jewish communities there were probably larger in 1348 than they had been in previous centuries.[52] This fact can partially explain the growing hostility towards these communities around the middle of the century. In any case, there is no reason to assume that any of the alleged poisoners in Languedoc were Jews. The same, of course, can be said about Muslims, who played only a symbolic role in well-poisoning accusations in France in 1321. As we have seen, the vicar of Narbonne suggested that "enemies of the kingdom of France" were responsible for the poisoning plot, perhaps alluding to a similar narrative.[53] Still, there is no evidence that this notion become popular, as it did in 1321. As for the lepers, many leprosaria still functioned in Languedoc in 1348, but many fewer inhabitants lived in them than in the beginning of the century. Many lepers were executed in 1321, and the others were segregated. Moreover, leprosy was declining in Europe in general, and fewer new patients were forced to join leprosaria. Overall, there were fewer lepers in Languedoc, and

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[50] Leonard B. Glick, *Abraham's Heirs: Jews and Christians in Medieval Europe* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 265; Donald F. Logan, *A History of the Church in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 284. Both probably based on: Philip Ziegler, *The Black Death* (London: Collins, 1968), 102.

[51] Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 294-329; Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 246-248; Jordan, "Home Again," 38-39; Einbinder, *No Place of Rest*, 2-3, 68-70.

[52] Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 223-238, 246-248; Assis, "Juifs de France réfugié," 291-309; Einbinder, *No Place of Rest*, 1-3.

[53] Guillere, "La Peste Noire a Gerone," 141; Horrox, *The Black Death*, 223.

their political and economic status was weaker than in 1321.[54] The idea that lepers would be powerful enough to organize a wide-scale poisoning plot seems unlikely for this period. And so, as the major minorities of 1321 were no longer around in 1348, or significantly diminished in power, they were a less likely target for well-poisoning accusations. Yet, in Provence there is only little evidence that lepers were persecuted in 1321, and major Jewish communities lived there in 1321. Still, the accusations there were not directed against Jews or lepers, perhaps because the allegations there were inspired by the persecution of paupers in Languedoc.

But even if there were no Jews or lepers in Languedoc, why were paupers and vagabonds seen as likely candidates to commit poisoning? To answer this question we should study the different effect that the plague had on the lives of the poor. In Narbonne, where the accusations probably began in 1348, the plague started within the lower classes. Dyers who worked in workshops along the Aude River, as well as their families, were the first victims. This was not the only city in which the plague broke out first in poor neighborhoods, but it is hard to say that this was the rule.[55] Some have suggested that there may have been a biological connection between a life of poverty and the attendant insufficient nutrition on the one hand, and susceptibility to the plague on the other, but this is not easy to prove.[56] Social rather than biological circumstances are a more likely explanation. Poor neighborhoods were usually more crowded, and the plague

[54] Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 139-184; Touati, *Maladie et société*, 294-300; Brodman, “Shelter and Segregation,” 41-42 ; Palmer, “The Church, Leprosy and Plague,” 79-81.

[55] Jean Noël Biraben, “Les pauvres et la peste,” in *Etudes sur l'histoire de la pauvreté (Moyen Age-XVIe siècle)* Michel Mollat, ed. (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1974), 505-506; Cayla, “L’épidémie de peste de 1348 à Narbonne,” 84-85. Bendictow suggests the plague usually started in poor neighborhoods, other historians disagreed: Benedictow, *The Black Death,* 59, 81, 136-137, 335; Wray, *Communities in Crisis*, 121; Cohn, *The Black Death Transformed*, 129.

[56] Gilles le Muisis, *Chronique et annales de Gilles le Muisit, abbé de Saint-Martin de Tournai (1272-1352),* ed. Henri Lemaître (Paris: Renouard, 1906), 257-258; Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 315; Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 185-187; Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages*, 196; David Herlihy, *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West*, ed. Samuel K. Cohn (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), 31-35, 38-39; Robert Jütte, *Poverty and Deviance in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 22-23.

infected their inhabitants more quickly. The poor often had to live around sources of urban pollution, which were also perceived as sources of potential infection. Thus, even before the plague they were often associated with infectious diseases and were suspected of unintentionally spreading them.[57] In addition, during times of plague, the poor had fewer opportunities to avoid contact with the sick. Louis Heyligen describes how the rich of Avignon paid poor people from the mountain areas of Provence to bury their dead for them. Naturally, the majority of the people who had to engage in this dangerous work found their death quickly.[58] Moreover, as Guy de Chauliac noted, many cities attempted to fight the plague by keeping out people who were seen as potential plague vectors. Other towns took the opposite approach, expelling the sick during outbreaks of the plague.[59] Several historians have pointed out that during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the plague became associated with the poor in many European cities. It is unclear whether this notion was already completely formed during the first outbreak of the Black Death.[60] Still, we should remember that the vicar of Narbonne stated that beggars and vagabonds were arrested because the smell of the poison which they carried exposed them as the criminals.[61] This statement seems to support the idea that medieval burghers saw the poor as unclean, or associated them with bad odor, and thus linked them with the appearance of the plague.[62] This attitude probably formed the belief that during a time of crisis, members of the lower classes cannot be trusted.

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[57] Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, 63-66, 143-144; Bayless, *Sin and Filth*, 33. On the other hand, see: Cohn, *The Black Death Transformed*, 129.

[58] *Breve Chronicon Clerici Anonymi*, 17-18; Horrox, *The Black Death*, 44; Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages*, 196. This practice was not unique to Avignon: Ann G. Carmichael, *Plague and the Poor in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 109.

[59] Guy de Chauliac, *Inventarium sive chirurgia magna*, 1:118; Aberth, *The Black Death*, 64-65; Biraben, "Les pauvres et la peste," 510-511; Carmichael, *Plague and the Poor*, 109-110.

[60] Jütte, *Poverty and Deviance,* 22-24; Biraben, "Les pauvres et la peste," 505-518; Carmichael, *Plague and the Poor*, 96-131; Carpentier, "Autour de la peste noire," 1067.

[61] "Et fragrante dictarum potionum seu menzinarum crimine plures reperti et capti extiterunt" - Guillere, "La Peste Noire a Gerone," 141.

[62] Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, 63-66, 143-144; Bayless, *Sin and Filth*, 33; Jütte, *Poverty and Deviance,* 22-24; Biraben, "Les pauvres et la peste," 505-506, 510-511; Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages*, 196-197. Note that Alphonso of

Moreover, while the number of lepers declined, the number of poor, beggars and vagabonds in European cities increased significantly before and during the Black Death. First, even before the plague appeared, many were impoverished and forced to leave their lands. The demographic growth of the thirteenth century slowed, as natural resources were exhausted in many areas of western Europe. During this century, peasants began to work marginal lands, such as swamps, hillsides or woodlands, to produce more arable land. At the same time, since the population continued to grow, the average size of land plots became smaller. New agricultural techniques introduced during the high Middle Ages were exhausted, and productivity did not increase. The European population was thus constantly on the verge of starvation at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Unfortunately, a major climate change began around the same time, and the temperatures dropped. This led to harsher winters and an excess of summer rains, which decreased agricultural production further. Since there was little surplus that could allow peasants to survive such environmental crises, a few bad years in a row were enough to cause a great hunger. The famine of 1315-1317 was the most devastating of these episodes, but it was certainly not the only one, as years of hunger became very common during the first half of the fourteenth century.[63] While the rich could usually afford the expensive grain, the poor starved. Since the land was divided into very small plots and productivity had declined, many discovered that land which had been sufficient to support their ancestors was no longer adequate to feed their families. Years of bad weather, wars and murrains which decimated livestock, all relatively common at this period,

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Cordova suggested that the poisoners spread the disease by infecting the air: Alphonso of Cordova, "Epistola et regimen Alphontii Cordubensis de pestilentia," 223-226.

[63] Hoffmann, *An Environmental History*, 116-117, 133-150; Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 12, 15-17, 25-35, 48-55, 94-95; Herlihy, *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West*, 31-38; Aberth, *An Environmental History*, 49-52; Jordan, "Famine and Popular Resistance," 13-17; Carpentier, "Autour de la peste noire," 1074-1083; Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, "Plague and Family Life," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 6:127-130.

made their situation even more desperate. Some were left with no alternative but to sell, or even simply leave, their lands in hope of finding better employment opportunities in the growing cities. Yet few did. Despite the significant urbanization of the thirteenth century, the towns could not support the great number of impoverished peasants who came from the countryside. These people usually found some employment as temporary workers, but often ended up as beggars, or thieves, at least part of the time. Urban charity mechanisms, which developed considerably during the previous century, were no longer sufficient to help these masses of poor. As a result, large numbers of poor, beggars, and unknown vagabonds filled the streets of medieval towns at this period, to the dismay of urban authorities.[64]

As we have seen, foreigners, the poor and beggars were suspected of spreading the plague, unintentionally or maliciously. As the vicar of Narbonne pointed out, officials easily noticed the infectious nature of the disease, and naturally suspected that unknown travelers from outside of town brought it with them.[65] Also, in Narbonne the sickness indeed started in poor neighborhoods, which probably supported the notion that beggars or poor vagabonds were involved.[66] In addition, the Black Death caused more beggars and poor to fill the streets. In the long run the real wages of peasants rose and their economic situation improved due to the sharp demographic decline caused by the plague. However, when the disease was still raging in Europe, many simply tried to flee infected areas. In the countryside, many villages lost most of their population, and the survivors roamed the roads in search for a new place to live.[67] As the disease spread through the countryside

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[64] Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 99-105, 109-114, 137-151, 184-185; Hoffmann, *An Environmental History*, 227-30; Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages*, 158-190; Jordan, "Famine and Popular Resistance," 15-24; Cohn, "Popular Insurrection and the Black Death, 189-194.

[65] Guillere, "La Peste Noire a Gerone," 141-142; Horrox, *The Black Death*, 223.

[66] Biraben, "Les pauvres et la peste," 505-506; Cayla, "L'épidémie de peste de 1348 à Narbonne," 84-85.

[67] Herlihy, *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West*, 39-51; Cohn, "Popular Insurrection and the Black Death," 194-196; Klapisch-Zuber, "Plague and Family Life," 6:132-133.

from Provence to Languedoc, it probably left many such survivors in its wake, and some of these refugees reached local cities. Since local officials witnessed this wave of foreigners entering their towns around the same time when the first signs of the sickness appeared there, it is no wonder that they suspected that the newcomers were responsible for carrying the Black Death.[68] Therefore, poisoning accusations against vagabonds, beggars, the poor or foreigners made much more sense in Languedoc and Provence in 1348 than did allegations against lepers, Jews or Muslims. The new appearance of the accusations and their focus on new minority groups can be explained by the fact that the environmental and social circumstances during the Black Death were very different than those of 1321. There is no reason to believe that the officials did not truly believe that the poor and foreigners were responsible for spreading of the plague, which indeed seemed unnatural. From a modern perspective, their reaction to the crisis seems like a tragedy, but considering the reality they faced, one can also understand their suspicions.

But even if well-poisoning accusations focused on Christians at this point, the Jews of Provence faced popular violence during the first outbreak of the plague. The first attack against them took place in Toulon on 13 April. This was Palm Sunday, and after nightfall a group of armed men entered the Jewish neighborhood. They used axes and other tools to break into the houses of local Jews, who were asleep, and killed many of them, perhaps up to forty.[69] They then proceeded to plunder their houses, and took with them money, books, garments and other valuables belonging to the Jews. A similar incident happened in the nearby town of Hyères, probably around the same

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[68] Biraben, "Les pauvres et la peste," 510-511, 514-515; Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," 8-9.

[69] The document states that "circa quadringenta tam judeos quam judeas per dextra nequiter occiderunt", i.e. that four hundred Jews were killed. Another witness stated that "moltos ex eis occiserunt", that is "many" of the Jews were killed: Adolphe Crémieux, "Les Juifs de Toulon au Moyen Age et la massacre du 13 avril 1348," *REJ* 89 (1930), 62; *REJ* 90 (1931), 58. Shatzmiller suggested that even forty victims might represent the entire Jewish community of Toulon, which was not very large: Joseph Shatzmiller, "Les Juifs de Provence pendant la Peste Noire," *REJ* 133 (1974), 458-459.

time.[70] By the end of the month, the violence had spread north, to Riez, Moustiers, Mèzel, Estoblon and Digne, and some Jewish property was plundered in those locations, too.[71] We know more about the attack against the Jews of Manosque, which happened on 14 May. Some people from Manosque and other towns broke into the houses of local Jews to plunder their property, in the process injuring and killing several of them. The municipal council was quick to investigate the charges and attempted to restore the property to its original owners.[72] The Jews of La Baume, a village north of Sisteron, were even less fortunate. On 16 May the whole community was murdered and its property plundered.[73] The Jews of Apt and Tarascon were also attacked sometime before 20 June, and those of Forqualquier on an unknown date.[74] Thus the Jews of Provence clearly faced a wave of persecution during April and May of 1348.[75]

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[70] "die XIII° mensis aprilis, proximo tempore qua die sint festivi ramispalmarum, de nocte more hostili venerunt circa primum sompnium ad Carreriam Judeorum ubi inde morabantur et, fractis cum securibus, et aliis instrumentis violenter hostiis domorum prefatorum judeorum, domos ipsas impetuose et furibunde intrarunt et inventis judies predictis in lectis, qui sub protectione reginali ibi quiescebant securi, armis evaginatis in eosdem prosilierunt eosque precussierunt et vulneraverunt cum sanguinis effusione sic et taliter quod circa quadringenta tam judeos quam judeas per dextra nequiter occiderunt eosque in carrerias sic mortous et suis vestibus spoliatos projessiarunt. […] predictos judeos et judeas tunc tempore comorantes in civitate Tholoni omnibus eorum bonis mobilibus, sicuti pecunia, raubis, vayssela argentea, jocalibus in auro et argento sistentibus, libris, instrumentis et mandamentis nomina suorum debitorum, continentibus et diversis aliis rebus spoliarunt", "sic nequiter et inhumaniter in judeos, tam maritos quam feminas, in Castro Arearum et Civitate Tholoni […] armis enudatis, prosilierunt quod multos ex eis occiserunt" - Crémieux, "Les Juifs de Toulon," *REJ* 89, 62, *REJ* 90, 58-59; Shatzmiller, "Les Juifs de Provence pendant la Peste Noire," 458.

[71] Shatzmiller, "Les Juifs de Provence pendant la Peste Noire," 469, n. 13, also see map in p. 464.

[72] "domos judeorum et hostia ipsorum violenter fregerunt et introyerunt et inde res multas tam pannos lineos et leneos quam jochalia et vasa argenta et pecuniam repuerunt, et secum portaverunt […] de predictis quosdam ex dictis iudeis tam masculos quam feminas letaliter vulneraverunt et interfecerunt" - Shatzmiller, "Les Juifs de Provence pendant la Peste Noire," 474-475; Camille Arnaud, *Essai sur la condition des juifs en Provence, au moyen-age* (Forcalquier: Impremarie-Libraire d'Auguste Masson, 1879), 54.

[73] "Pro parte Dayas Quinoni judei de Balma ante Sistaricum continue in nostro auditorio introducta quod dudum Ebreys in prefeto castro morantibus in ora gladii et alias crudeliter per iniquitatis filios interemptis omnia bona judeorum ipsorum […] per patratores jamdicti seleris furtinis rapta […]"
"ביום האף והחמה ששפך השם באש חמתו על קהל הקדוש מלבמא דשטרון כי כולם קדשו השם ית' טף ונשים ביום אחד בעונותינו הרבים בשנת קח' לפרט ו' פרשה והעבירו תער על כל בשרם" Shatzmiller, "Les Juifs de Provence pendant la Peste Noire, " 474, 479.

[74] Arnaud, *Essai sur la condition des juifs en Provence,* 55-57.

[75] For a general review and a map, see: Shatzmiller, "Les Juifs de Provence pendant la Peste Noire," 457-466; Arnaud, *Essai sur la condition des juifs en* Provence*,* 54-57; Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 160.

Yet while these documents reveal much about the fact of violence against the Jews, they say very little about the reasons behind it. Crémieux and Shatzmiller note that the various records suggest that the pogroms were not caused by well-poisoning accusations, but rather point to other reasons. First, the attacks started during the Holy Week, which may suggest that they originated as ritualistic violence which got out of hand.[76] They also point out that while the documents rarely mention the plague, and do not refer to well poisoning at all, they stress issues of property and royal authority. This may be due to the nature of the sources: most of them are documents ordering the return of property to its lawful owners and naturally focus on acts of plunder and on the legal authority which they violated. Still, as we have seen in earlier chapters, there are reasons to believe that the emphasis on property and royal authority is more than a coincidence. The attackers are often depicted by municipal authorities as challenging the lawful social order. For example, in Toulon they were said to be "inspired by diabolical spirit, and not without violent audacity of recklessness."[77] The perpetrators in Manosque allegedly "disregarded the fear and love of God, were drenched with the spirit of the devil, totally believing that this land is lacking a ruler, [and] with unsound mind," and attacked the Jews "against the will of their masters".[78] They plundered the Jews since they were "eager to enrich themselves with other peoples' money," and were "totally striving to commit theft and robbery."[79] On the other hand, local administrators emphasized the protection that Queen Joanna I of Naples, who was also the countess of Provence,

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[76] Crémieux, "Les Juifs de Toulon," *REJ* 89 (1930), 62, *REJ* 90 (1931), 58; Shatzmiller, "Les Juifs de Provence pendant la Peste Noire," 458; Foa, *The Jews of Europe*, 13. For ritualistic violence, see: Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 200-230.

[77] "diabolico spiritu inspirate, non sine effrenata temeris audacia" - Crémieux, "Les Juifs de Toulon," *REJ* 90, 58.

[78] "Dei timore et amore postpositis spiritu satanico poculati terrram istam totaliter credentes rectore carere animo apenssato", "et nolentibus dominis quorum res ipse erant" - Shatzmiller, "Les Juifs de Provence pendant la Peste Noire," 474.

[79] "alieno eri ditari cupientes" - Crémieux, "Les Juifs de Toulon," *REJ* 90, 59; "furtum at rapinam totaliter conitentes" - Shatzmiller, "Les Juifs de Provence pendant la Peste Noire," 474.

gave the Jews. The Jews of Toulon and Hyères, for example, were supposed to be "secure under the protection of the queen."[80] On the whole, these documents suggest that the attacks had more to do with the political and economic situation of the Jews in Provence than with well-poisoning accusations.

What particular political and economic situation might have triggered anti-Jewish attacks at about the same time when the plague in Provence reached its peak? Joanna of Naples found herself in the midst of a political drama during the first months of 1348. The death of her first husband, Andrew of Hungary, duke of Calabria, threw the kingdom of Naples into a war, as several possible heirs tried to take the Crown. Finally, Joanna decided to marry her cousin Louis of Taranto, but he struggled to protect his rule. At the end of 1347, King Louis I of Hungary, Andrew's older brother, invaded Naples to claim his hereditary rights, and Joanna had to flee the kingdom to her lands in Provence.[81] Crémieux suggested that the queen was in great need of money, and tried to raise it from the cities of Provence. The citizens, who were outraged by this additional taxation in a time of crisis, turned to plunder the Jews.[82] Indeed, we saw that the Jews were under the protection of the queen, and that the sources suggest that the attacks had an economic background. However, this argument is not completely convincing. There is no doubt that Joanna was in need of money, and indeed she sold her control over Avignon to the pope only a few months later, yet she was also in great need of political support.[83] When she came to Provence, she had to appease the burghers of Marseilles and Aix-en-Provence, and gave them a

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[80] "sub protectione reginali ibi quiescebant securi", "sub protectione reainali secures" - Crémieux, "Les Juifs de Toulon," *REJ* 90, 59.

[81] Nancy B. Goldstone, *The Lady Queen: The Notorious Reign of Joanna I, Queen of Naples, Jerusalem, and Sicily* (New York: Walker, 2009), 67-152.

[82] Crémieux, "Les Juifs de Toulon," *REJ* 89, 65-66; Mesler, "Legends of Jewish Sorcery," 302-303, tends to accept this argument.

[83] For the sale of Avignon: Goldstone, *The Lady Queen*, 165; Mesler, "Legends of Jewish Sorcery," 303.

series of new privileges.[84] Moreover, in July she even decreased the taxation of local Jews by a half, acknowledging the terrible effect that the plague and persecution had had on their communities.[85] Thus, Joanna was in no political position to force new taxes on the cities of Provence; instead, she was compelled to make concessions to them. Moreover, we have seen that the persecution of Jews happened despite the objections of municipal councils, who actually acted to protect the Jews in the name of the queen. It is hard to believe that they would act in this manner if the reason for the attacks was new taxes forced on them by the queen. Instead, the documents hint at a conflict between administrators who struggled to maintain the established order, including the protected status of the Jews, and other burghers who acted violently to create a new one. The likely reason for the anti-Jewish pogroms was not new taxes, but old debts. The documents state that the attackers took from the Jews possessions given to them as collateral for old loans, as well as books, possibly accounting books - an efficient way of making debts disappear.[86] As for the timing of the violence, both the plague and the arrival of Queen Joanna may have contributed to its appearance, but not directly. The plague weakened the force of local administrators, who had to cope with the crisis. At the same time, the queen, who was the legal protector of the Jews, was in a very problematic political situation and could not assist them. This was the perfect moment to challenge old debts and establish new political positions, and attacking the Jews served both goals. The attackers were able to take possessions back from the Jews and destroy evidence of their

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[84] Thierry Pécout, "Marseille et la reine Jeanne," in *Marseille au moyen âge, entre Provence et Méditerranée: les horizons d'une ville portuaire,* ed. Thierry Pécout (Méolans-Revel: Désiris, 2009), 215-222; Goldstone, *The Lady Queen*, 153-155.

[85] "hoc anno presenti que regnavit cladis mortalitatis pestifera et christiani in certis dictorum comitatuum terries et locis contra judeos sevientibus animis ad arma insurrexerunt inumaniter et eos nequantibus gladiis crudeliter perempuerunt ab eo ipsorum natio est quasi reducta ad nichilum" - Shatzmiller, "Les Juifs de Provence pendant la Peste Noire," 478 (full document: 477-478, analysis: 467-468).

[86] "omnibus eorum bonis mobilibus, sicuti pecunia, raubis, vayssela argentea, jocalibus in auro et argento sistentibus, *libris, instrumentis et mandamentis nomina suorum debitorum*, continentibus et diversis aliis rebus spoliarunt." - Crémieux, "Les Juifs de Toulon," *REJ* 60, 59. "et inde res multas tam pannos lineos et laneos quam jochalila et vasa argentea et pecuniam rapuerunt" - Shatzmiller, "Les Juifs de Provence pendant la Peste Noire," 474.

previous debts, and at the same time to challenge the authority of local administrators and the queen. Indeed, the council of Manosque may have not been off mark by claiming that the attackers "totally believed that this land is lacking a ruler."[87]

To conclude, during April, May, and June of 1348, right after the mortality reached a peak, both the Jews and the poor suffered violence in different locations in Languedoc and Provence. The persecution of paupers probably started in Languedoc, and was more common there, but it eventually spread to Provence. The persecution of Jews was limited to Provence, as there were no longer Jews living in France. Moreover, each minority faced persecution of a very different nature. The records suggest that the anti-Jewish pogroms were acts of popular violence, probably resulting from the economic and political status of the Jews in Provence. In contrast, the persecution of paupers was organized by officials, and was driven by well-poisoning accusations. Jews were probably still not suspected of such a crime, despite the popular hatred against them. As we have seen, the officials from Languedoc reported about the investigation and about the "confessions" that they extracted from local suspects to their peers in Aragon. Yet, the political and social circumstances there were different than in Languedoc, as was the response of the authorities to the accusations and the crisis. We will now turn to study this response, in order to further clarify the dynamic which caused well-poisoning accusations to spread during the early days of the Black Death.

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[87] "terrram istam totaliter credentes rectore carere" - Shatzmiller, "Les Juifs de Provence pendant la Peste Noire," 474. This was not the only case in which attempts to eliminate debts held by Jews caused outbreaks of interreligious violence: Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 87-88, 174-176.

Well-poisoning accusations and anti-Jewish violence in Aragon

As we have seen, officials in Aragon, including the king, knew about the plague and about poisoning accusations against paupers as early as the beginning of April, that is before the Black Death actually reached the kingdom.[88] In the coastal areas of the Crown of Aragon—for example in Barcelona, Gerona, Tarragona and Valencia—the first reports about the disease appeared around May 1348. In the next few months, the plague slowly progressed inland.[89] The mortality rate was probably about 30% of the urban population, but in particular cases could have been higher.[90] The officials of Aragon had to deal with a crisis similar to that of Provence and Languedoc, and they had good reasons to assume that mass poisoning took place. As in Provence and Langudeoc the plague led to appearance of well-poisoning accusations, and as in Provence to anti-Jewish violence. Still, we will see that as the political and social conditions in Aragon were different, so too were the patterns of the accusations and violence.

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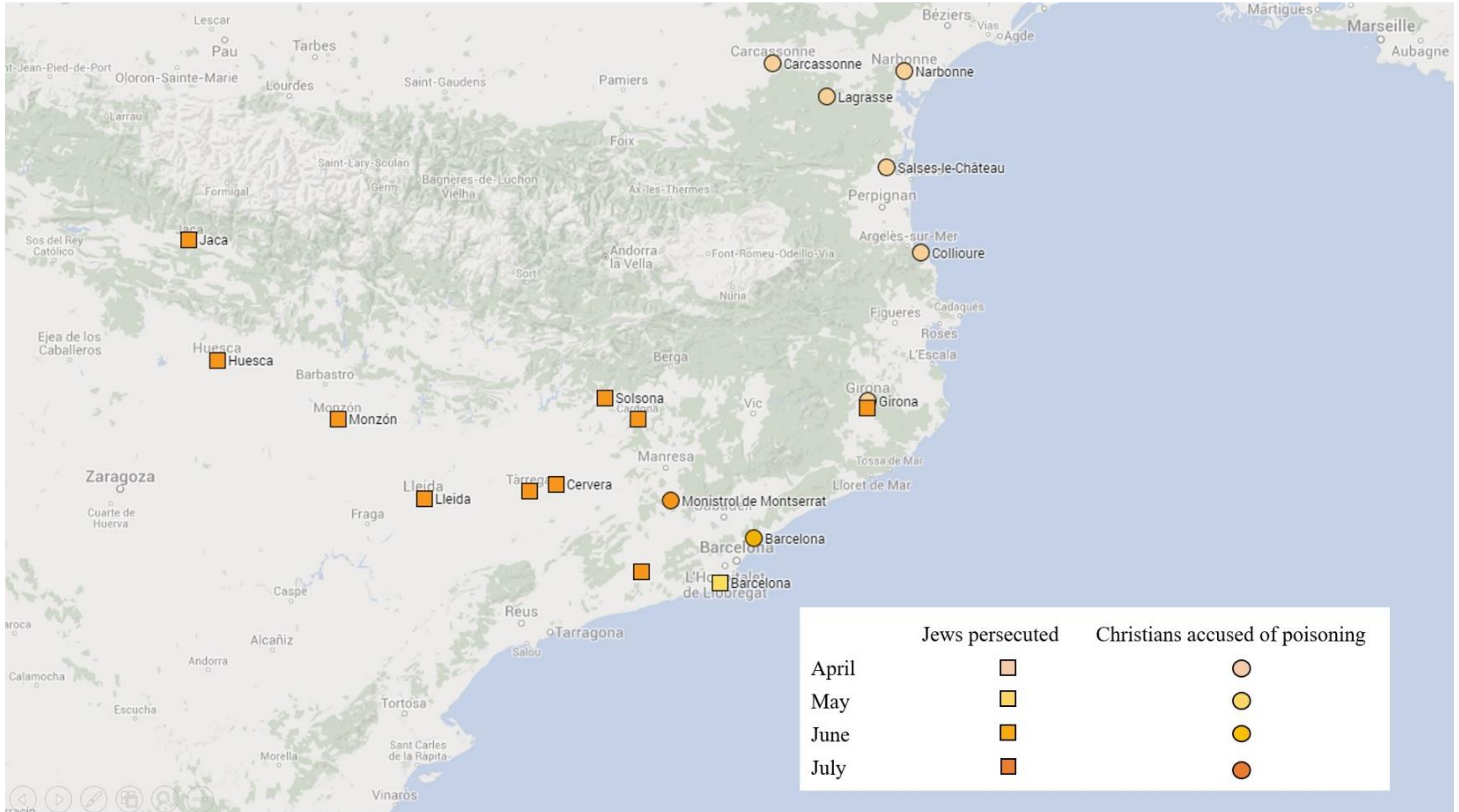
[88] Coroleu, *Documents històrichs Catalans*, 69-70; Guillere, "La Peste Noire a Gerone," 141; Benedictow, *The Black Death,* 78; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 236.

[89] Benedictow, *The Black Death,* 80-82; Biraben, *Les Hommes et la peste*, 74-76; Jordi Günzberg Moll, "Epidemias y mortalidad en la Cataluña medieval: 1300-1500," In *Le interazioni fra economia e ambiente biologico nell'Europa preindustriale, secc. XIII-XVIII,* Simonetta Cavaciocchi, ed. (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2010), 66-67; Jean Gautier-Dalché, "La *peste noire dans les états* de la couronne *d'Aragon," in Mélanges offerts à Marcel Bataillon par les Hispanistes français,* ed. Maxime Chevalier, Robert Ricard and Noël Salomon (Bordeaux: Féret, 1962), 65-67.

[90] Günzberg Moll, "Epidemias y mortalidad en la Cataluña medieval," 68-69; Benedictow, *The Black Death,* 273-285. Benedictow claims that the numbers were higher, but Günzberg Moll reviewed the literature more carefully, and his estimates are more convincing.

Suspicion of poisoning by clerics and attacks against Jews in Aragon



As elsewhere, in Aragon the fear of infection produced distrust towards strangers. We have seen that in his letter from 10 April, the governor of Roussillon warned the king that the poisoners disguised themselves as pilgrims or religious in order to spread the disease.[91] At least some people in Aragon believed this rumor. Sometime before 10 May, two Augustinian clerics who were on their way to a chapter meeting of their order at Pavia faced poisoning accusations. Passing through Barcelona, they were warned that it was not safe for churchmen to travel further. Some people, it was said, delayed traveling clerics, searched their belongings, questioned them, and sometimes even kept them captive. They did so, because they heard that people dressed as religious (but who

[91] "Aquestes persones, mon senyor, van meses á manera de gent de penitencia é destrugament." - Coroleu, *Documents històrichs Catalans*, 69.

were not truly religious) poisoned the water sources.[92] The clerics tried to continue to Gerona, where they met two other churchmen who had just returned from Verona and Perpignan. They told them that further north the mortality was so great that foreigners could not hope for hospitality anywhere. Thus, the Augustinians had to stay in Aragon and miss the chapter meeting, for which they were absolved, since higher officials in their order found their explanations convincing.[93]

About six weeks later, on 21 June, King Pere had to issue a letter of safe conduct to Stephanus Petri de Bramana, a Portuguese Franciscan, who was unable to travel through Aragon. Stephanus and his companion were on a pilgrimage to the monastery of Saint Francis, presumably in Assisi. They were dressed as pilgrims, that is in the simple woolen habits which Franciscans usually wore. These habits actually put them in danger, since people in several places suspected that they were poisoners, and so they could not travel further. Thus, the king provided them with a letter of protection stating their identity.[94] Johan Nicholai of Lusignan, a French cleric, was less lucky. On his way back from a pilgrimage to the monastery of Santa Maria de Montserrat, he passed through the town of Monistrol, not far from Manresa. The local sub-vicar, Francisco de Podio, arrested Johan and took his money until he was able to prove his identity by a letter from the *sénéschal* of Carcassonne. Johan had to appeal for royal protection before he received his

[92] "Barchinone illis fuisset, ut asseruerunt, intimatum quod sine magno periculo dictum iter facere non poterant, quia in locis pluribus licenter apparebantur homines ex toto expoliebantur et prescrutabantur et pro modica occasione capti tenebantur precipue religiosi, cum sacerdotalia facientes esset suspicio quod homines sub habitu religionis aquas inficiebant et potiones imponebant, ideo non erat securum alicui religioso iter illud accipere." - Guillere, "La Peste Noire a Gerone," 142-143.

[93] The letter was printed in: Guillere, "La Peste Noire a Gerone," 142-143. Also see: Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 236-237.

[94] "in locis aliquibus, propter generalem famam quod per incedentes cum tali habitu infectionantur aque, nequeat absque sue persone periculo effectum mancipare" - Amada López de Meneses, "Documentos acerca de la peste negra en los dominios de la Corona de Aragón," *Estudios de Edad Media de la Corona de Aragón* 6 (1956), 301-302, no. 12. For more about safe conduct documents in Aragon: Adam J. Kosto, "Ignorance about the Traveler: Documenting Safe Conduct in the European Middle Ages," in *The Dark Side of Knowledge: Histories of Ignorance, 1400 to 1800*, ed. Cornel Zwierlein (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 289-291.

money back.[95] The reasons for this arrest are unclear, but it is possible that rumors of poisoners dressed as clerics were popular around Manresa, as they had clearly been elsewhere.

Thus it seems that clerics, pilgrims or mendicants traveling through Aragon during the time of the Black Death were at risk of being accused of well poisoning. But why did the belief that the poisoners dressed as religious appear? First we should note that clerics, and mendicant friars in particular, were often disliked in late medieval Europe. Evidence for resistance, and even violence, towards them are far from rare. That being said, the Iberian Peninsula was not a center of anti-fraternalism, nor was the fourteenth century a time of great resistance towards clerics.[96] The issue that caused the people of Aragon to fear poisoning by counterfeit clerics was different: the tendency of churchmen to travel long distances. In all three cases above, clerics faced danger only when they reached a territory in which they were unknown foreigners. The Augustinians from Catalonia were warned against traveling further north into Languedoc, while the Franciscans from Portugal and the cleric from France faced danger in Aragon. In the last two cases, the problem was solved by a letter stating that the clerics were indeed who they claimed to be. Still, religious had an excuse to travel far across the continent, and they could easily hide potions or powders under their long habits. Anyone could put on the simple clothes of a pilgrim or a friar and gain access to water sources throughout the land without need for much explanation. Usually, pilgrims or traveling clerics were accepted with hospitality, but in Aragon, like in Provence and Languedoc, the fear of the plague shattered this kind of trust towards strangers, at least on some occasions.[97]

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[95] López de Meneses, "Documentos," 409-410, no. 130.

[96] Guy Geltner, *The Making of Medieval Antifraternalism: Polemic, Violence, Deviance, and Remembrance.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 45-75. For a study of specific case of anti-Dominican revolt, see Friedlander, *The Hammer of the Inquisitors*.

[97] Benedictow suggests that the pilgrims who traveled to Santiago de Compostela were one of the major causes for the relatively quick spread of the disease through the Iberian Peninsula. In that respect, the fear that foreign pilgrims inspired in the people of Aragon seems somewhat reasonable: Benedictow, *The Black Death,* 82-84.

Despite the rumors about poisoners dressed as clerics, there is no evidence that pilgrims, friars or other churchmen suffered mass persecution in Aragon during the Black Death. No official action was taken against them, and as long as they did not stray too far from their hometowns, they were usually safe. In contrast, the Jews of the kingdom faced a series of pogroms. The first of these attacks took place in Barcelona on 17 May. A funeral procession passed by the Jewish quarter, and suddenly a piece of reed or wood was thrown (or simply fell) from the walls of the Jewish neighborhood on the procession. Some of the enraged mourners attacked the Jewish quarter, and others joined them. The situation quickly deteriorated, as the attackers killed by swords twenty Jews and plundered their property, despite the attempts of urban administrators to intervene. The king quickly ordered town officials to find and punish the culprits, return the stolen goods, and take measures to prevent any further violence against the Jews.[98] He also wrote to his men in the towns of Montblanc, Tàrrega, Vilafranca del Penedès, and Cervera and directed them to defend the Jews.[99] This royal response was, however, insufficient to stop the violence. On 3 July, the Jews of Cervera suffered a similar attack. Some escaped to the local castle and were protected by the bailiff, but eighteen others were killed and their property plundered.[100] Three days later, the Jewish neighborhood of Tàrrega was assaulted. The attackers used axes to break in and rushed into the

[98] For the funeral, see: Baer, *Die Juden im Christlichen Spanien*, 1:327-328, and also 324-325. For the royal response to the attack, see: López de Meneses, "Documentos," 298, no. 8, 306-307, no. 18; López de Meneses, "Una consecuencia," 97-106, 321, no. 1, 341-342, no. 17. The number of Jews killed and the description of the response of urban officials are taken from the account of Ḥayyim Galipapa, a Rabbi from Monzón. This account is preserved in two versions in the books of the sixteenth-century writer Joseph Ha-Kohen: Joseph Ha-Kohen, *Dibre ha-Yamim le-Malke Ẓarfat we-'Otoman*, Elazar Horowitz, ed. (Jerusalem: Private edition, 1967), 26-27; Joseph Ha-Kohen, *Sefer 'Emeq Ha-Bakha*, 47-48. I have compared and analyzed these versions in Tzafrir Barzilay, "The Black Death in Aragon: Notes on a Jewish Chronicle," *Hayo Haya* 8 (2010), 53-71.

[99] López de Meneses, "Documentos," 299-300, no. 9; Baer, *Die Juden im Christlichen Spanien*, 1:325-326 (same document).

[100] López de Meneses, "Una consecuencia," 110, 324-325, no. 5, 328-329, no. 9, 349-350, no. 22, 356-357, no. 29. Most of the details are based on Galipapa's account: Barzilay, "The Black Death in Aragon," 57, 62.

neighborhood shouting “death to the traitors”.[101] They entered the houses, and plundered whatever property they could find. They then assaulted the Jews, injuring and killing many of them. The overall number of victims is unclear, but documentary and archeological evidence suggest that the massacre was more severe than in Barcelona and Cervera; it is possible that most of the Jewish community was killed. The attackers preceded to throw the bodies into a cistern, or several pits, in the Jewish cemetery.[102] The attack in Tàrrega was probably the most severe anti-Jewish incident during the wave of violence of 1348, but there were others. It is possible that in Solsona, Cardona, Valencia and Gerona similar attacks took place, but the sources do not reveal the details of these incidents, or when exactly they might have happened.[103] In Vilafranca, Jewish houses were stoned, and it seems that in Lleida, Jaca, Huesca and Monzón the Jews faced some form of attack but, perhaps with help from local officials, were able to escape unharmed.[104] Thus during the first outbreak of the Black Death, the Jews of Argon faced a wave of violence similar to the one we have noted in Provence.

The question is, again, why this anti-Jewish violence erupted. We have seen that well-poisoning rumors circulated in the kingdom of Aragon at the same time that Jews were persecuted,

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[101] “*Muyren los traydors”* - López de Meneses, “Una consecuencia,” 336-338, no. 14. This call is not necessarily anti-Jewish, but rather a generic call for attack, see: Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 238, n. 27.

[102] The attack in Tàrrega is the most well-documented episode of the violence of 1348, and the only one for which we can compare archeological findings with the written evidence. However, most of the documents discuss the return of Jewish property rather than the details of the attack: Anna Colet et al., “The Black Death and Its Consequences for the Jewish Community in Tàrrega: Lessons from History and Archeology,” *The Medieval Globe* 1 (2014), 63-96; López de Meneses, “Una consecuencia,” 115-126, 326-364, nos. 6, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 18, 20, 23, 24, 27, 28, 30, 31, 33, 35 (no. 14 has the most details, and is the most cited, regarding the attack); López de Meneses, “Documentos,” 426-427, no. 150; Barzilay, “The Black Death in Aragon,” 57, 62-63; Aberth, *The Black Death*, 142-143.

[103] López de Meneses, “Una consecuencia,” 127-128, 359-360, no. 32; Colet et al., “The Black Death and Its Consequences,” 81-82; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 237; Matías Calvo Gálvez and Josep Vincente Lerma, “Peste negra y pogrom en la ciudad de Valencia: La evidencia arqueológica,” *Revista de Arqueología* 19, no. 206 (1998), 50–59. Galipapa claimed that 300 people were killed in Solsona and Cardona, but since there is no mention of this in official sources, it seems highly doubtful: Barzilay, “The Black Death in Aragon,” 57, 63-64.

[104] López de Meneses, “Una consecuencia,” 126-127, 130, 324-325, no. 5, 332-334, no. 12; Barzilay, “The Black Death in Aragon,” 58, 64-65.

and it may seem likely that they fell victim to similar accusations. Indeed, Amada López de Meneses, who studied these events in depth and published most of the documents discussing them, assumed that well-poisoning accusations inspired the violence.[105] Other historians have simply ignored the problem by not mentioning the persecution of Jews in Aragon in 1348, or not discussing its causes, despite the fact that the anti-Jewish violence of 1348 was far from a minor incident.[106] Nirenberg thought it unlikely that the violence was caused by well-poisoning accusations.[107] He pointed out that there are about forty official documents discussing these events, particularly the attack in Tàrrega, and none of them mentions that the Jews were accused of poisoning wells.[108] One might suggest that such accusations existed but were simply left out of the official documentation, as they were irrelevant for the legal and bureaucratic actions that these documents were meant to achieve. However, we have seen that when clerics were accused of poisoning wells in 1348, or other Aragonese minorities were accused of this crime in 1321, well-poisoning allegations were mentioned explicitly.[109] The only source which seems to state that Jews were accused of poisoning wells in Aragon in 1348 is a short chronicle account of the persecution written by Ḥayyim Galipapa, a rabbi from Monzón. He added this account as an appendix to a book of Jewish law, which he published shortly after the events. He described the claims that the Christians of Aragon presented against the Jews: "They say the offence of Jacob caused this

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105 López de Meneses, "Una consecuencia," 92-97; see also Gautier-Dalché, "La *peste noire," 71.*

106 Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 63-68; Foa, *The Jews of Europe*, 13-14; Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," 31-35. Cohn in particular states that "the year 1391 was in effect Spain's 1348–9" (p. 31), without mentioning the events of 1348 in Aragon.

107 Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 238-239; Jaime Sobrequés Callicó, "La Peste Negra en la Península Ibérica." *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 7 (1970), 80-81 also doubted that the attacks against the Jews were triggered by well-poisoning accusations, but did not discuss the subject in depth.

108 The documents are published in: López de Meneses, "Una consecuencia," 321-364; Baer, *Die Juden im Christlichen Spanien*, 1:322-359; López de Meneses, "Documentos," 298-300, nos. 8-9, 306-307, no. 18, 342-343, no. 61, 363-364, no. 80, 402-403, no. 123, 426-427, no. 150.

109 Guillere, "La Peste Noire a Gerone," 142-143; López de Meneses, "Documentos," 301-302, no. 12. For 1321, see above: Ch 2, pp. 99-101, Ch. 3, pp. 209-224.

[plague]. They [the Jews] have brought the deadly poison into the world: And from them came this great evil upon us."[110] However, a closer reading of this passage shows that Galipapa reported that the Christians saw the Jews as responsible for the appearance of the plague, but not necessarily by poisoning wells. In contrast, when he discusses the accusations against the Jews of German-speaking lands, he mentions that they were specifically accused of throwing poison into wells.[111] Thus, it is likely that Galipapa acknowledged the difference between the allegations presented against the Jews in Aragon and in German-speaking lands. This is probably the reason that he described the accusations against the Jews of Aragon vaguely, even though he was probably well-informed about their nature.[112] In any case, the great majority of documents do not mention well-poisoning as a reason for the persecution of Jews in 1348.

While the documents discussing the persecution of the Jews are silent about well-poisoning, they do offer other reasons for the violence. Most often mentioned are attacks on Jewish property, and in particular on financial instruments, similar to the ones which took place in Provence. In Barcelona and Tàrrega, the attackers destroyed records of debts to the Jews and stole items which were given to them as collateral.[113] As a result, the Jews who survived the attack were

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[110] "ויאמרו בפשע יעקב כל זאת והם הביאו סם המות בעולם מאתם היתה נסבה מהם באה עלינו הרעה הגדולה הזאת" - Barzilay, "The Black Death in Aragon," 56.

[111] "ובאשכנז העלילו על היהודים שהשליכו מות בבורות וייסרום בשוטים ובעקרבים וישרפום באש" - Barzilay, "The Black Death in Aragon," 58.

[112] I also discuss this issue in Barzilay, "The Black Death in Aragon," 65. Nirenberg claimed that Joseph Ha-Kohen, who copied Galipapa's text in the sixteenth century, distorted the account to add well-poisoning accusations to the description of the allegations against the Jews of Aragon: Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 240. However, as we have seen, it is possible that Galipapa's original text was vague about the accusations, and there is no reason to assume Joseph Ha-Kohen was responsible for this language. In general, Galipapa's writing style is particularly difficult to decipher, see: Hayyim Galipapa, "The Book of Emeq Refa'im and Some Answers by Rabi Hayyim Galipapa," Yaakov Spiegel, ed., in *Jubillee Volume in Honor of Rav Soloveitchik*, ed. Shaul Israeli, Nachum Lamm and Isaac Rafael (HaRav Kook Institute, Jerusalem, 1984), 1211-1259. For more about the alleged reasons of the plague in Valencia, see Meyerson, *Jews in an Iberian Frontier Kingdom*, 212.

[113] "instrumenta debitoria" - López de Meneses, "Una consecuencia," 332-342, nos. 12, 14, 17; *Die Juden im Christlichen Spanien*, 1:326-327.

unable to meet their monetary obligations to their creditors.[114] The fact that the attackers targeted financial records, in addition to money and property, suggests that they had much to gain from destroying records of debts to the Jews. As we have seen, the Jews in most of Europe, and also in Aragon, often made their living by loaning money to Christians for interest. Many Christians despised the Jews for engaging in usury, but needed the credit they provided. They borrowed money from the Jews, but at the same time resented their practices, and were eager for an opportunity to get rid of their debts. Usually the king provided the Jews with protection against this popular contempt, in return for heavy taxation. Thus, many saw the Jews as agents of the Crown, since they charged them high interest and then paid much of the profit into the king's coffers, in a form of indirect taxation. The attackers of the Jews in 1348 were probably motivated by the will to destroy evidence of their old debts, or by anger at the financial prosperity of some of the Jews, who, they believed, made their gains by exploiting the public. This kind of anti-Jewish sentiment was common in Aragon, but the king was usually able to protect "his" Jews.[115] However, the summer of 1348 was far from usual, and again, specific political and economic circumstances provide important context for the development of the violence.

Even before the plague appeared, King Pere IV faced a significant political threat to his rule, similarly to queen Joanna of Naples. In 1347, groups of nobles, known as unions, started a rebellion against him, which lasted for two years. The Union of Valencia was a particularly formidable opponent, which defeated the king on the battlefield and captured him in May 1348.

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[114] López de Meneses, "Una consecuencia," 335-336, no. 13.

[115] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 21, 32, 35-37, 48-50, 173-179, 238-240; Meyerson, *Jews in an Iberian Frontier Kingdom*, 98-210; Mark D. Meyerson, "Victims and Players: The Attack of the Union of Valencia on the Jews of Morvedre," in *Religion, Text, and Society in Medieval Spain and Northern Europe: Essays in Honor of J.N. Hillgarth*, ed. Thomas E. Burman, Mark D. Meyerson, and Leah Shopkow (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2002), 75-77; Melanie V. Shirk, "Violence and the Plague in Aragón," *Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association* 5 (1984), 36-37; Ch. 3, pp. 182-183, 222-223.

The civil war, in conjunction with a major famine that struck the kingdom in 1347, led the Crown into great financial difficulties. The Jews often found themselves in dire straits due to this political and economic crisis. The king increased taxes on the Jews in the years prior to 1348, but due to the general economic hardship, they were not as prosperous as before. In addition, the Unionists saw them as royal serfs, and thus as a target in their war against the Crown. Thus some Jewish communities in Aragon suffered attacks in 1348 that had much more to do with the war than with the plague.[116] The plague worsened the crisis and made the king even less able to protect the Jews. First, while in the long run the plague had some economic benefits, in the short run it hindered economic activity significantly. The great mortality led to a decline in commerce, and the fear of foreigners limited travel and trade. These factors caused a short-term economic decline, which made the public resent Jewish loans even more. At the same time, the plague killed many of the taxpayers, leading the king to increase the taxation of Jews.[117] The plague also weakened the centralized control of the king over his domain, since many officials died and could not be replaced. At the same time, many people fled from the plague, and unknown vagabonds roamed the roads. The dead left much unattended property, often leading to looting, burglary, and violent confrontations over ownership took place— with no necessary connection to Jews. The surviving royal and urban officials indeed tried to suppress such actions, but in many cases the best they

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[116] Meyerson, *Jews in an Iberian Frontier Kingdom*, 161, 164-170, 210-215; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 19-20, 243; Meyerson, "Victims and Players," 70-102. Meyerson shows that the attack against the Jews of Morvedre did not necessarily produce economic profit to the attackers, but was rather an act of protest against the king.

[117] Gautier-Dalché, "La *peste noire," 72-76;* Sobrequés Callicó, "La Peste Negra en la Península Ibérica," 73-75; Melanie V. Shirk, "The Black Death in Aragon, 1348-1351," *Journal of Medieval History* 7 (1981), 362-363. In the years following the events of 1348 the king issued a series of privileges aimed to protect the Jews and allow them to recover from the crisis, but this happened only after the persecution.

could do was to return the property to its lawful owners after a delay of a few months, or even years.[118]

There is much evidence that this crisis in royal authority stood at the heart of the attacks against the Jews in 1348, rather than well-poisoning accusations. As we have seen, several documents suggest that the attackers aimed to profit economically from the anti-Jewish pogroms. Other documents claim that the attacks were meant as a challenge to royal authority. The king, or one of his official notaries, stated his firm opinion about the people responsible for the attack in Tàrrega and about their possible motives:

> *"Several men of this town [Tàrrega], who were boldly agitated, disregarded the fear of God and our [the king's] reproof. They did not dread offending our majesty [the king], [and] were incited by a diabolical spirit. With armed hands, determined souls, obstinate malice and thoughtless impulse, they approached the Call [the Jewish neighborhood] with hostility".*[119]

Other documents describe the attackers in similar terms: a mob that had lost any respect for the authority of the Crown.[120] Thus, the violence against the Jews is described, at least from the king's perspective, as an anti-royal action. Did the attackers indeed intend these acts as a protest against the Crown, or did the king simply misinterpret their anti-Jewish tendencies? Only one document appears to provide the perspective of the rioters. Allegedly, before they entered the Jewish *Call* in Tàrrega, they cried out: "death to the traitors".[121] Nirenberg points out that this was a generic battle

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[118] Gautier-Dalché, "La peste noire," 71, 74-75; Shirk, "The Black Death in Aragon," 357-362; Shirk, "Violence and the Plague in Aragón," 32-34, 37.

[119] "nonnulli ipsius ville, populum eiusdem fortiter concitando, Dei timore et nostre correctionis postposito, nostrum magestatem offendere non verentes, diabolico spiritu incitati, manu armata et mente deliberate, obstinata malitia et motibus inconsultis, ad Callum ipsius aljame hostiliter accesserunt" - López de Meneses, "Una consecuencia," 337, no. 14.

[120] In particular: López de Meneses, "Una consecuencia," 321-342, nos. 1, 7, 9, 12, 17.

[121] "*Muyren los traydors"* - López de Meneses, "Una consecuencia," 337, no. 14.

cry, which was used against Jews and Christians alike.[122] Still, assuming that this account is reliable, we must consider the possibility that the attackers indeed saw the Jews as traitors. During the civil war, the Jews clearly stood with the king, and if the rioters were supporters of the Union, they were likely to depict the Jews as traitors acting against the real interests of the kingdom. Again, Nirenberg doubts this explanation, as he notes that most of the anti-Jewish violence took place in the heart of Catalonia, an area generally loyal to the king. Instead, he suggests that the violence was related to local municipal tensions, unique to each attack.[123] Some of the documents, however, suggest that even the most loyal towns were not immune to anti-royal influences. Two documents state that the violence in Barcelona and Tàrrega was "incited by people of hostile descent".[124] It is impossible to determine who these mysterious enemies were, or even if they were supporters of the Union. But given the absence of evidence for well-poisoning accusations, the decline in royal authority provides a more plausible cause for resentment towards Jews and the attacks against them in 1348.

To conclude, it seems that well-poisoning rumors in Aragon targeted clerics and mendicants rather than Jews. The fact that traveling churchmen found themselves often as strangers who arrived in a certain area just when the plague appeared marked them as immediate suspects. That being said, there is no reason to think that clerics suffered organized persecution during the Black Death, and a letter of reference was usually enough to protect them from harm. The Jews of Aragon, on the other hand, endured several episodes of popular violence during this time. Yet the violence against them was triggered not by well-poisoning accusations, but rather by their economic status, the civil war, and the decline in the authority of the king who protected

[122] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 238 n. 27.
[123] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 243.
[124] "instigante humani generis inimico" - López de Meneses, "Una consecuencia," 341-342, nos. 17, 18.

them. It is likely that the plague accelerated or intensified these processes, but not because it sparked well-poisoning allegations against Jews. Interestingly, despite the political instability and well-poisoning rumors that reached Aragon from Languedoc, even the enemies of the Jews did not attempt to implicate them in such a crime. We have seen a similar state affairs in 1321, when well-poisoning accusations were rarely transferred from lepers to Jews in Aragon.[125] In both cases, the accusations could not transfer from one group to the other "naturally". Powerful political agents had to intervene for this transformation to occur in France, and such intervention did not happen in Aragon. It seems that the enemies of the Jews had a golden opportunity to turn them into scapegoats in 1348: the plague was raging, rumors of foreigners infecting wells were circulating, and the king was too weak to protect his servants. Still, the rioters did not do so. Did they not know about the rumors? Did the option to implicate the Jews never occur to them? Did they see the plague as a divine punishment? The documents do not answer these questions. In any case, it is clear that it took more than a combination of plague and anti-Jewish feelings to start well-poisoning accusations.

Well-poisoning accusations in the Dauphiné and in Savoy

We have seen that well-poisoning accusations probably did not transfer from paupers, vagabonds and foreigners to Jews in the first few weeks after their reappearance in 1348. Neither in Provence, nor in Languedoc or Aragon were the Jews accused of such crime during the first outbreak of the Black Death, even if they suffered persecution for other reasons. And so, it is still unclear when exactly such allegations against them began in 1348 and why. To answer these questions we must

[125] See above: Ch. 3, pp. 209-214.

study the persecution of the Jews in the areas north of Provence: the Dauphiné and the County of Savoy.

The territories of Savoy and the Dauphiné, once part of the kingdom of Arles, were now mostly independent. Officially, these territories belonged to the Empire, but in practice the Dauphins and the counts of Savoy were free to rule as they pleased. This independence quickly dissolved in the second half of the fourteenth century, but in 1348 it still endured.[126] The plague reached these areas in the second half of April or in the beginning of May, as it moved northwards form Provence through the Rhône valley. It is hard to measure the exact mortality rate, but indirect evidence suggests that it was massive. The plague was preceded by a period of harsh weather, and the conjunction of the two disasters caused an economic crisis. As in other places, officials found it difficult to maintain the survivors' property rights and to uphold legal procedures.[127] But while in general the effects of the plague in Savoy and the Dauphiné were not unlike in other locations, only there did well-poisoning accusations make the leap from from Christians to Jews.

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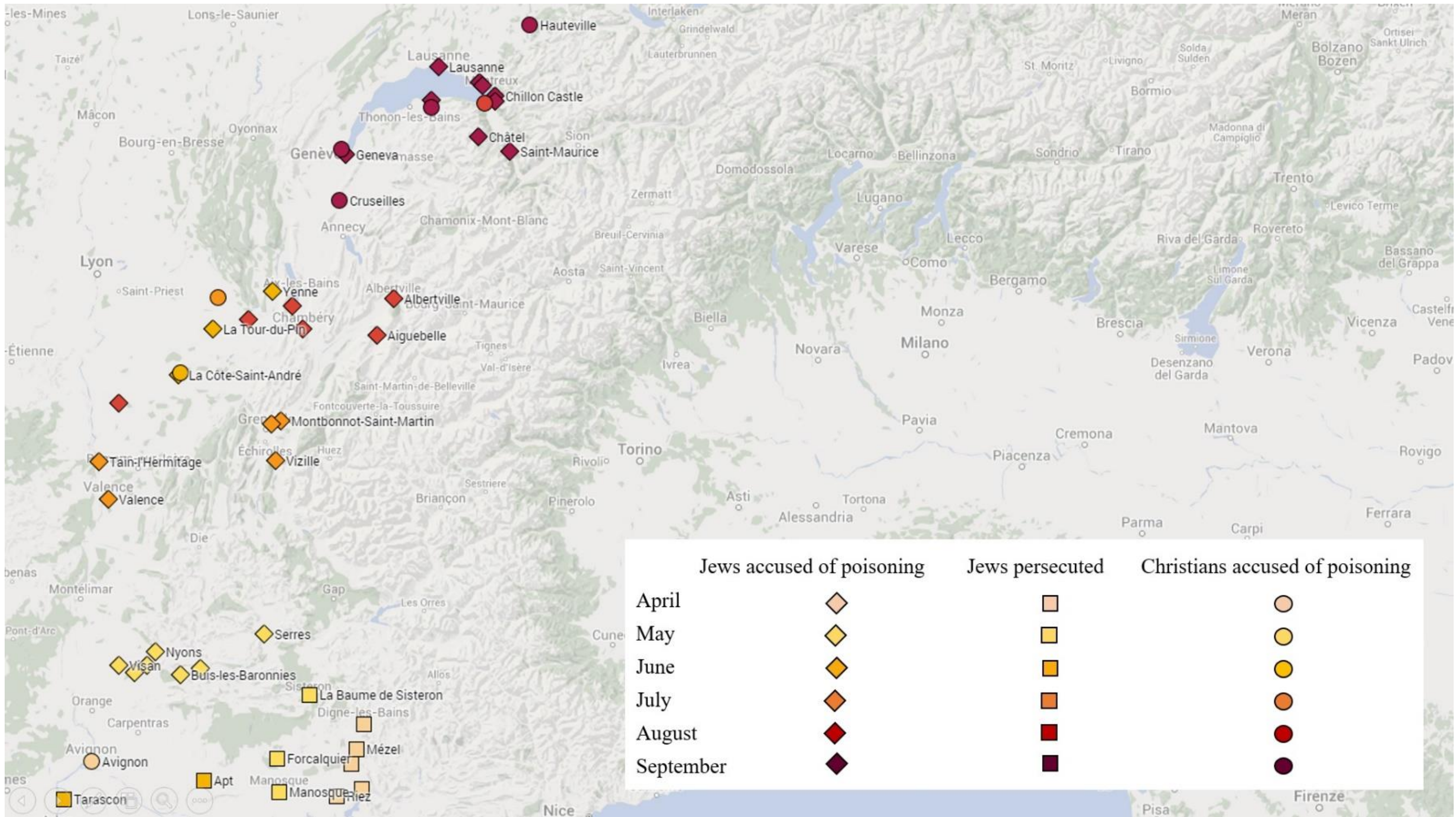
[126] Fournier, *Le royaume d'Arles*, 433-517; Cox, *The Green Count*, 71-75.

[127] Benedictow, *The Black Death,* 98-101, 315-328; Cox, *The Green Count*, 68-69; Bernard Andenmatten and Jean-Daniel Morerod, "La peste à Lausanne au XIV siècle (1348/1349, 1360)," *Études de lettres* 2-3 (1987), 19-30. Benedictow presents astonishing numbers of more than 50% mortality in some areas, and may have been partly right: Michael H. Gelting, "The Mountains and the Plague: Maurienne 1348," *Collegium Medievale* 4 (1991), 7-45.

Well-poisoning accusations and violence in the Dauphiné and in Savoy



The wave of anti-Jewish violence that spread through Provence in spring 1348 did not stop at the border. From La Baume de Sisteron, where the Jewish community was murdered on 16 May, it continued north, towards the southern parts of the Dauphiné.[128] There is significant evidence that in the area southwest of Gap, only about twenty miles from Sisteron, major persecution against Jewish communities took place. Humbert Pilati, notary of the Dauphin Humbert II, mentioned earlier, reports that the Jews were attacked in the towns of Nyons, Sainte-Euphémie-sur-Ouvèze, Mirabel, Visan, Villedieu and Buis-les-Baronnies. In Veynes alone, he states, 93 Jews were

[128] Shatzmiller, "Les Juifs de Provence pendant la Peste Noire, " 474, 479.

killed.[129] All of these small towns are quite close to each other, on the route between Gap and Orange, in the southern part of the Dauphiné, known as the Baronnies.[130] The fact that Humbert Pilati mentioned these towns in particular, though they are far from central, suggests that there was something unusual about the anti-Jewish incidents there. To discover exactly what, we need to turn to the documentary evidence, which can add a few more details. First, it seems that unlike the anti-Jewish violence in Provence, which included mostly pogroms performed by angry mobs, the attacks in the Baronnies were organized by local officials. The Jews of Buis were held in a castle (in Mévouillon) before they were killed, as were the Jews of Sainte-Euphémie.[131] In Serres, another nearby town, a large number of Jews were burnt in a barn, perhaps in a form of an organized execution.[132] This is not to suggest that the Jews did not suffer some popular violence, as in Sainte-Euphémie, where the crowd entered the castle in which they were kept captive and killed many of them.[133] Still, it seems that—in contrast to what we saw in Aragon— local officials acted to arrest the Jews rather than to protect them from the mob. Moreover, the Dauphin, Humbert II, approved of the violence, and perhaps even encouraged it. Humbert Pilati, who was well informed about local politics, reported that the Jews of the Baronnies, like those of the entire Dauphiné, "were

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[129] Humbert Pilati, *Preuves de l'hisoire de Dauphiné*, 625. Frédéric Chartrain suggested that the most severe attack against Jews in this area happened in Serres, rather than Veynes. He noted that the name of the owner of the barn in which the Jews were burnt in Serres was Guillaume Veyne, and suggested that this detail was somehow distorted by Hubert Pilati into a statement that the massacre happened in Veynes. This scenario is plausible, but it is also possible that such an attack happened in both places. Without further evidence, we should assume that Pilati was well informed about the events in the Dauphiné, and thus that there was a massacre in Veynes: Frédéric Chartrain, "Les Juifs de Serres au XIVe siècle d'après les comptes de la châtellenie," in *Economies et sociétés dans le Dauphiné médiéval: Actes du 108e Congrès national des sociétés savantes, Grenoble, 1983* (Paris: Comité des Travaux historiques et scientifiques, 1984), 207-208.

[130] A useful map describing the persecution against Jews in the Dauphiné in 1348 can be found in: Florent Pouvreau, "Les violences antijuives en Dauphiné en 1348: Des stéréotypes de persécutions aux enjeux locaux," *La pierre et l'écrit* 23 (2012), 24.

[131] Auguste Prudhomme, *Les Juifs en Dauphiné aux XIVe et XVe siècles* (Grenoble: Gabriel Dupont, 1883), 29-30.

[132] Chartrain, "Les Juifs de Serres," 207; Prudhomme, *Les Juifs en Dauphiné*, 30; Gérard Emmanuel Weil, "Recherches nouvelles sur les Juifs en Dauphiné au XIVe siècle," *REJ* 143 (1984), 260.

[133] Prudhomme, *Les Juifs en Dauphiné*, 29.

investigated by the orders of the Dauphin".[134] In fact, most of the information about the persecution in this area comes from tax documents sent from local nobles and officials to the court of the Dauphin. In these documents, they accounted for expenses they incurred during the trials, explained the decrease in tax collection due to the murder of the Jews, and even asked for refunds for some of these losses. In Sainte-Euphémie, for example, the Dauphin agreed to pay 50 florins to the attackers of the Jews.[135] As the trials against Jews continued, the Dauphin also made sure that the property confiscated from them ended up in his coffers, but there is no evidence that he did so as soon as the violence erupted in the Dauphiné.[136] In any case, the documents give the impression that the attacks against the Jews in the Baronnies were based on legal violance, and were indeed supported by the Dauphin, probably in retrospect.

And so, it seems that Humbert Pilati was not wrong to mark the Baronnies as an area in which the pattern of anti-Jewish violence transformed significantly. For the first time in 1348, we have evidence of mass arrests, and probably investigations and executions, of Jews. It is hard to tell whether this change was a result of an independent initiative by local lords, or if it was supported by the Dauphin from the very beginning. Still, it is likely that the nobles of the Baronnies did not hesitate to use their legal power against the Jews and probably guessed that the Dauphin would not prevent them from doing so.[137]

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[134] "Judaei, apud Buxum, Nions, Sanctam Euphemiam, Mirabellum, Avisanum, Villam Dei, Auraicam, Valentiam, Tinetum et per totum Dalphinatum inquiri jussit Dalphinus." - Humbert Pilati, *Preuves de l'hisoire de Dauphiné*, 625.

[135] Prudhomme, *Les Juifs en Dauphiné*, 29-30 (for Sainte-Euphémie and Buis); Chartrain, "Les Juifs de Serres," 207-208 (for Serres).

[136] Valbonnais, *Histoire de Dauphiné*, 2:615; Prudhomme, *Les Juifs en Dauphiné*, 33; Claude Bernard, *Histoire du Buis-les-Baronnies* (Buis-les-Baronnies: Caisse des écoles, 1956), 68; Ulysse Chevalier, *Regeste dauphinois ou répertoire chronologique et analytique des documents imprimés et manuscrits relatifs à l'histoire du Dauphiné, des origines chrétiennes à l'année 1349* (Valence: Imprimerie Valentinoise, 1913), 6:806, no. 36589.

[137] Mesler, "Legends of Jewish Sorcery," 304-305 notes the new pattern of the persecution in the Dauphine.

It is important to understand exactly when this transformation took place. One historian suggested that the persecution in the Baronnies started sometime in April. He based this idea on the fact that the report about the violence in Serres is preceded by a mention of the presence of the Dauphin's army in the area, an event which happened in April.[138] However, April does not fit well with other evidence. According to Humbert Pilati, the violence irrupted in the Dauphiné in the second half of May, and according to Heinrich of Diessenhofen, only in June. Moreover, in April the plague had not yet reached the area, nor had the attacks against Jews spread to the bordering parts of northern Provence.[139] It seems much more reasonable to assume that anti-Jewish violence in the Dauphiné started around the end of May. It is likely that at this point the attacks against Jews turned into acts of legal violence, a change which proved itself to be crucial.

Still, it is not completely clear whether well-poisoning accusations played any part in the transformation of anti-Jewish violence from popular pogroms to organized arrests and executions. Humbert Pilati seems to claim that all the Jews in the Dauphiné faced poisoning charges in 1348, but the documents from the Baronnies are silent on this issue.[140] However, a contemporary document from Savoy, which so far has received little scholarly attention, can shed some light on the subject.[141] On 5 June, the council of Count Amadeus VI of Savoy, residing in Chambéry, wrote to the lord of the castle of Côte-Saint-André about the issue of well-poisoning accusations. The

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[138] Chartrain, "Les Juifs de Serres," 207-208. The dates for the persecution in the Baronnies in the map produced by Pouvreau are based on Chartrain's chronology: Pouvreau, "Les violences antijuives," 24.

[139] Humbert Pilati, *Preuves de l'hisoire de Dauphiné*, 625; Heinricus de Diessenhoven, *Chronicon,* 68; Shatzmiller, "Les Juifs de Provence pendant la Peste Noire, " 474, 479.

[140] Humbert Pilati, *Preuves de l'hisoire de Dauphiné*, 625; Chartrain, "Les Juifs de Serres," 207-208, Bernard, *Histoire du Buis-les-Baronnies*, 68; Prudhomme, *Les Juifs en Dauphiné*, 29-30.

[141] Chambéry, Archives départementales de Savoie, Trésor des chartes, MS SA 15, no. 28. Chevalier and Cox knew about the existence of this document, but did not analyze it: Chevalier, *Regeste dauphinoise,* 6:706, no. 35904; Cox, *The Green Count*, 70. See an appendix for the full transcription.

members of the council were informed that the lord of Côte-Saint-André supported actions of his men against Christians and Jews suspected of poisoning wells:

> *It came to our [the council members'] attention that there is a rumor circulating, which emerged due to false claims, about toxic poisons and other potions. Some of those subject to you bring reproach and admonishment against the Jews of our lord the count and other Jews who pass through your lands. And [they] also [act against] some other Christians as they are passing through your territory, because of these potions and poisons. And concerning these [the poisons], they [the officials] accuse them [the suspects], saying that they put these poisons and potions in the water. And when they [the officials] discover that those mentioned above [Jews and some Christians] are passing, they search and investigate even Christians who seem to be strangers, under pretext of these poisons, and wish to see these [poisons] which they carry.*[142]

This is the earliest document which explicitly reports about well-poisoning accusations in 1348. Still, it seems that these accusations did not start at Côte-Saint-André, as the letter discuses rumors which were already spreading. It is possible that the origin of the accusations was in the Baronnies, about 70 miles south of Côte-Saint-André, which could explain the mass anti-Jewish persecution there. If this was indeed the case, than well-poisoning allegations probably started in the Dauphiné sometime in late May, and then traveled north to the southern parts of Savoy.

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[142] "Ad nostram audientiam pervenit quod laborante fama que a pretibus inficioribus emersit, super venenis tossicis et aliis poysionibus. aliqui ex vestris subditis Judeos dicti domini nostri comitis et alios Judeos per loca vestra transeuntes, necnon et aliquos christianos dum per loca vestra incedunt super ipsis venenis et poysionibus, molestias et opprobaria inferunt et de ipsis eosdem accusant, dicentes ipsus poysiones et venena per aquas posuisse. Et quos ut predicitur incedentes reperiunt tam Christianos qui videos dum tamen fuit extranei perscrutantur et perquirunt sub colore dicti veneni, et inde videre volunt ea que supra se portant. " - Chambéry, Archives départementales de Savoie, Trésor des chartes, MS SA 15, no. 28.

In any case, the letter clarifies that by the beginning of June the allegations were already clearly formed, as Jews were said to poison water sources (and not the air) using potions (and not by their sins). Yet, the letter discusses three groups of suspects: local Jews from Savoy, foreign Jews, and foreign Christians. Thus, it probably represents the transference of well-poisoning accusations from foreigners, who were, as we have seen, common suspects before June, to Jews, who were the usual suspects later on. While the letter describes the actions of the men of the castellan of Côte-Saint-André against local Jews are before their investigations against foreigners, the order of events may have been reversed. Rumors about well poisoning by Jews or foreigners reached the area, and so the officials questioned newcomers in search of potions, and only later turned their attention to local Jews. As we have seen, suspicion of strangers was nothing unusual during the first outbreak of the Black Death. Yet, the letter discusses foreign Jews separately from local Jews or other travelers. This probably indicates that a significant number of Jews entered Savoy around this time, in addition to other travelers, many of whom were probably attempting to avoid the plague. Some of these Jews could have been refugees from the persecution in Provence or in the Baronnies, who traveled north only to face further suspicion. Still, the letter does not report about executions or mass arrests of Jews or Christians, but only about questioning of suspects in well poisoning. And so, it seems that the letter represents an early stage of the persecution in Savoy, and one of the first instances in which anti-Jewish actions were justified by well-poisoning accusation in 1348.

This conclusion is also supported by the reaction of the authorities, the council Chambéry, to the investigations conducted in Côte-Saint-André:

> *We [council members] expressly order and command that while our Jews are staying within the county, and other strangers pass through the county, and also other foreign*

Christians [pass through], you [the castellan] will take care to defend them from any violent oppression and injury. And [you should] also direct [your men to do so], and [we order that you] not support any claim or pretext made against them [Jews or foreigners] or other [kind of] attack by anyone. And you should make sure that those acting against these people will be punished in such a way that would set an example to others.[143]

In early June 1348, the councilors of Savoy were unwilling to accept any unauthorized violence by nobles in their territory. They completely rejected well-poisoning accusations, and insisted that no investigation in this matter should take place, neither against Jews nor against Christians, neither against citizens of Savoy, nor against foreigners. Unfortunately, this attitude, a complete opposite to the actions of the authorities in the Dauphiné, did not last for long. The officials of Savoy eventually accepted the accusations and acted against local Jews, despite their initial reaction.

As for the Jews of Côte-Saint-André, it seems that they were not out of the woods yet. In the fiscal accounts of Savoy for the year 1349, there is a note about a sum "received from the Jews of Côte [Saint-André], for a certain letter obtained for them, so they will be brought back safely into the castle of Côte, so the Christians will not offend them."[144] In the letter discussed above there is no order to admit local Jews into the castle, and so this note must be referring to a different document. Thus, it is likely that despite the orders given to the castellan of Côte-Saint-André, anti-Jewish sentiment continued to develop in this area, and eventually the Jews had to pay the council

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[143] "mandamus quatenus nostros iudeos infra comitatum commorantes et alios extraneos per ipsum comitatum transitum facientur necnon ceteros advenas christianos ab omnibus oppresionibus violentiis et iniuriis quibuscumque defenditis tueamini ac etiam proregatis nec sustineantis quoius titulo sive causa per aliquem contra fieri aut aliter attentare. Et quos contra facientes reperieritis taliter castigens que cedat ceteris in exemplum" - Chambéry, Archives départementales de Savoie, Trésor des chartes, MS SA 15, no. 28.

[144] "Recepit a judeis Coste pro quadam litera per eosdem obtenta ut reducerentur secure in Castro Coste ne per christianos offenderentur" - Renata Segre, "Testimonianze documentarie sugli ebrei negli stati Sabaudi (1297-1398)," *Michael* 4 (1976), 312.

to protect them. It is possible that this tactic allowed the Jews of Côte-Saint-André to escape the persecution, but many of the Jews of Savoy and the Dauphiné were not as fortunate.

On 29 June, less than a month after the council of Chambéry rejected the accusations against Jews in Côte-Saint-André, the Jews of the town of Yenne, north of Chambéry, were murdered. It is unclear whether this was the doing of an angry mob or an organized execution. Still, the fact that the local castellan, Jacobus Bordelli, confiscated the property of the Jews suggests that the latter is more likely. It seems that he was at first reluctant to report these facts to the council of Chambéry, which may indicate that he was acting independently. In any case, the council failed in preventing violence against Jews (and foreigners), if it was still trying to do so.[145] At the same time, the persecution of Jews in the Dauphiné continued. On 4 July, the Dauphin confiscated the property of the Jews in the area of Tour-du-Pin, a town right by the border with Savoy, not far from Côte-Saint-André. He distributed the property to his men as he pleased, but it is unclear if he ordered any further action against local Jews.[146] A papal bull issued by pope Clement VI on 5 July suggests that the persecution was even more extensive. The bull was a reissue of the bull "Sicut Judeis" (c. 1120), which defended the Jews from harm by Christians.[147] It reminded all Christians that though the Jews rejected Christ, church doctrine states that they should be able to live safely within the Christian world. They should not be killed or expelled without due legal process, their property should not be taken away, and they should not be baptized by force. Several popes, starting in the mid-twelfth century, felt the need to stress this message and reissued

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[145] Segre, "Testimonianze documentarie," 312-313; Leon Costa de Beauregard, "Notes et documents sur la condition des Juifs en Savoie dans les siècles du moyen-âge," *Mémoires de l'Académie Royale de Savoie*, second series, 2 (1854), 103; Thomas Bardelle, *Juden in einem Transit- und Brückenland: Studien zur Geschichte der Juden in Savoyen-Piemont bis zum Ende der Herrschaft Amadeus VIII* (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1998), 251-252.

[146] Humbert Pilati, *Preuves de l'hisoire de Dauphiné*, 625; Prudhomme, *Les Juifs en Dauphiné*, 28; Chevalier, *Regeste dauphinoise,* 6:716, no. 35972.

[147] Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, 1:396, no. 372.

the bull. Clearly, the persecution of Jews in Provence, Aragon, the Dauphiné and Savoy convinced pope Clement that such a reminder was very necessary at this time.

But despite papal admonition, the persecution of the Jews grew more severe. A document of 21 July reveals that a major investigation against the Jews of the Dauphiné was already in full swing. Stephanus de Ruffo, a judge and member of the Dauphin's council, reported about an investigation that he and his colleague, Reymundo Falavelli, had conducted against Jews accused of well poisoning. The two had just returned from Visille, a small town just south of Grenoble, where they arrived to supervise the investigation in the name of the council. Eight Jews were arrested and kept captive in the local castle there, "because it was said that they put, and are still putting, poisons and toxic powders in water, fountains, wells and provisions which Christians use."[148] The Jews were questioned day and night, in order to "fully extract the truth out of them".[149] According to Stephanus, he and Reymundo started investigating these charges because by this time they already became public knowledge. More importantly, Dauphin Humbert II himself sent letters ordering the council to do so. The council members used the help of notaries, local officials and their men to conduct the investigation, and paid them accordingly. Guigonus Toscani, the castellan of Visille, received about 37 *livres* for keeping the eight Jewish men (their names appear in the document) imprisoned in his castle. However, when Guigonus reported his income to the Dauphin in a tax document, sometime in 1349, he stated that he received 194 *livres* for imprisoning 74 Jews, "both men and women, rich and poor" for a period of 70 days.[150] A simple mistake, or even a lie

[148] "quia tossicum et pulveres venenosos in aquis, fontibus, puteis et victualibus, quibus christiani utebantur, posuisseet poni fecisse dicebantur" - Prudhomme, *Les Juifs en Dauphiné*, 89. The document is also partially printed in: Valbonnais, *Histoire de Dauphiné,* 2:581; also see: Chevalier, *Regeste dauphinoise,* 6:35994.

[149] "ad plenius eruendam veritatem ab eisdem" - Prudhomme, *Les Juifs en Dauphiné*, 90.

[150] "pro expensis LXXIV Judaeorum et Judaearum, tam magnorum, quam parvorum, qui steterunt in carceribus per LXX dies" - Valbonnais, *Histoire de Dauphiné*, 2:585; Chevalier, *Regeste dauphinoise,* 6:779, no. 36419; Prudhomme, *Les Juifs en Dauphiné*, 29-30. Literally, "big and small", but this is most likely an indication of social status.

intended to hide taxable income, could hardly account for such great differences between the two documents. It is more likely that the document issued by Stephanus represents only the first wave of the arrests in Visille, which included eight Jews, presumably local. However, it seems that many more Jews were held in Visille castle later, for much a longer period. As Visille is a small town, such a large number of Jews probably came from elsewhere, perhaps from the city of Grenoble. If this was the case, the castle was used as a center for the investigation of Jews from the area. In any case, it is clear that by mid-July the Jews of the Dauphiné faced an official investigation sponsored by the Dauphin and conducted by his council members and officials.

The formal investigation against the Jews of the Dauphiné only incited popular hatred against them. A charge of ritual murder was brought against Jews in the town of La Mure sometime around mid-July, but it is unclear whether they were persecuted.[151] At Saint-Sorlin the Jews were killed by a mob on 17 August, while the local lord was away.[152] Still, it seems that in most places the persecution was organized by the authorities. In Montbonnot-Saint-Martin, not far from Grenoble, Jews were imprisoned for some time. In Montfleury, a couple of miles away, the Jews were kept captive for 53 days and their property was confiscated by the local lord.[153] Jews were also persecuted in towns of Valence and Tain, according to Humbert Pilati.[154]

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[151] "solvit pro expensis magistri Girardi delati de furato infant Christiano, et tradito Judaeis, et de pluribus aliis enormibus delictis" - Valbonnais, *Histoire de Dauphiné*, 2:585; Prudhomme, *Les Juifs en Dauphiné*, 30 ; Pouvreau, "Les violences antijuives," 21; Mesler, "Legends of Jewish Sorcery," 304. Apparently, one Master Girard was accused of stealing a Christian boy and giving him to the Jews (to be murdered, presumably), and thus was kept in prison for about seven months and then executed by torture. The historians cited above believed that Girard was a Jew, but the document does not state so. There is no information about persecution against the Jews of La Mure.

[152] "Die XVII Augusti interfecti Judaei de Sancto Saturnino ex commotione populi, extante domino apud Balmam" - Humbert Pilati, *Preuves de l'hisoire de Dauphiné*, 625; Prudhomme, *Les Juifs en Dauphiné*, 29.

[153] "Item, pro expenſis Judaeorum tempore quo fuerunt incarcerati apud Montem-Bonoudum"; "Item, pro duobus hominibus qui custodierunt domum et bona Judæorum tempore detentionis eorumdem pro LIII. Diebus" - Valbonnais, *Histoire de Dauphiné*, 2:584; Prudhomme, *Les Juifs en Dauphiné*, 30-31. See also Chevalier, *Regeste dauphinoise,* 6:720, no. 36003.

[154] Humbert Pilati, *Preuves de l'hisoire de Dauphiné*, 625; Pouvreau, "Les violences antijuives," 24.

The persecution in the Dauphiné obviously focused on the Jews, but the idea that Christians were involved in well-poisoning did not disappear completely. In the town of Morestel, a man named Pachodus Ribaldus was executed for poisoning. In Montbonnot-Saint-Martin, where Jews were also persecuted, several men were executed for robbery and poisoning. There is no indication that these people were Jews, but they were still accused of poisoning in 1348, presumably in connection with well-poisoning rumors.[155] Overall, however, the persecution in the Dauphiné was mostly organized by officials and focused on Jews. The fact that there were exceptions to this rule shows simply that the accusations and the violence that followed them were a part of a dynamic social process, which changed according to local circumstances.

As we have seen, Dauphin Humbert II had a very different approach to well-poisoning accusations and to the persecution of Jews than his peers in Provence and Aragon. He may have encouraged his officials to continue the persecution once he discovered that it was happening, and he definitely supported their actions in retrospect. As a result, the Jews of the Dauphiné faced mostly legal violence, organized by officials and sponsored by the Dauphin. Why did Dauphin Humbert choose this approach? There were very few Jews in the Dauphiné, or in Savoy, before 1306. During the great expulsion from France, some of the Jewish exiles settled in the Dauphiné, under the rule of Humbert I, Humbert II's grandfather. Others joined them when the Jews were expelled from France and Avignon around 1321. Thus, in 1348 they were still considered newcomers to the area and did not share a long history of peaceful coexistence with local Christians, as did the Jews of Aragon and Provence.[156] Furthermore, Humbert II may have been

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[155] "Item, deducuntur pro salario Carnacerii qui combuxit Pachodum Ribaldum delatum de imposition veneni"; "Item, solvit pro Minjaylliis quorumdam delatorum de impositione veneni et de latrocinio" - Valbonnais, *Histoire de Dauphiné*, 2:584.

[156] Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 224; Mesler, "Legends of Jewish Sorcery," 305; Prudhomme, *Les Juifs en Dauphiné*, 12-14 ; Pouvreau, "Les violences antijuives," 16-17; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 67.

inspired by the Capetian kings in his treatment of the Jews under his rule. In 1338, only five years after he inherited his title, he imposed an annual tax on local Jews as a condition for allowing them to remain in his lands. In 1345 he initiated a major expulsion of the Jews, whom he accused of being usurers, but was eventually willing to allow them to stay in exchange for a heavy fine. In 1347 he raised taxes, including over the Jews, again.[157] It seems that in 1348, when rumors began that the Jews were responsible for spreading the plague, Dauphin Humbert saw an opportunity to take over their property. Thus, he supported the persecution that his officials initiated against the Jews and launched a formal investigation to conclude whether they were guilty of poisoning wells. These actions indeed produced incomes for the Dauphin, and in 1350, shortly after the Dauphiné was annexed to the kingdom of France, he handed the property confiscated from the Jews over to the new ruler.[158] It is hard to say if Humbert simply used already existing anti-Jewish rumors to his benefit in 1348, or made a conscious effort to transfer poisoning accusations from Christians to Jews. In any case, after he established the Jews as a target for an official investigation regarding well poisoning, it was hard to reverse the situation.

The persecution of Jews in Savoy was now also led by local officials. Bernard de Murbello, the castellan of Aiguebelle, a town east of Chambéry, arrested around July eighteen Jews and kept them captive in the nearby castle of Charbonnières. About a year later, Bernard stated that the Jews were arrested "because of a public rumor which started due to the mortality." He stated that he held the Jews captive "in order to inquire against Jewish men and women about the poison which, so it was said, they used against Christians."[159] The castellan found the Jews guilty of these

[157] Pouvreau, "Les violences antijuives," 18-19; Mesler, "Legends of Jewish Sorcery," 305; Prudhomme, *Les Juifs en Dauphiné*, 16-18, 23-24.

[158] Valbonnais, *Histoire de Dauphiné*, 2:615; Chevalier, *Regeste dauphinoise,* 6:806, no. 36589; Pouvreau, "Les violences antijuives," 23; Prudhomme, *Les Juifs en Dauphiné*, 33.

[159] "propter rumorem populi occasione sumpta propter mortalitatem", "ad inquirendum contra Judeos et Judeas super tossico per eos ut dicitur ministrato contra christianos" - Costa de Beauregard, "Notes et documents," 116-118.

charges, executed them, and confiscated their property. On 8 August, the two regents of Savoy, Count Amadeus III of Geneva and Baron Ludwig (or Louis) II of Vaud, as well as the council of Chambéry, allowed the castellan to keep some of this property as a compensations for his expenses during the investigation.[160] Since Count Amadeus VI of Savoy was still a fourteen-year-old boy in 1348, the two nobles and the council were the actual governing authorities in Savoy.[161] The fact that they issued an order to compensate the castellan of Aiguebelle for investigating local Jews shows that by early August they all knew about the poisoning charges against them and were convinced of their veracity. And indeed, two days later, on 10 August, the same governors met in the town of Châtel, in Vaud, to discuss well-poisoning rumors against the Jews. Count Amadeus of Geneva, Baron Ludwig of Vaud, and Petrus Bonivardi, a member of the council of Chambéry, presided.[162] Also present were the bishop of Ivrea and other churchmen and nobles, including a judge and notaries. They issued an official document ordering "an investigation and other procedures against the Jews of the County of Savoy, because these Jews poisoned springs, water sources, and other such things, as was established by public opinion."[163] From this point, the persecution of Jews in Savoy was justified by the orders of all governing authorities. It is likely that the violent incidents which happened earlier, in particular in Côte-Saint-André, Yenne and

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[160] Costa de Beauregard, "Notes et documents," 103-104. Document printed in: 116-118; Bardelle, *Juden in einem Transit- und Brückenland*, 254-255.

[161] Cox, *The Green Count*, 33-41.

[162] Petrus Bonivardi was one of the council members who signed the letter to the castellan of Côte-Saint-André, a letter which rejected well-poisoning allegations against Jews and foreigners. About two months later he had apparently changed his mind about the matter: Chambéry, Archives départementales de Savoie, Trésor des chartes, MS SA 15, no. 28.

[163] "ad inquirendum et alias procedendum contra Judeos Sabaudiae comitatus super eo quod ipsis Judeis imponitur per famam ipsos fontes, aquas et alia quamplura intossicasse" - Nordmann, "Documents," 71; Segre, "Testimonianze documentarie," 311-312, no. 89.

Aiguebelle, were initiated by local officials and were reported to the higher authorities only later.[164] But from August the persecution of Jews in Savoy had a more official, and widespread, character.

The persecution of the Jews of Chambéry exemplifies the new form that the violence against them took in Savoy. Probably sometime in August, the council of the city began to investigate well-poisoning charges against the Jews. For 23 days the investigators gathered testimonies and reviewed confessions obtained from the Jews of the Dauphiné during the persecution there, until they were convinced that the accusations were not unfounded. Then, all local Jews were arrested by the major *bailli* of Savoy and transferred to the castle of Montmélian, outside of the city. The Jews were held there while the trial against them continued, and on 1 December, long after the violence had spread far beyond the county of Savoy, they were brought back to Chambéry to face judgment. The public was already convinced that the Jews were guilty, so much so that the *bailli* had to pay for a guard of forty men to protect the Jews from popular violence. Despite these measures, after the Jews returned to Chambéry, a large group of men broke into the castle where they were imprisoned and killed several of them. The attackers were arrested, four of them executed, and many others forced to pay fines, but this was not the end of the story. Eleven of the Jews who survived the attack were sentenced to death, and the others were compelled to pay a large sum.[165] It seems that the local authorities were determined to conduct a full investigation according to the orders of the regents and the council. As testimony convicting the Jews accumulated, also based on the persecution in the Dauphiné, they eventually concluded that

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[164] Chambéry, Archives départementales de Savoie, Trésor des chartes, MS SA 15, no. 28; Costa de Beauregard, "Notes et documents," 103-104, 116-118; Bardelle, *Juden in einem Transit- und Brückenland*, 251, 254-255; Segre, "Testimonianze documentarie,“ 312-314.

[165] Costa de Beauregard, "Notes et documents," 101-103; Bardelle, *Juden in einem Transit- und Brückenland*, 252-253, 256; Segre, "Testimonianze documentarie," 312; Cox, *The Green Count*, 70.

the Jews were guilty. At the same time, the investigation only affirmed public suspicion and incited popular violence against the Jews.

The events in Chambéry are particularly well documented, but there is evidence that the Jews were persecuted all over Savoy. In the town of Conflans (Albertville) the local lord arrested 54 Jews, kept them captive in a castle, and confiscated their property. Goods belonging to Jews were also confiscated in the towns of Saint Genix and Bourget-du-Lac, perhaps after their owners were convicted and executed.[166] Other documents record major confiscations of Jewish property in the western counties of Bugey, Bresse, and Dombes.[167] In September and October of 1348, the persecution of Jews spread to the northern parts of Savoy, that is Chablais, Vaud and Gex, the areas surrounding Lake Léman. These areas were under the rule of Count Amadeus of Geneva and Baron Ludwig of Vaud, the regents of Savoy, and were practically autonomous before 1349.[168] There is no evidence of anti-Jewish violence there before September, but then an extensive investigation against them occurred quickly. Jews were persecuted in Chillon, Châtel, Villeneuve, Vevey, La Tour-de-Peilz, Saint-Maurice, Évian-les-Bains, Lausanne and maybe also in Geneva. Some Christians were also executed for well-poisoning in Geneva, Villeneuve, Évian-les-Bains, Cruseilles and Hauteville.[169] In the next chapter, we will study these events in detail, as they have left some of the most complete records of an investigation against alleged poisoners. For present

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[166] Costa de Beauregard, "Notes et documents," 104; Bardelle, *Juden in einem Transit- und Brückenland*, 255; Cox, *The Green Count*, 69-70.

[167] Segre, "Testimonianze documentarie," 311-314, nos. 89, 91, 93-94, 98, 100-104; Bardelle, *Juden in einem Transit- und Brückenland*, 250-251.

[168] Cox, *The Green Count*, 33-41, 47. Cox does not even include these areas in his description of the persecution of the Jews in 1348 (pp. 69-70).

[169] UB Strassburg (Hans Witte and Georg Wolfram, eds., *Urkunden und Akten der Stadt Strassburg, herausgegeben mit Unterstützung der Landes- und der Stadtverwaltung* (Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner, 1879-1902)), 5:164-165, no. 179, 167-174, no. 183; Nordmann,"Documents," 67-69, 71; Segre, "Testimonianze documentarie," 315, no. 95; Nordmann, "Histoire des Juifs à Genève," 10-11; Nordmann, "Les Juifs dans le pays de Vaud," 153-155; Bardelle, *Juden in einem Transit- und Brückenland*, 257-265; Horrox, *The Black Death*, 211-219; Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," 19-20; Mesler, "Legends of Jewish Sorcery," 306-312.

purposes, it is enough to note that persecution in the northern parts of Savoy was already completely driven by the authorities. The transformation from popular violence to legal violence was completed. Moreover, we will see that while in spring 1348 well-poisoning accusations played a relatively minor part in inciting violence against minorities, and Jews in particular, by September it was central.

One may wonder whether the investigation of the Jews in Chambéry, and in other locations in Savoy, was an honest attempt to determine their guilt or simply an excuse to punish them. The ongoing tension between Christians and Jews in late medieval Europe may point to the latter option, but it seems that the authorities in Savoy were not eager to blame the Jews. First, as we have seen, the council of Chambéry initially rejected well-poisoning accusations against the Jews of Côte-Saint-André.[170] In addition, the investigation in Chambéry lasted for 23 days, and the trial about three months more. During this time, the authorities imprisoned the Jews, but also made an effort to protect them from popular violence (even if they eventually failed in doing so).[171] Moreover, in Savoy generally it seems that the authorities were willing to protect the Jews. In 1329, Jews in several towns in the county were accused of murdering Christian boys and using their flesh to make *ḥarosset*, a food eaten as part of the Passover ritual.[172] The accused were investigated under torture, and some confessed, but despite these confessions the judge rejected the accusations. He pointed out that the confessions were obtained under torture and were thus unreliable, and that cannibalism stands in contrast to the Jewish law. Count Eduard, ruler of Savoy

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[170] Chambéry, Archives départementales de Savoie, Trésor des chartes, MS SA 15, no. 28

[171] Costa de Beauregard, "Notes et documents," 101-103; Bardelle, *Juden in einem Transit- und Brückenland*, 252-253, 256; Segre, "Testimonianze documentarie," 312; Cox, *The Green Count*, 70. Cox even claims that the anti-Jewish violence throughout Savoy was popular in nature and that the authorities protected the Jews as much as they could. However, this reading of the evidence ignores the acts that the council of Chambéry and the regents undertook to promote the official investigation against the Jews.

[172] The records refer to ritual food as "aharace", but the context makes this reference clear: Mario Esposito, "Un procès contre les Juifs de la Savoie en 1329," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 34 (1938), 789-792.

at the time, supported his decision. Notably, Bartholomeus Taberne, a noble whom Count Eduard put in charge of the investigation in 1329, was also present when the official order to investigate well-poisoning accusations against the Jews was issued in 1348.[173] So why did the same authorities, and even the same officials, who rejected ritual cannibalism charges against the Jews in 1329 accepted well-poisoning accusations against them in 1348? One reason was probably that in 1348 the authorities in the Dauphiné had convicted the Jews of well poisoning before the investigation in Savoy started. Thus, there was an official precedent supporting their guilt, based on many confessions and testimonies. More importantly, the charges against the Jews in 1329 were based solely on a public rumor and on forced confessions, without any physical evidence. In 1348, the plague was raging in Savoy, and the bodies piled up. Thus, it was easy to believe that mass poisoning indeed took place, and to accept the rumors blaming the Jews.[174] It seems that the authorities in Savoy, unlike in the Dauphiné, were not quick to blame the Jews for poisoning wells, but the great mortality and the evidence already presented against the Jews convinced them to do so.

Pope Clement VI, who already protested against the persecution of Jews in early July, was notified about the investigation in the Dauphiné and in Savoy. On 26 September he issued a letter to all church officials ordering them to admonish Christian rulers who supported the persecution, and to demand that they protect the Jews. This time, the pope did not conclude with general statements, and addressed the recent events as he saw them:

Recently, however, it has come to our attention by public fame, or rather infamy, that some Christians out of rashness have impiously slain several of the Jews, without

[173] Esposito, "Un procès contre les Juifs," 786-793; Nordmann, "Documents," 71; Bardelle, *Juden in einem Transit- und Brückenland*, 244-246.

[174] Benedictow, *The Black Death,* 98-101, 315-328; Cox, *The Green Count*, 68-69; Andenmatten and Morerod, "La peste à Lausanne," 19-30.

respect to age or sex, after falsely blaming the pestilence on poisonings by Jews, said to be in league with the devil, when in fact it is the result of an angry God striking at the Christian people for their sins. And we have heard that although the Jews are prepared to submit to judgment before a competent judge concerning this preposterous crime, nevertheless this is not enough to stem Christian violence, but rather their fury rages even more.[175]

According to the pope, the persecution of the Jews was caused by popular rage which stemmed from an inability to understand the plague and accept it as part of the divine order. Many concluded that only the devil could create such mortality and marked the Jews as his agents. Notably, the pope suggested that the Jews tried to use legal procedures to refute well-poisoning accusations made against them. As we have seen, this may have been the case during June and July in Savoy. However, in the Dauphiné, and starting from August also in Savoy, the enemies of the Jews were able to harness legal procedures against them. Still, the pope was right to point out the legal procedures as a factor which actually contributed to the intensification of anti-Jewish violence. Indeed, well-poisoning accusations were usually directly connected with the transformation of the persecution from popular pogroms to legal violence.

A few days later, on 1 October, the pope published his letter again, but added a new comment regarding the motives of the persecutors of the Jews:

And so this is the assertion of many [that the Jews caused the plague by poisoning], since they are blinded by their own greed for the losses [property] of their Jews. Several of these

[175] Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, 1:396-398, no. 373. English trans. Aberth, *The Black Death*, 158-159. Aberth translated the letter issued on 1 October, while the letter from 26 September was translated by Horrox, *The Black Death*, 221-222. However, I found Aberth's translation to be more accurate in this case, and used it to create an English version of the first document.

Christians [who attacked the Jews] were held [responsible] by some of the Jews for large amounts of money, [and] were chasing their own profit [in attacking them].[176]

This short comment represents a dramatic change in papal opinion regarding the causes of well-poisoning accusations and of the persecution of the Jews. In the first letter the pope focused on the popular reaction to the plague and saw the accusations as an attempt to force reluctant rulers to act against the Jews. However, in the second letter he stressed that Christian leaders were looking for an excuse to blame their own Jews in order to take over their property and to escape paying outstanding debts. The anti-Jewish violence, he understood, was not a popular interruption of legal order, but an organized policy. The letters do not reveal what caused Pope Clement to change his mind so quickly and radically, but it is likely that churchmen informed him about the scope and nature of the persecution in the Dauphiné and in Savoy. If he was first under the impression that the Jews suffered popular attacks, as in Provence or Aragon, he soon heard about general investigations, mass arrests and executions, and major confiscations of property. These mechanisms of legal violence, fueled by forced confessions and popular rumors of well poisoning, were already set in motion. Not even the protests of the pope could stop them.

Conclusion

Well-poisoning accusations, absent from 1321, reappeared in south-western Europe in 1348 during the first outbreak of the Black Death. In Provence and Languedoc the accusations started in April, and the targets were Christian paupers, vagabonds and foreigners, who were arrested, investigated and executed. In Aragon, traveling clerics were suspected of well poisoning, but the king protected

[176] "et ut multorum habet assertio, cupiditate propria excecati in ipsorum dispendiis Iudeorum, quorum aliquibus nonnulli Christianorum ipsorum in magnis tenebantur pecuniarum quantitatibus, propria lucra venantes […]" - Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, 1:398, no. 374.

them and ignored the allegations. Pogroms against the Jews of Provence and Aragon began around the same time and continued until June or July, but there is no evidence that these were caused by poisoning accusations. Instead, the attacks were motivated by resentment for the economic activity of the Jews, and by the temporary weakness of local rulers, who sometimes failed to protect them. This pattern changed in the Dauphiné around late May or early June, and later in Savoy. Local lords there supported and organized anti-Jewish violence and were the first to associate popular poisoning rumors with the Jews. The letter to Côte-Saint-André in Savoy shows how the castellan and his men accused different minorities of poisoning wells: foreign Christians and Jews, as well as local Jews. Dauphin Humbet II was quick to support this kind of action by his officials, probably because he was eager to confiscate Jewish property, while the council of Chambéry was first opposed to it. During June and July an official investigation was conducted against the Jews of the Dauphiné, and many of them were convicted, executed, and their property confiscated. The fact that an investigation in the Dauphiné had concluded that Jews were guilty of well poisoning probably led the authorities in Savoy to change their minds and to consider the charges themselves. The raging plague, confessions extracted from Jews in the Dauphiné, and popular pressure, led them to conclude that the Jews indeed poisoned wells. Thus, the Jews of Savoy, like those of the Dauphiné, were arrested, investigated and executed during August, September and October 1348.

The Black Death played an important part in these developments, and it is not a coincidence that well-poisoning accusations reappeared during the first outbreak of the plague. The mortality had increased social tension of all kinds: between rich and poor, between locals and foreigners, and between Jews and Christians. Many searched for someone to blame for the crisis, and usually pointed a finger at those whom they distrusted anyway. Well-poisoning accusations against minorities were one manifestation of these social tensions, anti-Jewish pogroms were another, and

popular rebellions against rulers were a third. However, these tensions were not manifest in the same way in every location. In places where the ruler was weak there was a bigger chance of popular riots, and where Jews were already marginalized it was likely that anti-Jewish violence would erupt. Well-poisoning accusations in particular required the willingness of the authorities to acknowledge popular rumors which insisted that the plague was not a natural occurrence. Only in a very few cases was mob violence against minorities explicitly justified by well-poisoning accusations, and local officials were usually the ones who acted against suspects of this crime. Therefore, each ruler's decision whether to reject the accusations or open an official investigation was crucial in determining the patterns of persecution against minorities in each territory. This decision was influenced, at least to some degree, by the local history of well-poisoning accusations. In Provence, Aragon and Languedoc well-poisoning accusations were not new, as lepers had been convicted of this crime in 1321. The authorities in Aragon and Provence had a long history of protecting the Jews and they never accepted the allegations against them. In Languedoc, meanwhile, there were no Jews, and very few lepers, by 1348. And so, in all of these territories the accusations targeted marginalized Christians. In contrast, in the Dauphiné and in Savoy there was neither a significant history of well-poisoning accusations, nor of a long Jewish presence. The plague, anti-Jewish pogroms and well-poisoning accusations against foreigners probably all reached the Dauphiné from Provence sometimes in May. Local officials there, including the Dauphin himself, had a history of anti-Jewish tendencies and an economic interest in confiscating Jewish property. Thus, they merged the accusations against the Jews, which had previously revolved around issues of usury and loyalty to the Crown, with well-poisoning accusations against Christians. As part of this transformation, they also harnessed the mechanisms of legal violence against the Jews, mechanisms which up to that point were used only against marginalized

Christians in 1348. The formal investigation produced confessions, trial records and convictions, and these justified further action against Jews, as well as inflamed popular rage. These convinced the authorities in Savoy, who initially rejected the accusations completely, to change their minds and consider the charges. Once they did, more evidence against Jews and Christians was produced, and well-poisoning accusations were transformed from popular rumors to legal rulings.

By September 1348 well-poisoning accusations were formalized in confessions, trial records and decrees, which were sent from one official to the next. In this manner, the accusations spread from the southern areas of Europe to the German Empire. The persecution of Jews there was much more severe and widespread than in the South during the years of the Black Death. Yet it is unclear to what extent this persecution was a result of well-poisoning accusations and what part these accusations played in triggering anti-Jewish violence in each case. Surely, the plague, the persecution of Jews and well-poisoning accusations occurred around the same time in German-speaking lands, but we still need to analyze the historical connections between them. That is the subject of the next chapter, which studies the role that well-poisoning accusations played in provoking an anti-Jewish dynamic in the Empire from 1348 to 1350.

Chapter 5: Well-Poisoning Accusations in the German Empire during the Black Death

By September 1348, well-poisoning accusations were already the subject of an official investigation in Savoy and the Dauphiné. The suspects were usually Jews, rather than marginalized Christians. The wide scale of the persecution and the large number of suspects suggests that they were accused of plotting mass poisoning of water sources, intended to infect whole areas with the plague. At the same time, the disease continued to spread, and so did the rumors about it. We have seen that in some places well-poisoning accusations began even before the first signs of plague appeared, as the fear of the mortality was powerful enough to trigger the violence. Thus, the patterns which characterized the persecution of the Jews in the German Empire were already formulated. Yet, understanding the nature of the accusations is only the first step in analyzing the great outbreak of anti-Jewish violence that quickly spread through the Empire from 1348 to 1350. This political body was uniform in name only. In fact, it was a conglomerate of principalities, bishoprics, counties, cities and towns of different legal status, and rural areas subjected either to one of these political entities, or to independent nobles. The kings (by the fourteenth century, they were often unable to claim the title of emperor) were elected by a group of high nobles and bishops who inherited this right. In this political climate, they had only limited ability to centralize their rule of the Empire, and many cities and territories were practically autonomous, at least to some degree.[1] As we have seen, political and economic circumstances influenced the manner in which well-poisoning accusations were accepted or rejected, the identity of the suspects, and the nature of violence which they triggered. Therefore, one should assume that different areas of the Empire reacted differently to well-poisoning accusations. Not everywhere was the historical dynamic

[1] Peter Herde, "From Adolf of Nassau to Lewis of Bavaria, 1292–1347," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 6:515-550; Ivan Hlaváček, "The Habsburgs and Rupert of the Palatinate," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 6:551-569.

similar to the one that we have seen in the Dauphiné and in Savoy, even if the allegations were similar. This chapter presents several case studies that illuminate the various ways in which the inhabitants of the Empire responded to well-poisoning accusations. It suggests new conclusions regarding the role that these accusations played in bringing about anti-Jewish violence during the days of the Black Death.

Narrative, Historiography, Methodology

> *Those speaking about [my] crimes prevailed, they opened their mouth against me, [and] they placed and spread the deadly potion over the water.*
>
> *They were talking evil about us, to slander and attack us, they put venom in our belongings, and [then] throw it into the water.*
>
> *He [God?] fed me the bitter herbs, he had me drink the bitter water, when [my] enemies despaired of drinking the water. […]*
>
> *"Remove the impure", they called, "you shall know and see [that] the Jews defiled and contaminated [every] spring, well, [and] source of water."* [2]

With these words Baruch Ḥiel, a Jewish poet, lamented the suffering of his community during the Black Death.[3] He knew well that Christians accused the Jews of poisoning water sources and even

[2] "דברי עונות גברו פיהם עלי פערו סם המות שמו ויזורו / על פני המים / דוברים הוות אלינו להתגולל ולהתנפל עלינו, עכס [ארס?] שמו בכילינו / וישליכו אל המים / השביעני במרורים השקני מי המרים בעת נלאו הצרים / לשתות את מי המים / [...] סורו טמא קראו ידוע תדעו וראו היהודים טנפו וטמאו / מעין ובור מקוה מים." -
Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Oppenheimer 676, ff. 127r-130r; printed (with some minor mistakes) in: Abraham Berliner, ed., "Kinot ve-Sliḥot," *Kovetz al Yad* 3 (1887), 22-23. The unclear word עכס can mean "snake": Midrash Tanḥuma, Beshalaḥ, 18 – I translated "venom", which seems to make more sense here. Later medieval Jewish writers presented, of course, similar arguments: Shelomoh Ibn Ṿirgah. *Sefer Sheveṭ Yehudah*, 70-71; Samuel Usque, *Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*, 192; Joseph Ha-Kohen, *Sefer 'Emeq Ha-Bakha*, 81-83.

[3] It is not completely clear which community was the poet is referring to. The fifteenth-century manuscript contains rituals according to the tradition of "קושניץ", which seems to refer to Constance. However, the persecution allegedly happened on "לחודש העשירי באחד", which probably stands for 23 November 1348 (or, 13 December 1349, but this is less likely), while the Jews of Constance were executed only on 4 January 1349. Still, several communities were attacked in November 1348 around Constance, and the poet could have been a member of one of them: Christoph M.

"planted evidence" to incriminate them. He was so outraged by this new allegation, that he based his entire lament on the motif of water.

Many Christian chroniclers of events in the Empire agreed that the main reason for the wave of anti-Jewish violence during the years 1348 to 1350 was well-poisoning accusations. Heinrich of Diessenhofen reported:

> *The persecution of the Jews began in November 1348, and the first outbreak in Germany was at Solothurn, where all the Jews were burnt on the strength of a rumor that they had poisoned wells and rivers, as was afterwards confirmed by their own confessions and also by the confessions of Christians whom they had corrupted and who had been induced by the Jews to carry out the deed. And some of the Jews who were newly baptized said the same. Some of these remained in the faith but some others relapsed, and when these were placed upon the wheel they confessed that they had themselves sprinkled poison or poisoned rivers. And thus no doubt remained of their deceitfulness which had now been revealed.*[4]

It seems that Heinrich was convinced that the Jews indeed poisoned water sources. Writing in retrospect, he notes that first the accusations against them were merely rumors, but as more of them were investigated, some confessed to performing this crime. Later, Christians and converts who allegedly cooperated with the Jews were forced into similar confessions.[5]

Cluse, "Zur Chronologie der Verfolgungen zur Zeit des 'Schwarzen Todes'," in *Geschichte der Juden im Mittelalter von der Nordsee bis zu den Südalpen*, ed. Alfred Haverkamp (Hannover: Hahn: 2002), 231.

[4] Heinricus de Diessenhoven, *Chronicon,* 68-69; translated in Horrox, *The Black Death*, 208-210.

[5] For more about accusations against Christians and converts: Conradus Megenbergensis, *Tractatus de mortalitate in Alamannia*, ed. Sabine Krüger, in *Festschrift für Hermann Heimpel zum 70*, vol. 2 (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), 866; Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 41-43; Gerd Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß* (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1995), 379-384; Reinhard Schneider, "Der Tag von Benfeld im Januar 1349: Sie kamen zusammen und kamen überein, die Juden zu vernichten," in *Spannungen und Widersprüche: Gedenkschrift für František Graus*, ed. Susanna Burghartz et al. (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1992), 259-261.

Heinrich was aware of the fact that these admissions were extracted from the suspects using torture, but still he believed that the story of the mass-poisoning plot was a real one.

Herman Gigas, a Franciscan from Franconia, focused in his account on different aspects of the events:

> *In 1347 there was such a great pestilence and mortality throughout almost the whole world [...Some people say] that the Jews planned to wipe out all the Christians with poison and had poisoned wells and springs everywhere. And many Jews confessed as much under torture: that they had bred spiders and toads in pots and pans, and had obtained poison from overseas; and that not every Jew knew about this wickedness, only the more powerful ones, so that it would not be betrayed. As evidence of this heinous crime, men say that bags full of poison were found in many wells and springs, and as a result, in cities, towns and villages throughout Germany, and in fields and woods too, almost all the wells and springs have been blocked up or built over, so that no one can drink from them or use the water for cooking, and men have to use rain or river water instead. God, the lord of vengeance, has not suffered the malice of the Jews to go unpunished. Throughout Germany, in all but a few places, they were burnt. For fear of that punishment many accepted baptism and their lives were spared. This action was taken against the Jews in 1349, and it still continues unabated, for in a number of regions many people, noble and humble alike, have laid plans against them and their defenders which they will never abandon until the whole Jewish race has been destroyed.* [6]

Herman, who wrote his account while the persecution of Jews was still raging, agreed with

[6] Hermannus Gygantis, *Flores Temporum, seu Chronicon Universale* (Leiden: Bonk, 1743), 138-139; translated in Horrox, *The Black Death*, 207.

Heinrich that the accusations against the Jews were convincing. While he knew that the confessions they gave were forced, he noted that there was physical evidence of their guilt, in the form of bags of poison hidden in water sources. Indeed, as Baruch Ḥiel insisted, this evidence could have been (and almost certainly was) manufactured—but many were still convinced, so much so, that they avoided water drawn from wells or springs. The details added to the anti-Jewish narrative certainly contributed to its credibility: the organizational structure of the plot and the technical aspects of obtaining the poison were now explained. At the same time, Heinrich pointed out that the Jews faced a coalition of forces, of different social classes, determined to annihilate them, whether they were found guilty or innocent. We will see that he had good reasons to believe that this was the case.

But not all chroniclers were convinced that the Jews caused the plague by poisoning wells. Heinrich of Herford, a Dominican from Westphalia, observed the attacks against the Jews with horror:

> *That same year [1349], the Jews, including women and children, were slain by sword or fire in a cruel and inhumane manner, throughout Germany and many other provinces. [This happened] because of their abundant riches, which many nobles, and also the poor and destitute, were seeking to usurp, as did their debtors. This I think is the truth, just as [was with the things] that were said about the Templars. Or, [the Jews were killed] due to water poisoning that they have committed, as many claimed, and [as] was reinforced by rumors, which were melodiously and wickedly fabricated everywhere. I do not believe this to be true. Although the plague, which raged in the world at the time, gave credibility to this rumor; it did not advance everywhere continuously, but rather, like in a game of chess, flew up from one place where it was*

raging, through another region which was not contaminated, to hit a third one. Sometimes it would return to the area in the middle, as if by choice. Until [some] places even made themselves inaccessible to guests, who were told not to pass through there, lest these [guests] would destroy them using poison. Also, this poison, so it was said, was scattered throughout the world by the Jews and those Christians whom they bribed. Happy and dancing they [the Jews] hurried to be led to their death, first children, then women, and then those given to the flames, lest anyone would be driven against Judaism by human fragility on their part. And in certain places they were burnt in different ways, in others they were broken [at the wheel], or even slaughtered like pigs in the most ferocious and barbaric manner.[7]

In this account Heinrich of Herford presents two seemingly contradictory opinions about the motives of those who blamed the Jews of poisoning wells. On the one hand, he stated that the attacks against Jews were an attempt to take over their property. Therefore, he thought that the rumors against them were fabricated in order to justify violence against them, thus implying that the accusers did not really believe their own claims. On the other hand, Heinrich noted that the unusual nature of the plague could convince people that the illness was a result of an unnatural occurrence, that is poisoning. He probably meant to suggest that

[7] Item hoc anno Judei per Theutoniam pluresque provincias alias universi cum mulieribus et parvulis ferro vel igne crudeliter et inhumaniter absumuntur, aut propter divitias eorum copiosissimas, quas plerique et nobiles et alii pauperes et indigentes vel etiam eorum debitores usurpare querebant; quod verum esse credo, sicut de templariis dictum est; aut propter aquarum invenenationes per eos, ut asserunt quam plurimi, et fama communis est, nequiter et malitiose factas ubique terrarum; quod verum esse non credo, quamvis illi fame fidem preberet pestilentia, que tunc in mundo sevissime, non tamen ubique continue, sed quandoque quasi in ludo scacorum, subvolando de loco uno, in quo sevierat, per medium sine contagio ad tertium sevitura pertransiens, et forte post ad medium rediens, quasi eligendo grassaretur; ad loca quoque, que per hospites non fuerunt communiter accessibilia, non pervenire dicebatur, quasi illa per toxicum non essent vitiata. Toxicum autem illud Judei, ut dicebatur, et per se et per cristianos ad hoc conductos a se per mundum diviserunt. Ad mortem quoque leti et coreas ducentes properabant, primo parvulos, post feminas, post se ipsos incendio tradentes, ne humana fragilitate per eos quidquam contra judaismum ageretur. In quibusdam etiam locis per alios comburebantur, in quibusdam trucidabantur, vel etiam ut porci sevissime barbariceque mactabantur. - Henricus de Hervordia, *Liber de rebus memorabilioribus sive Chronicon,* ed. Augustus Potthast (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1859), 280.

some agents, from different social classes, manufactured these rumors on purpose, while others accepted them due to the unique nature of the Black Death. In any case, this account agrees with the other chroniclers that an anti-Jewish coalition was formed around well-poisoning accusations, and that it was strong enough to propel a wide-ranging persecution of Jews in the Empire.

Many other chroniclers documented the anti-Jewish violence during the plague and speculated about its reasons.[8] Most of them thought that the Jews indeed poisoned the wells,

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[8] I have found 41 medieval Latin and German chronicles from the Empire which mention the persecution of the Jews during the Black Death.

Chronicles discussing the plague, the persecution of Jews, well-poisoning accusations and the flagellants (19)
Heinricus de Diessenhoven, *Chronicon,* 68-75 (written before 1376); Henricus de Hervordia, *Liber de rebus memorabilioribus*, 277, 280 (written before 1355); Gilles le Muisis, *Chronique et annales de Gilles le Muisit, abbé de Saint-Martin de Tournai (1272-1352),* ed. Henri Lemaître (Paris: Renouard, 1906), 195-198, 223-242; Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 263-272 (written before 1370); *Magnum Chronicon, in quo cumprimis Belgicae res*, in *Rerum Germanicorum Veteres*, ed. Ihannis Pistorii (Regensburg: Joannis Conradi Peezii, 1726), 327-328 (written before 1474); *Cronica Sancti Petri Erfordensis Moderna, continuatio II*, M.G.H SS, 30, 1:470 (written around 1353); *Cronica Sancti Petri Erfordensis Moderna, continuatio III*, M.G.H SS, 30, 1:462-463 (written around 1355); *Chronicon Elwacenses,* M.G.H SS, 10:40-41 (written around 1477); *Gesta abbatum Trudonensium, Continuation tertia, pars II*, 432 (written around 1366); *Gesta archiepiscoporum Magdeburgensium, Continuatio I*, M.G.H SS, 14:435-437 (written around 1367); *Die Weltchronik des Mönchs Albert,* M.G.H SS rer. Germ. N.S., 17:110-111 (written around 1376); *Chronik der Stadt Zürich mit Fortsetzungen,* ed. Johannes Dierauer, Quellen zur Schweizer Geschichte 18 (Basel: A. Geering, 1900), 45-46 (written around 1477); Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Gesta Betholdi Episcopi Argentinensis*, M.G.H SS rer. Germ. N.S., 4:532-538 (written after 1365); Fritsche Closener, *Chronik,* in *Die Chroniken der oberrheinischen Städte: Straßburg* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1870), 1:104-120, 127-128, 130 (written before 1396); Jakob Twinger von Königshofen, *Chronik,* in *Die Chroniken der oberrheinischen Städte: Straßburg* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1870-1871), 1:480, 2:759-765 (written before 1420); Michael de Leone, *Cronicis temporum hominum modernorum*, in *Fontes rerum Germanicarum,* F.R.G, 1:473-477 (written around 1355); Conrad Justinger, *Berner-Chronik*, ed. Gottlieb Studer (Bern: Wyss, 1871), 111 (written in the first half of the fifteenth century); Nikolaus Stulmann, *Chronik des Nikolaus Stulmann vom Jahre 1407*, ed. Joseph Würdinger in *Jahres-Bericht des historischen Kreis-Vereins im Regierungsbezirke von Schwaben und Neuburg* 32 (1866), 23-24; Levoldus de Northof, *Chronica comitum de Marka,* M.G.H. SS rer. Germ. N.S., 6:86 (written around 1358); Johannes Nederhoff, *Des Dominicaners Jo. Nederhoff Cronica Tremoniensium*, Eduard Roese, ed. (Dortmund: Köppen, 1880), 52-53 (written after 1456).
Chronicles discussing the plague, the persecution of Jews, well-poisoning accusations, but not the flagellants (5)
Hermannus Gygantis, *Flores Temporum,* 138-139 (written around 1421); *Die grosseren Basler Annalen,* in *Basler Chroniken,* ed. August Bernoulli (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1895), 5:21 (written aroun 1412); *Annales Matseenses*, M.G.H SS, 9:829-830 (written between 1305 and 1395); Ludwig Ettmuller, ed. *Die beiden ältesten deutschen Jahrbücher der Stadt Zürich*, (Zurich: Meyer und Zeller, 1844), 71-72 (written around 1460); Conradus Megenbergensis, *Tractatus de mortalitate in Alamannia*, 866-868 (written in 1350, not a chronicle per se).
Chronicles reporting the plague and the persecution of Jews, but not well-poisoning accusations or the flagellants (2)
Notae Historicae Blidenstadenses, F.R.G, 4:392 (written around 1391); *Kalendarium Zwetlensis,* M.G.H SS, 9:692 (written between 1243 and 1458).

but others insisted that these allegations had no basis.[9] In addition, most of them agreed that well-poisoning accusations stood at the heart of the events, either as a justified reason or as an excuse for the persecution. As a background for the accusations, almost all chroniclers mentioned the plague, and many also reported about groups of flagellants who roamed the Empire.[10] These devoted Christians turned to extreme practices of penance in an attempt to atone for the sins which presumably drove God to send the plague. They gained some popularity, but eventually their anti-authoritarian tendencies led both secular and religious leaders, including the king of France and pope, to denounce them.[11]

Chronicles mentioning the plague, the persecution of Jews and the flagellants but not well-poisoning accusations (8)
Detmar von Lübeck, *Detmar-Chronik von 1101-1395,* in *Die Chroniken der niederreinischen Städte: Lübeck* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1884) 1:520-521; *Kölner Jahrbücher des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts*, in *Die Chroniken der niederreinischen Städte: Köln* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1876), 3:22-23 (written before 1445); *Annales Francofurtani,* F.R.G, 4:394-395 (written between 1306 and 1364); *Chronicon Moguntinum,* M.G.H SS rer. Germ. (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi) 20:3 (written around 1478); *Continuatio Mellicensis*, M.G.H SS, 9:513 (written between 1124 and 1564); *Annales Marbacenses,* M.G.H SS rer. Germ. 9:101 (continuation written between 1308 and 1375); *Die Kölner Weltchronik*, M.G.H SS rer. Germ. N.S., 15:91-92 (written around 1376); Johannes de Beka and others, *Chroniken van den Stichte van Utrecht*, ed. Hettel Bruch, in Rijks geschiedkundige publication, Grote Serie, vol. 180 ('s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1982), 196-197 (written around 1393).
Chronicles mentioning the persecution, well-poisoning accusations and the flagellants, but not the plague (1)
Continuatio Zwetlensis Quarta, M.G.H SS, 9:685 (written around 1386)
Chronicles discussing the persecution of Jews and well-poisoning accusations, but not the plague or flagellants (3)
Johann Stetter, *Chronik*, in *Das alte Konstanz in Schrift und Stift: Die Chroniken der Stadt Konstanz,* ed. Philipp Ruppert (Konstanz: Münsterbau-Verein, 1891), 55-57 (written before 1400); Heinrich Taube of Selbach, *Chronica Heinrici surdi de Selbach*, M.G.H SS rer. Germ. N.S., 1:92-93 (written around 1364); Henricus Rebdorfensis, *Annales Imperatorum et Paparum*, F.R.G, 4:534 (written around 1364).
Chronicles reporting about the persecution and the flagellants, and not about the plague or the accusations (2)
Annales Agrippinenses, M.G.H SS, 16:738 (written between 1092 and 1384); *Versus Babenbergenses,* M.G.H SS, 17:639 (written in 1348).

[9] Most chroniclers simply reported about the persecution of Jews and the accusations against them, or assumed that the accusations were true. Yet a few doubted the idea that they poisoned the wells: Henricus de Hervordia, *Liber de rebus memorabilioribus*, 277, 280; Conradus Megenbergensis, *Tractatus de mortalitate in Alamannia*, 866-868; Fritsche Closener, *Chronik,* 104; *Gesta archiepiscoporum Magdeburgensium, Continuatio I*, 435-437; Jean de Venette, *Continuationis Chronici Guillelmi de Nangiaco Pars Tertia*, In *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nagis de 1113 à 1300, avec les Continuations de Cette Chronique de 1300 à 1368,* ed. H. Géraud (Paris: J. Renouard, 1843), 2:213-214.

[10] 29 out of 41 mention well-poisoning accusations, 35 out of 41 report about the plague, and 31 out of 41 write about the flagellants. See note 8 above.

[11] Many of the relevant primary sources are printed in Paul Frédéricq, ed. *Corpus documentorum inquisitionis haereticae pravitatis Neerlandicae: verzameling van stukken betreffende de pauselijke en bisschoppelijke inquisitie in de Nederlanden* (Gent: Vuylsteke, 1889-1906), 1:190-203, 2:96-142; 3:13-38. Also see: Jean de Fyat, *Sermo factus*

These descriptions from the chronicles have convinced several historians that overall, the correct explanation for the persecution of the Jews is a simple one. Supposedly, since the plague hit European society so severely, it lead to horror and panic everywhere. Desperation, as well as the deterioration of social order due to mortality, inspired many acts in line with the most extreme tendencies embedded within European culture. The flagellants put into practice millenarian ideas, while those who attacked the Jews manifested anti-Jewish feelings, both quite common during the later Middle Ages. Thus, it is no wonder that sometimes these movements overlapped; those who considered the plague a sign of divine anger were likely to turn against the Jews, the eternal enemies of Christ. This simple model of "plague – flagellants – pogroms against Jews" can be found in the writing of several scholars.[12] Well-poisoning accusations fitted well into this explanation, as they were seen as another expression of the extreme, and even irrational, views of European culture, exposed by the Black Death.[13]

However, from the 1970s historians have applied new methods to explore the social influence of the plague, and the persecution of the Jews in particular. Rather than relying heavily on the chronicles, they have given more weight to documentary evidence. Rather

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Avinione coram papa Clemente VI contra flagellatores, in Paul Fredericq, ed., "Deux sermons incdits de Jean de Fayt sur les Flagellants (5 octobre 1349) et sur le Grand Schisme d'Occident (1378)," *Bulletin de la Classe des lettres et des sciences morales et politiques* 41 (1903), 694-708. For additional primary sources see note 8 above. František Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde*, 38-60; Bergdolt, *Der Schwarze Tod*, 107-119; Bergdolt, *Der Schwarze Tod*, 133-155; Kieckhefer, "Radical Tendencies in the Flagellant Movement," 157-176; Robert E. Lerner, "The Black Death and Western European Eschatological Mentalities," *American Historical Review* 86 (1981), 534-537; Robert Hoeniger, *Der Schwarze Tod in Deutschland: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Grosser, 1882), 5-14, 107-108.

[12] The most famous example is Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 87-88, 131-145. But also: Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1967), 4:100-112; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 63, 68; Poliakov, *The History of Antisemitism*, 1:108-110; Baron, *A Social and Religious History*, 11:160-161, 164; Delumeau, *La peur*, 129-133; Bergdolt, *Der Schwarze Tod*, 119-120; Rowan, "The *Grand Peur* of 1348-1349," 20-23; Carpentier, "Autour de la peste noire," 1068-1069.

[13] See above, and Langmuir, *History, Religion and Antisemitism*, 126, 267, 301-303.

than following the views or comments of chroniclers, sometimes selectively, they account for all, or most, of the relevant sources. Rather than discussing the violent reactions to the plague as a singular event, they contextualize them as part of wider social changes which took place in the Empire during the later Middle Ages. In an important article in 1981, Alfred Haverkamp highlighted some of the general characteristics of the persecution of the Jews during the Black Death. The plague, he claims, allowed for long-standing social tensions to come into play. For example, he notes that anti-Jewish pogroms often happened on Sundays or holy days, and suggested that preachers presented sermons containing hostile messages towards Jews, and thus triggered the persecution. Anti-Jewish tendencies already existed, but rumors about the plague and specific accusations against the Jews allowed it to turn into actual violence.[14] At the same time, he points out that the flagellants reached most areas after the Jews were already gone. Thus, the idea that they attacked the Jews, or instigated violence against them, is often unconvincing.[15] Most importantly, Haverkamp claims that usually, cities and lords had ample time to decide whether to act against the Jews or defend them, even after rumors about the plague and alleged well-poisoning plots began to circulate. Anti-Jewish violence was mostly the result of institutional decisions, rather than the actions of

[14] Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 27-35, 46-59. For a possible example of such a preacher: Regina D. Schiewer, "Sub Iudaica Infirmitate - 'Under the Jewish Weakness': Jews in Medieval German Sermons," in *The Jewish-Christian Encounter in Medieval Preaching*, ed. Jonathan Adams and Jussi Hanska (New York: Routledge, 2015), 68-69.

[15] Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 43-46; and also Kieckhefer, "Radical Tendencies in the Flagellant Movement," 160-163. A similar idea was suggested almost a century earlier, but later historians gave it little attention: Hoeniger, *Der Schwarze Tod*, 5-14, 107-108. It is likely that in some particular cases the flagellants influenced the persecution of the Jews, but this was not the rule: Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 269; Matthias Schmandt, *Judei, cives et incole: Studien zur jüdischen Geschichte Kölns im Mittelalter* (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2002), 88-89; Christoph Cluse, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden in den mittelalterlichen Niederlanden* (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2000) 220-242. The idea that the flagellants attacked Jews is probably based on the arguments of the preacher Jean de Fyat, which were latter adopted by the pope: Jean de Fyat, *Sermo contra flagellatores*, 697-698, 706-707; Frédéricq, *Corpus documentorum inquisitionis,* 1:199-201. However, in most primary sources about the flagellants there is no mention of an attack against the Jews, see above nn. 8 and 11.

angry mobs. Thus, he states that each city council or lord acted according to their own political interests when discussing the guilt of the Jews. They had to consider forces from within the towns calling for the execution or protection of the Jews; the arguments often represented preexisting class struggles (though it is hard to single out one group or class which was consistently anti-Jewish). They also had to take into account the possible reaction of the local lord, bishop or prince, as well as of the king. However, the Empire was in the middle of power struggle between two competing kings, and so many towns had to decide about the faith of the Jews in a changing political climate. Haverkamp claims that free imperial cities, i.e. cities which were officially under the authority of the king rather than of a local lord, were more likely to execute their Jews. He suggests that some of these cities wished to show their independence vis-a-vis the king by killing the Jews and thus violating official imperial policy. King Karl IV, who was in control of most of the empire but still in a war to establish his authority, had to concede.[16] Haverkamp's article shows convincingly that anti-Jewish violence was caused, or at least influenced, by a wide array of social, political and religious factors.

Haverkamp's article shifted the focus of the historical discussion about anti-Jewish violence during the plague. Rather than considering the deep psychological effects of the Black Death or describing the hostile representation of Jews in medieval culture, it analyzed political and economic interests, and contextualized the persecution as the outcome of complex social dynamics. But there was much more to be done. Haverkamp outlined some general observations about the persecution, but never claimed to present a full account of the

[16] Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 59-91. For the political struggle, see Hlaváček, "The Habsburgs," 551-553. Cohn repeated some of these observations: Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," 7-24, 35-36.

factors which caused anti-Jewish violence. František Graus, in his *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde*, published in 1987, took on this challange.[17] At the heart of the book stands a detailed analysis and mapping of the persecution of the Jews, presented as a part of a wide crisis which characterized the later Middle Ages. Graus describes the terror created by the plague as a wave that spread extremely quickly throughout the Empire (much faster than the plague itself), and destabilized social and political institutions and arrangements, some of which were already unstable before 1348. In particular, the political status of the Jews in the Empire began to deteriorate long before the plague, as a result of the tendency of the kings to tax them heavily, and at the same time deny them the protection which they traditionally received. The policy of Karl IV was particularly aimed at financially exploiting the Jews, and he would defend them only when he stood to gain from such action, even before 1348. Moreover, as in other places, Jews were the major source of loans, often to the nobility. In the Empire, where the nobility was particularly strong, engaging in such an activity without royal protection was particularly dangerous. Many cities, bishops, lords and princes had economic and political reasons to kill or expel the Jews, and they waited for an opportunity to do so. In general, the economic crisis of the early fourteenth century occurred in parallel with a crisis in the authority of the kings of the Empire, and both factors acted to undercut the political position of the Jews.[18] Another reason for the deterioration in the social status of Jews was the fact that clerics and other religious often portrayed them as enemies of Christianity. Ritual murder accusations and host desecration allegations were common and popular in the Empire starting at the end of the thirteenth century.

[17] Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde.* Some of the ideas presented in the book were presented in an article six years previously: František Graus, "Judenpogrome im 14. Jahrhundert: Der Schwarze Tod," in *Die Juden als Minderheit in der Geschichte*, ed. Bernd Martin und Ernst Schulin (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1981), 68-84.

[18] Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 13-37, 227-248, 335-340. Compare: Breuer, "The 'Black Death' and Antisemitism," 139-151.

Indeed, three major waves of persecution occurred even before 1348 based on such accusations, in addition to local events of anti-Jewish violence.[19] When the panic and despair triggered by the plague destabilzed social norms, anti-Jewish tendencies were manifested in an unprecedented manner, yet these tendencies were not new. Graus agrees with Haverkamp that each city or teritory had a different set of circumstances to consider when deciding whether to act against the Jews. Still, he states that artisans, a class that grew in political strength during the fourteenth century, were particularly anti-Jewish, and often played a major part in the persecution. The initial political position of the Jews was so weak, and the crisis broght on by the plague so overwhelming, that it was easy to form a coaliton of urban and external forces against them.[20] Overall, Graus mainly explains the persecution by contextualizing it within major historical shifts. The events of 1348-1350 are portrayed as the peak of a long and severe crisis, which was quickly intensified by the plague.

Other historians turned to study the persecution of Jews in particular areas or cities, producing a detailed explanations of the social dynamic that triggered it in individual cases. Due to the nature of their research, they often highlighted the unique characteristics of the persecution in each case, as Haverkamp suggested. At the same time, they often used the

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[19] Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 155-158, 275-298. The first major wave persecution took place in 1287-1288, based on the accusation that a boy named Werner was ritually murdered: Gerd Mentgen, "Die Ritualmordaffäre um den 'Guten Werner' von Oberwesel und ihre Folgen" *Jahrbuch für Westdeutsche Landesgeschichte* 21 (1995), 159-198. The second wave, known as Rintflisch massacres, was driven by host desecration accusations in 1298: Rubin, *Gentile Tales,* 40-69. The third wave, known as the Armleder persecution, lasted from 1336 to 1338, and while it started as a host desecration pogrom, it developed into a riot with aspects of a class struggle: Christoph M. Cluse, "Blut ist im Schuh: Ein Exempel über die Judenverfolgung des 'Rex Armleder'," in *Liber Amicorum Necnon et Amicarum für Alfred Heit. Beiträge zur mittelalterlichen Geschichte und geschichtlichen Landeskunde*, ed. Friedhelm Burgard, Christoph Cluse und Alfred Haverkamp (Trier: Trierer Historische Forschungen, 1996), 378-383. In between these waves, some communities suffered local persecutions: Jörg R. Müller, "*Ereẓ gererah* - 'Land of Persecution': Pogroms against the Jews in the Regnum Teutonicum from c.1280 to 1350," in *The Jews of Europe in the Middle Ages (Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries): Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Speyer, 20–25 October 2002*, ed. Christoph Cluse (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 245-260.

[20] Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 168-214, 244-248, 335-339, 360-361. As we have seen, Ritzmann claimed, in contradiction to Graus, that the persecution can be explained fully by political, economic and social factors, and that the plague was not a significant cause: Ritzmann "Judenmord als Folge des 'Schwarzen Todes', " 101-124.

general framework presented by Graus to fill in gaps in the relevant sources.[21] Still, these historians did not usually intend to present a new explanatory model of the persecution in general, but only to add nuance to the existing literature. There are a few exceptions to this rule, but they lack the depth and sophistication of the work of Haverkamp or Graus.[22] Nevertheless, scholarly discussion about the anti-Jewish violence that followed the plague has clearly turned away from the vivid descriptions of the chroniclers. Instead, it has focused on political power struggles, economic interests and class dynamics, while considering religious mentalities as a general contributing factor for the persecution.

This shift in historiographical perspective diminished the importance of well-poisoning accusations as an explanation for the persecution of the Jews during the Black Death. We have seen that earlier historians, drawing on the medieval chroniclers, often viewed well-poisoning accusations as the main reason for the violence, an extreme reaction to the horrors of the plague. However, when later historians claimed that long-standing political, economic and religious factors were the main reasons for the persecution, they implied that poisoning accusations were not. Haverkamp mentions often the fact that Jews were accused of well-poisoning, but does not ask what role did this accusation played in

[21] Schneider, "Der Tag von Benfeld, " 255-271; Schmandt, *Judei, cives et incole*, 85-95; Cluse, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden in den mittelalterlichen Niederlanden*, 210-282; Christoph Cluse, "Zwischen Vorurteil und Vertrauen: Die Rettung der Regensburger Juden im Jahr 1349," in *Kulturkonflikte – Kulturbegegnungen. Juden, Christen und Muslime in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Gisbert Gemein (Bonn: Schriftenreihe der Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2011), 362–375; Cordelia Heß, "Jews and the Black Death in Fourteenth Century Prussia: A Search for Traces," in *Fear and Loathing in the North: Jews and Muslims in Medieval Scandinavia and the Baltic Region*, ed. Cordelia Heß, and Jonathan Adams (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 109-125; Dirk Jäckel, "Judenmord-Geißler-Pest: Das Beispiel Straßburg 1349," in *Pest: Die Geschichte eines Menschheitstraumas*, ed. Mischa Meier (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2005), 162-178; Annegret Holtmann, *Juden in der Grafschaft Burgund im Mittelalter* (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2003), 318-336; Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 364-385; Christoph Stadler, "Judenverfolgung zur Zeit der Großen Pest 1349," *Jüdische Kultur im Hegau und am See* (Bonn: MarkOrPlan, 2007), 7-28; .

[22] Ritzmann "Judenmord als Folge des 'Schwarzen Todes', " 101-124; Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," 7-24, 35-36.

causing the persecution, or why was it so popular.[23] In contrast, Graus dedicates a long section of his book to the issue of well-poisoning allegations. He reviews their history starting in 1321, and points out that they were usually spread by officials and nobles rather than by the public. These men inquired into the poisoning rumors, met to discuss their veracity, and sent each other confessions of alleged poisoners to be used as evidence. Thus, Graus claims, these officials acted deliberately to build up the rumors in order to direct popular unrest caused by the plague against the Jews, lest it would turn against them. At the same time, he states that despite these actions, the accusations rarely caused the persecution of Jews in a direct manner. It usually took a few months from the moment that the accusations appeared in a certain location until the authorities executed the Jews there. And so, Graus concludes, well-poisoning allegations were merely an excuse used by officials to justify anti-Jewish actions which they took for political and economic reasons.[24] Surely, Graus and Haverkamp would agree, there were historical causes which determined that well-poisoning accusations were the popular justification for the violence in 1348-1350. Yet, they would state, if a different excuse had gained popularity, the nature of the persecution would have remained essentially similar, since it was actually driven by other political, economic, social and religious factors.

One can find justification for such position in the primary sources. Several chroniclers claimed that the accusations were false, and suggested that the persecution was merely an attempt to take over Jewish property.[25] Most contemporary doctors who tried to explain the

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[23] Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 31-32, 39, 41-43, 50, 60, 62-66, 74.

[24] Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 299-334.

[25] Henricus de Hervordia, *Liber de rebus remorabilioribus*, 277, 280; Conradus Megenbergensis, *Tractatus de mortalitate in Alamannia*, 866; Fritsche Closener, *Chronik,* 104; *Gesta archiepiscoporum Magdeburgensium, Continuatio I*, 435-437; Jean de Venette, *Continuationis Chronici Guillelmi de Nangiaco Pars Tertia*, 2 :213-214. And, of course, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Oppenheimer 676, ff. 127r-130r.

plague insisted that it occurred naturally, and considered mass poisoning an unlikely scenario.[26] We have seen that the pope explicitly rejected the accusations and opposed the persecution, as did some secular rulers in the Empire.[27] These voices, however, were far from being the majority. Most chroniclers accepted the accusations, as did most leaders.[28] One may assume that some of them maliciously supported rumors which they believed to be false in order to justify action against the Jews. Still, they must have thought that well-poisoning accusations were convincing enough to persuade others that the Jews should be killed. Someone, be it other leaders, citizens or officials, most likely believed the rumors. Moreover, historians have noted that well-poisoning allegations were stated to be the cause for the persecution in almost all of the cases in which any reason is mentioned.[29] Previous waves of

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[26] Conradus Megenbergensis, *Tractatus de mortalitate in Alamannia*, 866-868; Guy de Chauliac, *Inventarium sive chirurgia magna*, 1:118-119; Guerchberg, "The Controversy over the Alleged Sowers of the Black Death," 208-221. Though there is an example to the contrary: Alphonso of Cordova, "Epistola et regimen Alphontii Cordubensis de pestilentia," 223-226. Most medical treatises about the plague do not mention the persecution of Jews: Karl Sudhoff, "Pestschriften aus des ersten 150 Jahren nach der Epidemie des 'schwarzen Todes' 1348," *Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin* 4 (1911), 191-222; 5 (1912), 36-88; 6 (1913), 36-87; 7 (1914), 57-114; 8 (1915), 175-224, 236-286; 9 (1916), 53-78, 117-167; 11 (1918), 44-176.

[27] Other than the pope, Duke Albert II of Austria tried to defend the Jews in his territories with partial success. In Strasbourg, Basel and Freiburg, municipal councils were able to defend the Jews only for a limited period, as we will see. In Regensburg, Nuremberg and Luxembourg the authorities defended the Jews successfully: Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, 1:396-398, nos. 372-374; "omnes Iudei occisi et iugulati sunt […] Quapropter dux Albertus [Duke Albert II Austria], fautor Iudeorum, omnes adiacentes villas iussit spoliare." - *Kalendarium Zwetlensis,* 692; "[Iudei] alii vero servati ad mandatum domini Alberti ducis Austria, qui eos defendi mandavit. Sed hoc modicum profuit, quia infra annum sequentem occisi fuerunt quotquot habebat in suis municionibus […] Sed civitates imperii ipsos [Iudeos] nequaquam ulterius sustinere volebant, unde et duci Austrie Alberto qui suos Iudeos in comitatibus Phirretarum et Alsacie et Kyburgensi defendabat, scripserunt: ut aut upse eos per suos iudices cremari faceret, aut vel ipsi eos per iusticam cremarent. Sed dux per suos iudices mandavit eos cremari. […] Per Austriam vero Stiriam ac Karinthiam per dominum Albertum ducem Austrie omnes Iudei defense fuerunt similiter in civitate Romana ac Avinionensi" - Heinricus de Diessenhoven, *Chronicon,* 69-71, 74; "Duces autem Austrie et Moguntini tenuerunt suos [Iudeos]." - Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 268; Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 68-73; Schneider, "Der Tag von Benfeld," 258-259; Jäckel, "Judenmord-Geißler-Pest," 169-171; Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 370-373; Schmandt, *Judei, cives et incole*, 93; Cluse, "Zwischen Vorurteil und Vertrauen," 362-375; Alois Schmid, "Die Judenpolitik der Reichsstadt Regensberg im Jahre 1349," *Udim: Zeitschrift der Rabbinerkonferenz in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* 9-10 (1979-1980), 123-134.

[28] See nn. 8 and 21 above.

[29] Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 332. Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 367 points out that there were a few cases of ritual murder accusations in 1349, but generally agrees with Graus regarding the dominance of well-poisoning accusations.

anti-Jewish violence in the Empire were justified by ritual murder or host desecration accusations.[30] If stories of well-poisoning were merely an excuse used by the authorities to legitimize the execution of Jews, why did they not turn to allegations which had already proven popular?

Thus, it is very likely that well-poisoning accusations in particular played an important part in the dynamic that caused the mass violence of 1348-1350. However, it is quite difficult to determine what part exactly. One should not throw the baby out with the bathwater by rejecting wide scale analysis of the persecution as performed by Haverkamp, Graus and others. Even if the issue of well-poisoning accusations is not convincingly addressed in their works, their methodology is sound, and many of their conclusions are persuasive. Instead, one should find a way to fit well-poisoning allegations into the existing historical models. Yet this task is quite difficult, due to the state and nature of the existing sources. Ideally, one could study each case of persecution to determine if and how well-poisoning led to the execution of Jews, but in practice this is impossible. There were probably around 350 such cases in the Empire during the Black Death, making up the largest wave of anti-Jewish persecution in the Middle Ages.[31] About most of these events we can only tell where they happened, as they are mentioned briefly in Latin or German chronicles or Hebrew "memory

[30] Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 155-158, 275-298; Mentgen, "Die Ritualmordaffäre um den 'Guten Werner' von Oberwesel," 159-198; Rubin, *Gentile Tales,* 40-69; Cluse, "Blut ist im Schuh," 371-392; Müller, "*Ereẓ gererah*," 245-260.

[31] Michael Toch, *Die Juden im mittelalterlichen Reich* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1998), 55-68; Nico Voigtländer and Hans-Joachim Voth, "Persecution Perpetuated: The Mediaeval Origins of Anti-Semitic Violence in Nazi Germany," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 127 (2012), 1348-1350; Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*, 158. Toch suggests that the number of communities attacked in 1348-1350 was about 400, Voigtländer and Voth claim that there are 325 cases in which persecution surely took place, and Aberth states that 342 such cases exist. Thus, 350 seems like a reasonable tentative number, if one assume that at least in some of the cases in doubt persecution indeed happened.

books".[32] For some 150 cases we can assign a date, but often not much more. Only in a couple of dozen instances can one offer some insight about the particular circumstances of the persecution.[33] Even in these cases, the sources do not always explain how well-poisoning accusations developed or why they were believed. Often, issues of authority and property are of more interest to the writers than the exact causes for the persecution.[34] And so, the historian is left with very few cases in which it is possible to analyze the role of well-poisoning accusations. Such a small sample out of the known cases cannot establish a sound quantitative study of the subject.

Rather than setting aside the question about the part that poisoning accusations played in the persecution of Jews as one of the mysteries of history, one can apply a different methodological approach. We can view the few instances in which it is possible to explain the importance of well-poisoning allegations for the development of the violence as case studies, which can reveal something about this dynamic. I do not intend to claim that these few cases necessarily represent the common occurrences in all, or most, places in which Jews

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[32] See such lists in: Heinricus de Diessenhoven, *Chronicon,* 68-75; Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 263-272. For the Hebrew *Memorbücher*, see: Siegmund Salfeld, *Das Martyrologium des Nürnberger Memorbuches* (Berlin: Leonhard Simion, 1898), 69-70, 73-78, 81-85. For analysis: Rainer Barzen, "Regionalorganisation jüdischer Gemeinden im Reich in der ersten Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts," in *Geschichte der Juden im Mittelalter von der Nordsee bis zu den Südalpen*, ed. Alfred Haverkamp (Hannover: Hahn: 2002), 293-366; Voigtländer and Voth, "Persecution Perpetuated," 1348. One Hebrew account describing the execution of Jews in Nordhausen survives in two manuscripts, and so did a few legends, but they tell nothing about well-poisoning accusations: Felix Böhl, "Die hebräischen Handschriften zur Verfolgung der Juden Nordhausens und ihrem Tanz zum Tode im Jahre 1349," in *Tanz und Tod in Kunst und Literatur*, ed. Franz Link (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1993), 127-138; Abraham David, "Tales Concerning Persecutions in Medieval Germany," in *A.M. Habermann Jubilee Volume: Studies in Medieval Jewish literature*, ed. Zvi Malachi (Jerusalem: Mass, 1977), 77-78, 81-83.

[33] Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 159-167, 168-214; Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 35-38, 68-76; Cluse, "Zur Chronologie der Verfolgungen," 223-242.

[34] For example, King Karl sent many letters to different cities regarding the persecution of Jews. These mostly discuss the authority to judge and punish the Jews, forgiveness to cities which executed their Jews (or sanctions against them, in a few cases), and the redistribution of Jewish property. The issue of well-poisoning rarely comes up: UB Strassburg, 5:190, no. 201; 5:197-198, nos. 210-211; 5:207, no. 217; M.G.H, Leges, Constitutiones et acta publica imperatorum et regum, 9:108-111, nos. 148-150; 9:151, no. 194; 9:153-154, nos. 197-198; 9:161, no. 212; 9:185-189, nos. 240-242, 244-245; 9:241, no. 315; 9:260-261, no. 346; 9:271-272, no. 359; 9:273-274, nos. 361-363; 9:375, no. 365; 9:376-378, nos. 367-368; 9:389-393, nos. 389-392; 9:394, no. 395; 9:398, no. 402.

were persecuted. Still, focusing on these particular case studies can clarify how things may have happened in other places, and illustrate the range of possible scenarios. It may also provide us some insights about how well-poisoning accusations can fit into complex general explanations of the persecution and other reactions to the plague.

For the purpose of understanding the role of well-poisoning allegations in causing the persecution of Jews I have chosen two main case studies, and four minor ones. The first focuses on the area of Lake Léman, in northern Savoy. The persecution there left a record describing in detail the investigation of several local Jews. As we have seen, such 11documents proved very valuable in analyzing the development of the accusation in 1321, and the record from Savoy is the most detailed example of such document from 1348-1350. The second case study, which is the most detailed, focuses on the events in the city of Strasbourg, and the surrounding area of Alsace. Strasbourg was the largest city in the region, and had one of the most flourishing Jewish communities of the Empire.[35] Thus, the faith of the Jews there was the subject of a long and heated debate between different social groups. This debate, and the investigation performed by local authorities, left the most extensive set of documents relating to the circulation of well-poisoning accusations. We will also examine the influence of well-poisoning on the persecution of Jews and marginalized Christians in four shorter case studies, focusing on Basel, Würzburg, Cologne and Regensburg. Finally, based on these case studies, the chapter concludes by presenting an explanation of the persecution that recognizes the role of well-poisoning accusation as well as of long-term social, political and economic factors.

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[35] Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 40-48, 132-136.

Well-poisoning accusation around Lake Léman – Records from Chillon and Châtel

Well-poisoning accusations developed in the County of Savoy during June, July and August 1348, as the previous chapter shows. The transfer of the accusations from Christians to Jews began in the Dauphiné, but this pattern quickly spread north, to Savoy.[36] On 10 August Count Amadeus of Geneva, Baron Ludwig of Vaud, and a representative of the council of Chambéry presided over a meeting in Châtel, which launched an official investigation against the Jews.[37] This was the beginning of a more intensive and organized stage of persecution against Jews, and against Christians who were accused of supporting them, in Savoy. The previous chapter presents an overall picture of the institutional violence in the county, reviews the known incidents and discusses possible general reasons for them. However, the existing sources do not usually allow us to focus on the details of particular cases, i.e. to analyze investigations of particular individuals. Yet, as we have seen in chapter 2, this kind of analysis based on inquisitorial records can reveal much about the dynamic that generated the persecution.[38] And so, one should pay much attention to the only similar document which survives from 1348-1350, reporting about two investigations that took place in northern Savoy, in Chillon Castel and the town of Châtel.[39]

The said document is in fact a long letter that the castellan of Chillon, on the eastern shore of Lake Léman, sent to the administrators of Strasbourg, in Alsace, sometime at the end of 1348. Historians have known about this letter for centuries. It was first transcribed,

[36] See above: Ch. 4, pp. 285-303.

[37] Nordmann,"Documents," 71.

[38] See above: Ch. 2, pp. 114-128.

[39] Other documents indeed contain some details about particular investigations, but none provides a whole record: UB Strassburg, 5:164, no. 179; 166, no. 182; 167-174, no. 185; 174-176, no. 186; 177, no. 188; 196-197, no. 209.

translated from Latin to German, and printed by Johann Schiltern in 1698.[40] Since then, it has been printed again in both Latin and German, and translated into English several times.[41] It is not surprising that this is the most cited primary source regarding the persecution of the Jews during the Black Death.[42] However, several of the influential historians who cite this source do so very inaccurately,[43] and most others highlight selective details without analyzing the whole document. This approach has caused some misunderstandings regarding the nature of the persecution and the part that well-poisoning accusations played in it, as we will see. The existing historiography lacks even a comprehensive technical analysis of this document. First, many scholars refer only to half of the document, that is only to the part that describes the investigation in Chillon, and not in Châtel.[44] Second, few have noticed that no one has seen the original manuscript of this document since the eighteenth century.[45] And so, all of the existing printed sources describing it

[40] Printed as an appendix to: Jacob von Königshoven, *Die älteste teutsche so wol allgemeine als insonderheit Elsassische und Strassburgische Chronicke*, ed. Johann Schiltern (Strassburg: Josias Städel, 1698), 1030-1048.

[41] Latin: UB Strassburg, 5:167-174. Partial German: Justus F.C. Hecker, *Der schwarze tod in vierzehnten Jahrhundert: Nach den Quellen für Aerzte und gebildete Nichtkrzte bearb* (Berlin, F.A. Herbig, 1832), 96-102. This book was translated into English in 1833, with the relevant text: Justus F.C. Hecker, *The Black Death in the Fourteenth Century,* trans. B.G. Babington (London: A. Schloss, 1833), 181-189. Partial English: Johannes Nohl, *The Black Death: A Chronicle of the Plague,* trans. C. H. Clarke (New York: Harper, 1969), 197-202; Aberth, *The Black Death*, 145-150. Full: Horrox, *The Black Death*, 211-220.

[42] See n. 41 above, and also: Wolfgang Friedrich von Mulinen, "Persécutions des juifs au bord du Léman au XIVe siècle," *Revue historique vaudoise* 7 (1899), 33–36; Graetz, *History of the Jews*, 4:103-104, 108; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 67-68; Poliakov, *The History of Antisemitism*, 1:110; Baron, *A Social and Religious History*, 11:162; Bergdolt, *Der Schwarze Tod*, 128; Rowan, "The *Grand Peur* of 1348-1349," 22; Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 103-104; John, "Legend of the Jewish Mass Poisoner," 178-179; Foa, *The Jews of Europe*, 14; Collard, *The Crime of Poison in the Middle Ages*, 41; Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 309-312; Ziegler, *The Black Death,* 102; Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*, 156-158, 165, 172-178, 188; Richards, *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation*, 103. Breuer, "The 'Black Death' and Antisemitism," 140 is also probably based on the same source. See additional sources in: Mesler, "Legends of Jewish Sorcery," 307, n. 163, 311-312.

[43] Mulinen, "Persécutions des juifs," 35; Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 104; Graetz, *History of the Jews*, 4:103-104; John, "Legend of the Jewish Mass Poisoner," 178; Richards, *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation*, 103. Mesler, "Legends of Jewish Sorcery," 311-312 describes the origin of these mistakes, and lists other historians who misquoted this source.

[44] The investigation in Chillon is overemphasized in comparison to the one in Châtel in the majority of the sources listed in n. 42 above. This may not be surprising if one notes that most of the existing translations include only the first part of the document, see n. 41 above.

[45] An inventory list from the eighteenth century in AVS III (Strasbourg, Archives de la ville de Strasbourg, Série III) 174, files the document as AVS III 174/4. However, Hecker, *Der schwarze tod,* 96-102 and UB Strassburg, 5:167-174, from 1833 and 1895, already had to use Schiltern's edition (Jacob von Königshoven, *Strassburgische Chronicke*,

rely, often indirectly, on Schiltern's work, as we will have to do here.[46] (He usually transcribed the manuscripts reliably, and one should assume that he did so in this case as well.[47])

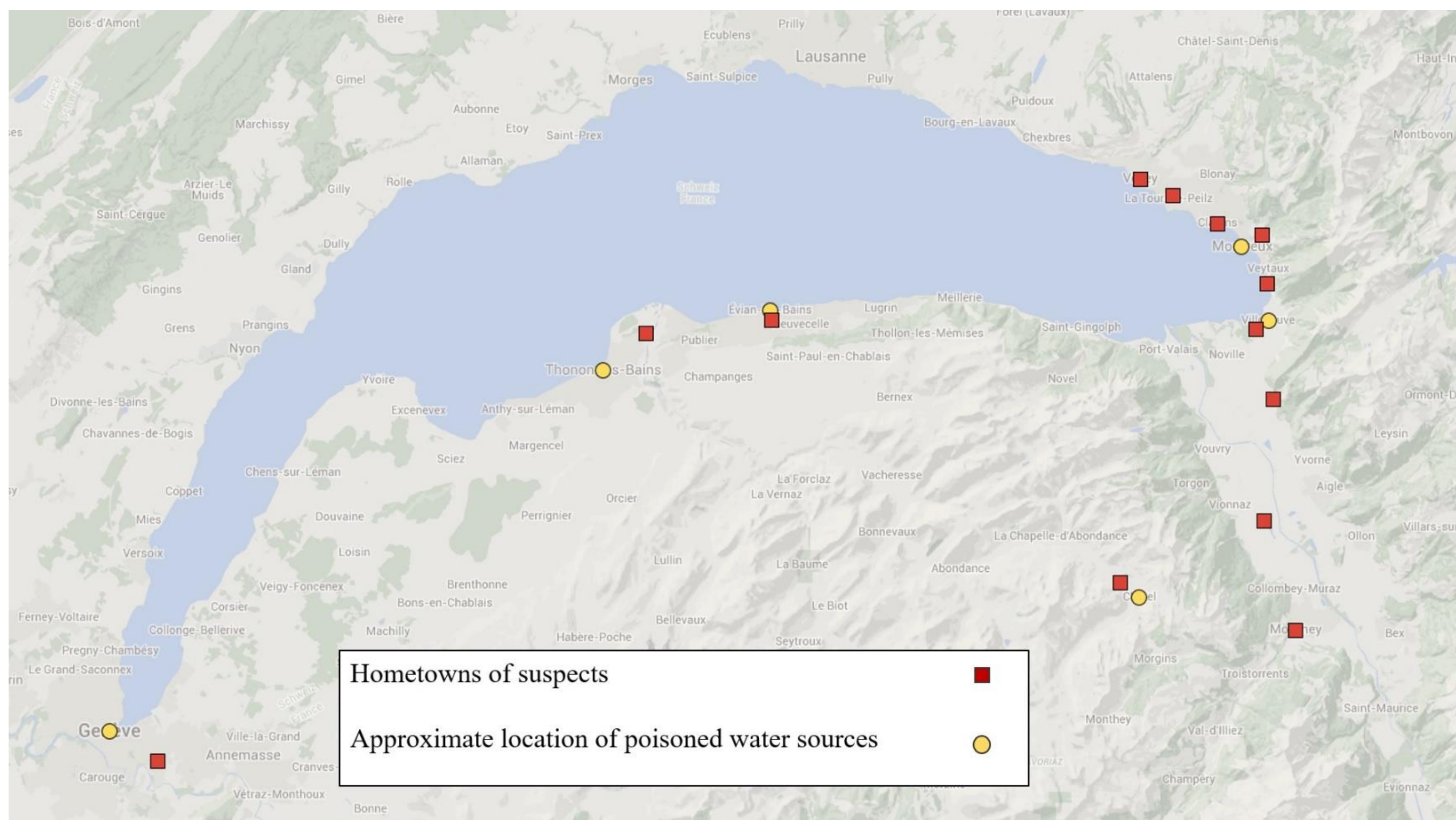
The document describes two separate investigation sessions: the first took place in Chillon castle between 15 September and 18 October the second in a castle in the town of Châtel on 10 and 11 October. Five Jews were investigated in each location, but some of them reported about more than one case of alleged poisoning, and all mentioned the names of other Jews who may have been involved. The names of about twenty other Jews are mentioned in these records, and it is likely that at least some of them were arrested later as a result. And so, one can depict a fairly complex picture of the accusations and the persecution around Lake Léman in September and October 1348.

1030-1048) as a basis for their work. If Hecker may have chosen to do so out of convenience, Witte and Wolfram, who edited the UB Strassburg, consistently reviewed the original manuscripts, when possible. Thus, by the nineteenth century the manuscript was already lost.

[46] I cite the clear and available edition of the UB Strassburg, but it is also based on Schiltern.

[47] Compare: AVS III 174/3, no. 3 to Schiltern's edtion (Jacob von Königshoven, *Strassburgische Chronicke*), 1028, and UB Strassburg 5:166, no.182; AVS III 174/3, no. 5 to Schiltern, 1025-1026 and UB Strassburg 5:198-199, no. 212; AVS III 174/3, no. 9 to Schiltern, 1021-1022 and UB Strassburg 5:165, no. 181; AVS III 174/3, no. 13 to Schiltern, 1029 and UB Strassburg 5:177, no. 188; AVS III 174/3, no. 15 to Schiltern, 1024-1025; AVS III 174/3, no. 18 to Schiltern, 1023-1023 and UB Strassburg 5:178-179, no. 190; AVS III 174/3, no. 22 to Schiltern, 1026-1027; AVS III 174/6, no. 29 to Schiltern, 1051-1052 and UB Strassburg 5:197-198, no. 210; AVS III 174/7, no. 30 to Schiltern, 1052-10253 and UB Strassburg 5:207, no. 217.

Well poisoning around Lake Léman according to the records from Chillon and Châtel



The very existence of this document shows that the persecution of the Jews in northern Savoy was organized, at least partly, by local officials. Count Amadeus of Geneva and Baron Ludwig of Vaud ordered the investigation of Jews in August, and the arrests in the area resulted from this decision. Indeed, they made sure to compensate officials in La Tour-de-Peilz for expenses they incurred during the investigation, and to redistribute the property of the executed Jews among their men.[48] The above-mentioned record was written by the castellan of Chillon, acting under the authority of the bailiff of Chablais (the area south of Lake Léman), who was probably in charge of the investigation there. He was assisted by a

[48] Nordmann, "*Documents,*" 68-69, 71.

notary, Henricus Gerardis, who was also involved in the investigation in La Tour-de-Peilz.[49] Other unknown officials were in charge of the investigation in Châtel, but also they acted according the orders of Count Amadeus of Savoy.[50] The records do not mention any kind of popular violence, but rather describe an investigation conducted using routine medieval practices and procedures.[51] Torture indeed played an important part in this investigation, as historians have often noted.[52] Still, the same can be said for many other medieval investigations, which were aimed at extracting confessions using torture, or the threat of torture. Moreover, this practice had its rules, and they were kept consistently during the investigations in Chillon and Châtel. Confessions given during torture were inadmissible, and so the suspects were always given time to recover before they were asked to confess. They had to repeat the confession in the presence of reliable witnesses, and swear on the books of the Pentateuch that their statement was true.[53] The confession was then translated into Latin, and a notary made an official record of it.[54] Indeed, this practice produced false confessions, as was surely the case also for the Jews of northern Savoy. The interrogations in Chillon and Châtel were more severe than most cases, probably due to the enormity of the

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[49] Nordmann, "*Documents,*" 69; UB Strassburg 5:169. In Nordman he is called Henricum Grandis, but in both documents he is described as a notary, and due to the geographical proximity between La Tour-de-Peilz and Chillon, it is likely that this is the same man.

[50] "inquisitio, quae fit et facta intenditur ex officio curiae illustris domini nostri Amadei comitis Sabaudiae et ejus gentium contra judaeos" - UB Strassburg 5:171.

[51] Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*, 158; Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, 23-65; Remensnyder, "Torture and Truth," 158-165; Peters, *Inquisiton,* 65; Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 94-97. Given points out that an imprisonment was usually a more common investigation technique than torture, but the need to find the alleged poisoners quickly probably led the inquisitors in Savoy to use the latter.

[52] Graetz, *History of the Jews*, 4:104; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 67; Baron, *A Social and Religious History*, 11:162; John, "Legend of the Jewish Mass Poisoner," 178; Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*, 156; Breuer, "The 'Black Death' and Antisemitism," 140; also see Remensnyder, "Torture and Truth," 158-165.

[53] This was a common medieval practice: Amnon Linder, "The Jewry-Oath in Christian Europe," in *Jews in Early Christian Law: Byzantium and the Latin West, 6th-11th Centuries*, ed. John Tolan et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 311-358.

[54] UB Strassburg, 5:168-174; Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, 23-65.

crime in question, but the inquisitors did not neglect any of the administrative aspects of the investigation. In this sense, the records give the impression that they are the outcome of a thorough investigation, not a careless fabrication.

In addition to the technical aspects of the investigation, the content of the confessions themselves made the charges seem reliable. Markedly, the inquisitors who performed the questioning in Chillon had created a protocol presenting testimonies that often corroborate each other. Balavigny, a doctor from Thonon-les-Bains, confessed to poisoning a spring near Montreux, and Mamson from Villeneuve also stated that he did so. Mamson and his wife were accused in turn by a women named Belieta. Her son, Aquetus, was suspected of poisoning a spring in Roche, but blamed the act on one Banditonus, who had been questioned previously, and on Banditonus' son, Aquetus. And so, Aquetus son of Belieta was confronted by the inquisitors with Aquetus son of Banditonus, and while the latter confessed, both Jews were convicted. In fact, all six Jews who were questioned in Chillon were either accused by one of the other Jews, or were related to someone who had already been questioned. In addition, names of other Jews who allegedly played a part in the plot are repeated in different testimonies. Both Balavigny and Banditon insisted that a rabbi called Jacob of Toledo, who was now living in Chambéry, was the driving force behind the plot, and that one Samuleto from Villeneuve was involved. Mamson, Belieta, and her son Aquetus did not mention the rabbi, but instead stated that a man called Provenzal convinced them to poison water sources.[55] This pattern is no doubt the outcome of work done by a skilled inquisitor. Such an investigator would use feuds between families to extract names of new suspects, and to

[55] UB Strassburg, 5:167-171.

manipulate these suspects into corroborating the confessions already given.[56] The result of this practice is a very rich and compelling record, in which each testimony seems to corroborate the others, that creates the impression of a tightly-knit network of poisoners at work around Lake Léman.

However, some historians who have focused on particular details of this account have missed the overall picture. They highlight the fact that Rabbi Jacob came from Toledo, and suggest that this detail is an indication that the inquisitors were thinking in terms of an international plot organized from there, but the records tell a different story.[57] There is neither a mention of correspondence between the Iberian Peninsula and Savoy, nor of any acts of poisoning there, and so the remark about Toledo seems to be an incidental detail. Instead, it is more likely that Chambéry was depicted as the center of the plot. Rabbi Jacob actually lived there, as did Rubi Peyret, who organized the plot according the account from Châtel. Indeed, in September and October the Jews of Chambéry were already under arrest, and an investigation against them was ongoing.[58] When the investigators in Chillon and Châtel looked for a location from which the plot originated, Chambéry seemed like a much more reasonable choice than Toledo. Similarly, several historians have also given much importance to a remark in the record stating that Basilisk was the source of the poison. They highlighted this detail as an indication that the inquisitors in Chillon were looking for

[56] Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, 40-41, 178-181; Donald J. Kagay, "Law and Memory: The Many Aspects of the Legal Inquisition in the Medieval Crown of Aragon," *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 34 (2004), 56-57; Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 77-110.

[57] Poliakov, *The History of Antisemitism*, 1:110; Collard, *The Crime of Poison in the Middle Ages*, 41; Bergdolt, *Der Schwarze Tod*, 128; Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 104; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 67. Mesler, "Legends of Jewish Sorcery," 308, n. 170 points out that this detail is probably coincidental.

[58] Costa de Beauregard, "Notes et documents," 101-103; Bardelle, *Juden in einem Transit- und Brückenland*, 252-253, 256; Segre, "Testimonianze documentarie," 312; Cox, *The Green Count*, 70.

evidence of sorcery or projected on the Jews irrational fears.[59] However, only Balavigny the doctor mentioned Basilisk as the source of the poison, and he did so as a professional conjecture, which indeed has some basis in contemporary medical literature.[60] All of the other Jews, either in Chillon or in Châtel, described only the simple physical characteristics of the poison. They usually stated that it was a powder, in the colors black and red or black and green, stored in cloth bags or paper cornets.[61] The fact that historians focused on these peculiar details prevented them from noticing that the poisoning is usually described as a simple and technical act, and the plot as an operation organized by a small number of neighbors who know each other well.

Still, the detailed testimony of Balavigny, the doctor from Thonon-les-Bains, calls for special analysis, since one can drew from it some general conclusions regarding well-poisoning accusations. First, it seems that the investigators understood that it would be very difficult to poison water sources without killing Jews and Christians indiscriminately. Balavigny was apparently asked how did the conspirators managed to protect their family and friends, or other Jews, from being poisoned. He stated that he told his wife and son not to drink from the spring that he poisoned, but did not explain the reason to them, implying that they did not know about the plot. Jews who were part of the plot could simply be notified which water sources were poisoned, as the doctor confessed that he did in one other case.

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[59] Baron, *A Social and Religious History*, 11:162; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 68-69; John, "Legend of the Jewish Mass Poisoner," 178-179; Ziegler, *The Black Death,* 102.

[60] Juan Gil of Zamora, *Iohannis Aegidii Zamorensis - Liber contra venena et animalia venenosa*, 123-125; Thorndike, *A History of Magic*, 1:67-68, 70, 75, 169, 324, 573, 603, 626, 636, 771, 2:201-202, 348, 362, 433, 562, 901-902, 905, 3:107, 433, 435, 534, 540, 553, 4:45–46, 181, 225, 338; Mesler, "Legends of Jewish Sorcery," 308; Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*, 157.

[61] UB Strassburg, 5:168-174. Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*, 156-157 reviews many of these details clearly and accurately. Yet he did not separate in his analysis the record from Chillon from the one from Châtel, and thus missed the unique characteristics of each one.

However, this kind of ad hoc solution could not allow for a wide-scale conspiracy. Balavigny elaborated on this point when he told the investigators about the actions of Mussus of Villeneuve, who allegedly poisoned public water basins in his town and in Chillon. The doctor said that Mussus drank only from the lake after the poisoning, and that he notified other Jews about the danger. Yet, when it came to poisoning of such central water sources, these measures were insufficient, and local rabbis had to warn all Jews not to drink from these basins.[62] Thus, these details show that the investigators believed that an extensive poisoning plot required leadership and organization, and that without addressing this issue, the confession would be unconvincing.

Balavigny also shed some light on a question of great importance to modern historians: whether the investigators truly believed the charges they presented. The doctor confessed to poisoning a spring in the town of Clarens, not far from Chillon. Thus, he was taken there to identify the spring, and after he did so the notary Henricus Gerardis found in it a piece of cloth, which was allegedly used to wrap the poison. The doctor declared in front of witnesses that he recognized the cloth, which was then taken as evidence.[63] Supposedly, there are only two ways to explain this event: either Balavigny was indeed guilty of poisoning, or the notary intentionally framed him for the crime. Baruch Ḥiel presented the Jewish perspective on this issue, and of course insisted that any physical evidence found against Jews was maliciously planted, as several modern historians also claimed.[64] But there are also possible scenarios

[62] UB Strassburg, 5:168-169.

[63] This was not the only case in which "physical evidence" against the Jews were found. Balavigny testified that "toxicum, de quo tunc datum fuit cuidam judaeo, qui inde mortuus fuit probando ipsum toxicum." - UB Strassburg, 5:169. Also see a letter from Zofingen to Strasbourg, reporting about poison given to animals as an experiment: UB Strassburg, 5:166, no. 182.

[64] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Oppenheimer 676, f. 127v; Ziegler, *The Black Death,* 102; Baron, *A Social and Religious History*, 11:162; John, "Legend of the Jewish Mass Poisoner," 178.

which can explain the physical evidence presented against Jews without assuming that the investigators convicted them despite knowing that the accusations were false. One cannot exclude unusual coincidences, but the most compelling scenario is that the inquisitors were convinced of the suspects' guilt due to their confessions, and only later manipulated the physical evidence to fit the charges. According to this idea, the evidence was fabricated in order to produce the legal outcome, which the investigators truly believed to be justified.[65] Indeed, we have seen that the confessions given in Chillon could seem reliable by themselves, and they probably convinced other officials, with or without physical evidence, that the Jews were guilty.

The patterns revealed in the record from Châtel are quite different from the ones in Chillon. There, the confessions are shorter and less detailed, and they never point a finger at other suspects who were imprisoned at the castle of Châtel at the time. Only in one case is there a family connection between two of the suspects. Moreover the alleged organizers of the plot are not usually Jews from around the area. Three of the suspects mentioned that Rubi Peyret (Peretz?), a rabbi from Chambéry, sent letters and poison to many Jews so they would take part in the plot. One other suspect said that he received the poison from a rich Jew who lived in Pont-de-Beauvoisin, and only one named a Jew from Bex, not far from Châtel, as the one who incited him to commit the crime.[66] Thus, this record does not create the impression that a local network of poisoners acted around Châtel, but rather that the suspects were influenced by external agents. In addition, other than the fact that three confessions mention Rubi Peyret, they do not corroborate each other, and so the account seems overall

[65] Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 94-97; Kagay, "Law and Memory 58-59, 61-63.
[66] UB Strassburg, 5:171-174.

less convincing.

The differences between the records from Chillon and Châtel probably resulted from more than a variation in the skill level of the investigators. Each of the two records shows a unique narrative regarding the nature of the plot. According to the account from Chillon, the plot was local, and based mostly on personal connections between the Jews. Historians have overemphasized the role of Rabbi Jacob of Toledo as the leader of the plot. The names of local Jews, such as Balavigny, Banditonus, Provenzal and one Aquetus of Montreux, appear more often in the document as the perpetrators of poisoning.[67] It is true that this record contains a few general statements about the involvement of "all the Jews" in the plot, which seems to indicate an international conspiracy. However, when the suspects actually elaborate on this point, they refer to all the Jews of a particular town rather than of the entire continent.[68] Since the record from Chillon suggests that the plot was organized locally, the suspects were usually led to report that it started around June, when the plague reached Savoy. The investigators probably know that the Black Death hit southern Europe long before then, but did not try to implicate local Jews in its cause.[69]

In contrast, the account from Châtel clearly presents the characteristics of an international conspiracy. As we have seen, the organizers of the poisonings were said to live around Chambéry, rather than around Lake Léman. The targets were not only water sources

[67] UB Strassburg, 5:168-171; Poliakov, *The History of Antisemitism*, 1:110; Breuer, "The 'Black Death' and Antisemitism," 139. Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 104 locates the origin somewhere in southern France.

[68] "Mamsson […] credit quod super isto facto toxici judaei de partibus istis apud Aquanum [Évian-les-Bains] ante penthecosten habuerunt et tenuerunt consilium inter se ipsos", "Interrogatus [Aquetus] si pater suus et alii judai Novae villae scirent factum hujusmodi toxici, dicit, quod bene credit, quia magni judaei tenebant consilium inter se extra portam superiorem Villae novae et parvi judaei tenebant similiter consilium." - UB Strassburg, 5:170-171.

[69] Benedictow, *The Black Death,* 96-98, 103-104; Biraben, *Les Hommes et la peste*, 73-76; the plague reached the northern areas or Savoy not before August, and probably later: Andenmatten and Morerod, "La peste à Lausanne," 24-27.

around Châtel, but also elsewhere in Savoy, like Chambéry and Geneva, and even beyond. It was said that the infamous Rubi Peyret used the fact that a Jew named Agimetus was sent on a business trip to Italy and convinced him to poison wells in springs there. Agimetus was supposedly so efficient, that he was able to poison water in Venice, Calabria, Apulia, Barletta, and throughout the Mediterranean coast up to Toulouse. Another Jew, Iconetus, was allegedly sent to the Low Countries, and poisoned wells and springs around Brussels and Mons. According to the account, Rubi Peyret convinced not only people that he knew personally to commit poisoning, but also sent letters and poison to others that he had never met. He, and the other perpetrators, could only persuade so many Jews to risk their lives and join the conspiracy by offering them large sums of money. While in the record from Chillon there is no mention of payment, in the one from Châtel three out of the five Jews investigated confessed to receiving money for committing poisoning. Two of them were apparently in financial dire straits, and were easily manipulated into joining the plot.[70] Moreover, such a wide scale conspiracy could not have been organized in a few weeks. And so, according to three suspects, the operation was arranged between six months to two years before their arrest, that is long before the plague reached Savoy, or even Europe.[71] And so, while the record from Chillon presents the plot as a local initiative, the one from Châtel insists that it was an international conspiracy.

Why are these two accounts so different in character? Probably due to the fact that the investigation in Chillon started about a month before the one at Châtel, and took place in a less central location. As we have seen, the order to investigate all of the Jews of Savoy was

[70] UB Strassburg, 5:172-174.

[71] UB Strassburg, 5:172-174; Benedictow, *The Black Death,* 68-98; Biraben, *Les Hommes et la peste*, 72-76.

given in Châtel on 10 August, and so it is likely that such an investigation indeed took place there around at that time. If so, then the record which survives does not represent the accusations as they first emerged there, but a later, more developed, version of them. The first version may have been more like the accusations recorded at Chillon, that is more limited in scope. Even if there was no early investigation in Châtel, the details of the account represent a thematic development in comparison to the investigation at Chillon. The narrative apparently evolved to state that the plot was global, well-organized and well-financed, rather than local, sporadic, and based on personal initiative. This development also included the claim that some Christians were involved in the plot as well, and indeed some of them had been persecuted throughout northern Savoy.[72] According to the primitive narrative, the attempt to poison the wells was a small, local and communal Jewish operation, which no Christian had a reason to join. Yet according to the later narrative, the poisoners did not know each other and acted for financial gain, and indeed Christians, especially marginalized Christians, could be bribed as easily as Jews. And so, the claim that Christians played a significant, even if subordinate, part in the conspiracy regained popularity.[73] Yet, as we have seen, the new narrative had its problems. The record depicting a plot based on personal connections is much more convincing than the one sketching an international conspiracy dependent on much capital and organization. Medieval administrators, and in particular those of Strasbourg who received the letter containing the records from Chillon and Châtel, were

[72] Nordmann, "*Documents,*" 71; UB Strassburg, 5:164-165, no. 179; 174; Heinricus de Diessenhoven, *Chronicon,* 68-69.

[73] Valbonnais, *Histoire de Dauphiné*, 2:584 presents two cases of poisoning accusations against Christians in the Dauphiné. Chambéry, Archives départementales de Savoie, Trésor des chartes, MS SA 15, no. 28 reports about such accusations in Côte-Saint-André in Savoy on 5 June. Yet, I did not find any similar examples between the beginning of June and the middle of September 1348. Moreover, in these earlier sources there is no mention of the Jews as the leaders of the plot, and the Christian suspects presumably acted independently.

intelligent enough to notice this. This may have been the reason that the castellan of Chillon, who created the document, chose to incorporate in it these two different accounts. One was very reliable, but provided no reason for the citizens of Strasbourg to believe that the Jews in their town knew about the plot in Savoy. The other account was unspecific and less trustworthy, but reported consistently about a wide-scale conspiracy which included all Jews, including those of Strasbourg. The two records complete each other as evidence that can be used to incriminate other Jews, yet they make little sense as a single narrative. In each one the perpetrators allegedly possess different motives, methods and aims, yet the accounts were merged together, probably in order to cause the conviction of Jews elsewhere.

Naturally, a few of the chroniclers who wished to provide a more detailed description of the plot tended towards the second of the narratives discussed above. These chroniclers tried to present the most colorful version of the accusations. Unfortunately, several modern historians, for their own reasons, have focused on the accounts of these chroniclers rather than on the great majority of chronicles. As a result, it was easy for them declare that well-poisoning accusations made little sense, and those who accepted them did so simply as an excuse to persecute the Jews.[74] However, we must remember that this is not necessarily the only description of the plot that medieval administrators, who were the ones to decide the fate of the Jews, had to consider. There is no reason to think that the record from Chillon was unusual in its characteristics, even if it is the most detailed surviving document of its kind

[74] Hermannus Gygantis, *Flores Temporum,* 138-139; Gilles le Muisis, *Chronique et annals*, 223-224. For the other chroniclers, see n. 8 above. Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 104; Graetz, *History of the Jews*, 4:103-104; John, "Legend of the Jewish Mass Poisoner," 178; Ziegler, *The Black Death,* 102; Richards, *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation*, 103; Langmuir, *History, Religion and Antisemitism*, 126, 267, 301-303. As we have seen, other historians adopt this argument for other reasons: Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 333-334; Jäckel, "Judenmord-Geißler-Pest," 169-171; Schneider, "Der Tag von Benfeld," 255-256; Breuer, "The 'Black Death' and Antisemitism," 139-151.

for the events of 1348-1350.[75] When officials, city councils, bishops and lords had to decide the fate of the Jews, they often based their decision not only on vague rumors, but also on detailed records of investigation, as we will see. They saw before them a long list of names, dates and crimes, with details which often corroborated each other, all extracted by acceptable methods of questioning and thoroughly documented. Some of these officials were surely determined to condemn the Jews regardless of the evidence, but is it unlikely that others were indeed convinced that the accusations were true?

Political constellations and well-poisoning accusations in Strasbourg

The castellan of Chillon sent the confessions extracted from the Jews around Lake Léman to the officials of Strasbourg at their request.[76] We will see that similar requests were sent from Strasbourg to several other towns, in an organized effort to verify or disprove rumors about a mass well-poisoning plot. Strasbourg was not the only city to do so, but due to its central political and economic status in Alsace, and the fact that it housed one of the largest Jewish communities in the Empire, it apparently made a special effort to clarify the situation.[77] We will see that it became a hub of information from around the southern parts of the Empire, as many officials were glad to share their opinions about the allegations. This information included mostly different kinds of "evidence" against the Jews, but also some attempts to

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[75] The accounts from Chillon were also sent to Bern. In addition, the castellan stated: "transcribe feci confessions quorundam judaeorum supra contentas, tamen multae sunt aliae accusationes et probationes contra dictos judaeos et alios existentes in aliis partibus comitatus Sabaudiae tam per judaeos quam christianos jam punitos propter hujusmodi delictum enorme, quas nunc penes me non habebam nec mittere potui cum superdictis." Officials from Lausanne sent to Strasbourg, and also to Bern and Friburg, a confession made by a Jew called Bona Dies (Yom Tov). A similar investigation took place in Freiburg and Waldkirch, but it was much more limited in scope. Officials from Kenzingen reported about physical evidence found against Jews there. UB Strassburg, 5:164, no. 179; 166, no. 182; 168, 174; 174-176, no. 186; 177, no. 188.

[76] "Quia intellexi vos scire desiderare confessiones judeorum et probationes factas contra ipsos judeos" - UB Strassburg, 5:168.

[77] Jäckel, "Judenmord-Geißler-Pest," 166-167; GJ 2:798-803.

defend them. Different officials and political agents in Strasbourg had contradicting opinions about the subject, which often lined up with existing political conflicts. Thus, the study of this debate in the city, and the reasons which eventually led to the execution of the Jews, can illuminate the role that well-poisoning accusations played in this dynamic.

The first letter sent to Strasbourg on the issue of well-poisoning accusations was written by officials from the city of Cologne on 10 August 1348. Rumors about the conviction of alleged poisoners in Strasbourg reached Cologne's administrators, and they wished to verify them and receive more information on this issue:

> *Dear friends, we have understood from a certain report that in your city six people were condemned to die and were burnt due to acts of poisoning which they were said to commit. These people, as we have heard from some of your fellow citizens who are present here, were employed by the Jews in this matter, [and] infected with poisonous things springs and wells and other [resources] necessary for human life.*[78]

This letter shows again how quickly well-poisoning accusations spread in 1348. It was written on the very day when the officials of Savoy opened an investigation against the Jews, but rumors about the alleged plot had already reached Cologne, more than 300 miles to the north![79] The most likely scenario which explains such a speedy transmission of the accusation assumes that the allegations began to circulate even before officials acknowledged them. We have seen that well-poisoning accusations appeared in Savoy in

[78] "Amici predilecti, intelleximus ex relatione quorundam, quod in civitate vestra sex persone propter actus venenificus, quos exercuisse dicuntur, ad mortem condempnate et conbuste. Que persone, sicut ex manifestacione aliquorum vestrorum concivium pud nos existentium audivimus, ex parte judeorum ad hoc conducte fonts et puteos et alia humane nature necessaria infecerunt rebus venenosis." - UB Strassburg, 5:162, no. 173.

[79] Nordmann,"Documents," 71. Needless to say, the plague did not spread as quickly: Benedictow, *The Black Death,* 185-202; Andenmatten and Morerod, "La peste à Lausanne," 24-27.

early June, but were quickly rejected by the council of Chambéry.[80] In the two months required for the authorities there to change their minds on this subject, the rumors had already reached Strasbourg and caused persecution of alleged poisoners. Moreover, administrators in Cologne quickly heard about this event, and began to look into the rumors, even before the Jews of northern Savoy were investigated. The content of the rumors that reached Strasbourg and Cologne also fits well with this scenario. The six people executed at Strasbourg for poisoning were not Jews, and the letter does not indicate that any Jews were suspects at this point. It is possible that the rumors first reached Strasbourg in their early version, in which the Jews did not play a major role. Yet already in August it was suggested that the Jews paid the poisoners, and were actually the driving force behind the conspiracy. And so, this letter probably represents the transference of the accusations from marginalized Christians to Jews, which naturally happened in Strasbourg later than in Savoy.[81]

Despite the fact that some form of well-poisoning allegations was known in Strasbourg from the beginning of August 1348, local Jews were only executed around 10 February, 1349, that is six months later. Graus claims that this long gap between the first appearance of the allegation and the execution of the Jews is an indication that the accusations were not the main cause of the persecution. The rumors, he states, did not spark an immediate anti-Jewish incident, and until the authorities decided to act against the Jews due to their own interests, they were safe. This argument can surely be applied to Strasbourg, but also to several other locations, and Graus suggests that it is generally true.[82] However, it assumes that officials simply disregarded the allegations until it was politically suitable for them to

[80] Chambéry, Archives départementales de Savoie, Trésor des chartes, MS SA 15, no. 28.
[81] For the transference of the accusations from Christians to Jews, see above: Ch. 4, pp. 290-305.
[82] Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde*, 333-334.

act, or until public unrest forced them to do so. Yet in Strasbourg local administrators opened an extensive investigation into the charges before any social unrest threatened their rule.[83]

In 1348, the council in Strasbourg was headed by an *ammannmeister*,[84] a representative of the City's burghers, and the role was held at the time by a man named Peter Swarber. Two other men, Gosse Sturm and Conrad or Cuntze of Winterthur, held the position of *stettmeister*, an administrative role subjected to the *ammannmeister*. Under these three men acted the city council, which was composed of representatives of different guilds, and of the low and high nobility, most prominently the Zorn and Müllenheim families. This structure was relatively new, and resulted from a revolt that took place in 1332. This revolt increased the power of the artisans and the low nobility over the old noble families, which were of course reluctant to accept the change. This political tension was, as we will see, a predominant factor in determining the fate of local Jews. But in the last months of 1348, the rule of Peter Swarber and his peers was still stable.[85]

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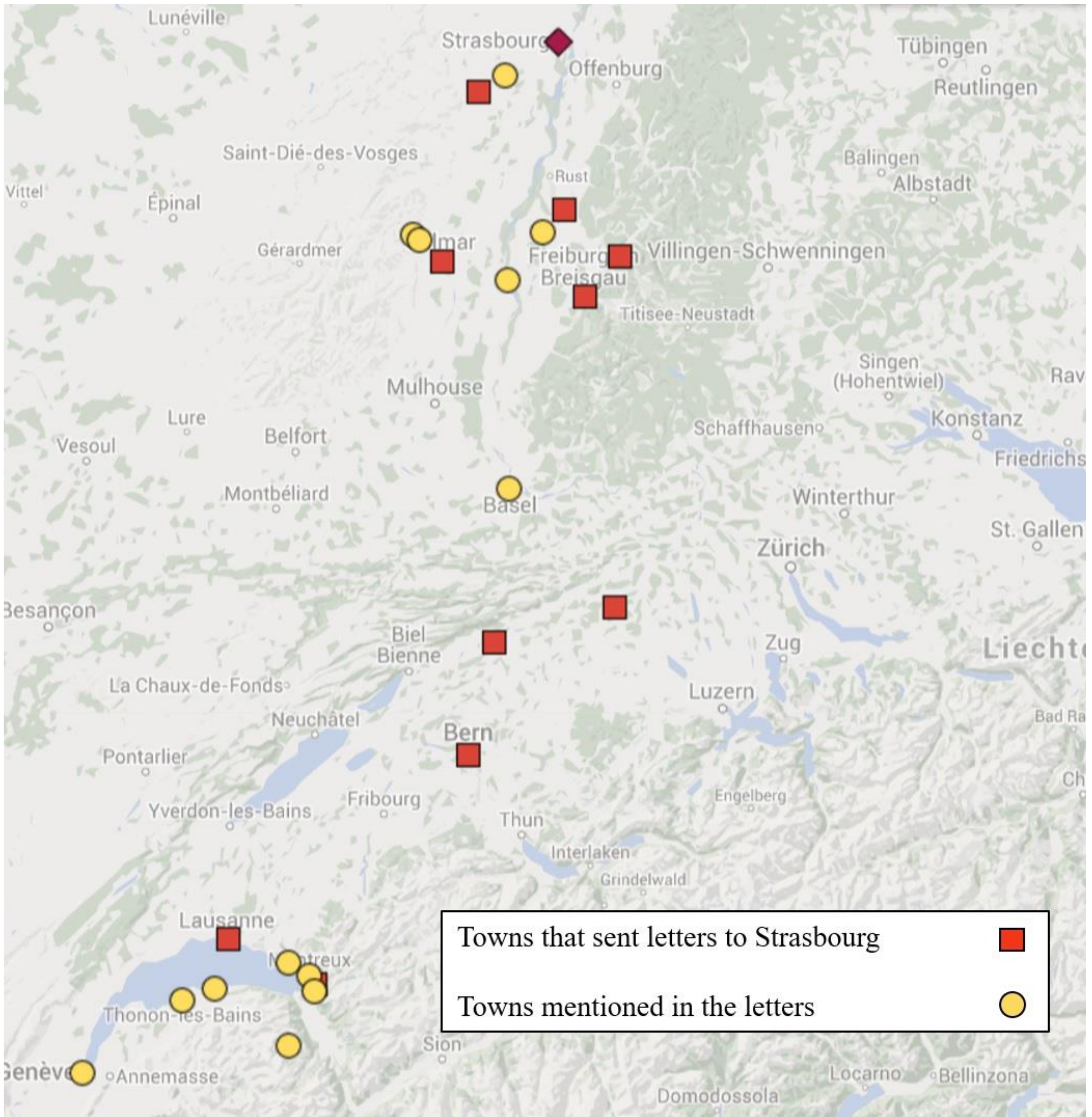
[83] It is hard to say when exactly the unrest around the protection of the Jews began, yet both major chroniclers which report about it agrees that it was sometime in the beginning of 1349: Fritsche Closener, *Chronik,* 126-127; Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 266. The first letter which was clearly a response to an inqury from Strasbourg was written on 15 November 1348: UB Strassburg, 5:164-165, no. 179.

[84] Also known as Ammäister or Ammestre.

[85] Fritsche Closener, *Chronik,* 126-127; Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 369-374; Jäckel, "Judenmord-Geißler-Pest," 165-166, 171; Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 63-65; Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 176-177.

Information received in Strasbourg about the plot before February 1349



It took about two months before the authorities in Strasbourg decided that well-poisoning rumors, which appeared there in August, required serious investigation. It seems that the *Stettmeister* Conrad of Winterthur was put in charge of this inquiry.[86] Around November he sent letters to some of the cities of the western Alps in an attempt to discover more about the alleged plot. On 15 November the officials of Lausanne, north of Lake Léman, sent him a response, which included the confession of a Jew named Bona Dies (Yom Tov). The confession itself does not survive, but one can assume that the officials meant to report that Yom Tov was accused of poisoning. Indeed, they stated that “in the lordship of the Count of Savoy many Jews, and Christians as well, have confessed to the same appalling crime”.[87] The nature of this crime is made very clear in a response sent from Bern to Strasbourg around the same time. The letter states that the authorities in Strasbourg wrote specifically to find out whether the Jews were involved in poisoning. The officials of Bern said nothing about the Jews in their city, but reported about information they received from the town of Solothurn, where Jews had already been persecuted. One victim was questioned, and stated that two Jews poisoned wells around Solothurn and elsewhere. Another suggested that the plot was much more extensive, and said that “he knew that all the Jews throughout the land have known about the poison.”[88] A few weeks later, Burkart of Münsingen, a lord from Solothurn, confirmed that the Jews had indeed been convicted of poisoning there.

[86] Most letters were addressed to the “master and council”, i.e. to the leadership of Strasbourg in general. Yet, two letters were addressed to Conrad of Winterthur specifically, which may indicate that he was the author of the queries sent from Strasbourg to other towns: UB Strassburg, 5:164-165, no. 179, 178-179, no. 190.

[87] UB Strassburg, 5:164-165, no. 179. Translated in: Horrox, *The Black Death*, 211.

[88] “Alz ir úns geschriben hant von der juden wegen, ob wir út fúrer von inen vernomen bettin umbe ir gifft”, “daz Kôppli der jude und Kúrsenner der jude gifft leiten in den brunnen ze Solottern und daz och si andern emphelin gift anderswa in brunnen ze legende”, “wissent daz alle juden in allen landen umbe die gifft wissen.” - UB Strassburg, 5:165, no. 180.

Moreover, he insisted that the plot was an extensive Jewish attempt to destroy Christianity.[89] The authorities in Zofingen reported on 23 December about an experiment which they had performed: they took poison that they had found in the houses of local Jews, and gave it to a dog, a pig and a chicken. The animals all quickly died, and thus four local Jews were tortured, and others arrested.[90] Heinrich of Diessenhofen reports that the poison was found in the house of a Jew named Tröstli, and that only three Jews were tortured. The others, he claims were (temporarily) protected by Duke Albert of Austria, yet these details do not appear in the letter sent to Strasbourg.[91] Around the same date the castellan of Chillon sent to Strasbourg his detailed record of the investigation there and in Châtel, which contained plenty of additional "evidence" against the Jews. And so, by the end of 1348, Conrad of Winterthur and the others officials in Strasbourg held several official documents which claimed decisively that the Jews of the western Alps were engaged in a mass well-poisoning plot.

Moreover, it seems that the officials in Strasbourg received more than documents. In 19 December another letter was sent from Cologne, again asking for additional information about the plot. The administrators there complained that so many contradicting rumors about the issue were circulating in their city that they could not find out the truth. They had reason

[89] "si die gift getragen hant und etwe mengen brunnen vergift hant" - UB Strassburg, 5:167, no. 184. The letter does not mention that it was sent from Solothurn, but Burkart of Münsingen was an official there: M.G.H., Leges, Constitutiones et acta publica imperatorum et regum, 8:478-479, no. 442. Heinricus of Diessenhoven also report that Solothurn was one of the first places in the Empire in which mass persecution of Jews occurred: Heinricus de Diessenhoven, *Chronicon,* 68-69; Schneider, "Der Tag von Benfeld," 263-265.

[90] "Doch enbieten wir úch, daz wir die gift funden hant hinder únsern juden in iren schlossen. Wir lassen úch öch wissen, daz wir die gift versücht han an hunden, an schweinen und an hůnren, also daz si von der gift ellú tot sint, und enbieten úch öch, daz wir drie juden geredert hant und ein wip […] andern juden, die wir noch han, daz wir die gehalten unz" - UB Strassburg, 5:166, no. 182.

[91] "Sed in oppido Zovingen supradicto repertum fuit venenum in domo Iudei dicti Trösteli quod consules civitatis ibidem inquirentes reperierunt, et per experienciam probant esse fore toxicum, propter quod tunc duo Iudei et una Iudea fuerunt rotis inserti, alii vero servati ad mandatum domini Alberti ducis Austrie, qui eos defendi mandavit." - Heinricus de Diessenhoven, *Chronicon,* 69.

to believe that the officials of Strasbourg would be able to help: "[one of Cologne's officials]" understood that the councilors of the city of Bern in Oitlant [Üechtland] sent over to you [Strasbourg] a certain Jew whom they captured, so he would inform you about the contamination and the spreading of the poison."[92] It is impossible to tell who this unfortunate witness was, and what exactly he told the investigators in Strasbourg. Yet, the fact that the councilors of Bern, who believed that the plot was real, decided to send him suggests that he indeed corroborated the narrative presented in the letters mentioned above.[93]

Towards the end of 1348 other towns in Alsace started to gather evidence against Jews and conduct investigations against individuals. A letter sent from Colmar to Strasbourg on 29 December reports about such inquiries. A Jew named Heggman confessed to receiving poison and a letter from a Rabbi Jacob. The letter instructed him to poison a well in Colmar, and so he did. He also convinced a Jewish woman named Belin to poison wells in the nearby towns of Kayserberg and Ammerschwihr, and was in some contact with Jews in Endingen am Kaiserstuhl.[94] The mention of the infamous Rabbi Jacob may indicate that the officials of Colmar received some of their information from Chillon, maybe through Bern.[95] In any case, the letter insists that the plot was not limited to the Western Alps, but included Jews from towns near Strasbourg, who had already performed acts of poisoning. A letter from

[92] "Henricus conmendator domus Coloniensis […] intellexerit, quod consules opidi de Berne in Oitlant quondam judeum captivum transmiserint vobis ad informandum vos de intoxitacione et venenosa sparsione" - UB Strassburg, 5:165, no. 181.

[93] Conrad Justinger, *Berner-Chronik*, 111; UB Strassburg, 5:168; UB Strassburg, 5:165, nos. 180-181; Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 264-265.

[94] "im meister Jacob de senger. Ein jude bi úch gesessen, vor etwie langem zit santi einen brief und etwievil vergift und gebutti im an dem brief, daz er die gift leiti in die burnen ze Colmer; und daz er die gift leiti wol vor vier wochen in einen burnen […] und daz er siner mů̊men vro Belin einer Júdinne gelopt zehen pfunt ze gebend, daz si die gift leiti öch in die burnen; und daz si die gift leti in den nehsten burnen bi Amerswiler öch wol vor vier wochen." - UB Strassburg, 5:166-167, no. 183.

[95] UB Strassburg, 5:167-170. Bern was indeed very active in spreading the accusations: UB Strassburg, 5:165, nos. 180-181; Conrad Justinger, *Berner-Chronik*, 111; Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 264-265; GJ 2:75-76.

Obernai (Oberehnheim) reported that five Jews were arrested and tortured there, until they confessed to poisoning a well in the nearby village of Innenheim. They also said that they were sent to commit this crime by two rich Jews, Jêkelin and Aharam, who came to Alsace from Speyer.[96] Officials from Kenzingen wrote about the investigation against local Jews, who were said to have poisoned all the wells there. A man named Jacob reported that the Jews kidnaped two Christian boys, presumably for ritual murder purposes. Another suspect, Abraham, also mentioned the kidnapping, but focused his testimony on the poisoning plot. He confessed to infecting several local water sources, including the moat of the nearby castle of Keppenbach. He even mentioned that the poison killed the fish and the frogs that lived in the moat, as evidence for its effectiveness. More importantly, Abraham listed ten other people who were allegedly involved in the plot, and included the names of three Jews from Strasbourg: Sůzekint, Abraham, and a rich man called Jacob.[97] This was the first time that the accusations targeted particular Jewish inhabitants of Strasbourg, one of them of a high social status. This kind of information was probably one of the factors which led the authorities there to act against local Jews.[98]

The most detailed document that reached Strasbourg from the nearby towns of Alsace

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[96] "wir unserre juden fúnfe húte uf disen mentag gekestiget und getúmet hant von dirre vergift wêgen, und hant die verjehen, daz sú unserre burnen zů Ehenheim sibene vergift hant; und het der alteste under in verjehen, daz die vergift der riche Jêkelin und Aharam die juden, die hie gesêszen sint, har us gein Ehenheim hant gesant und daz sú des úberein kament zů Spyre, es si wol ein halp jar oder uf die masse." UB Strassburg, 5:176-177, no. 187.

[97] "Dis hant die juden verjehen zu Kentzingen, daz si hant vergift alle die brunnen, die zu Kenzingen sint […] So het Jacob sunderlichen verjehen, daz er zwei cristanú kint gescehet habe, eins zu Mûnchen und eins zû Tûwingen. So hett Abraham ein kint verderbet alt von eim jare zû Strasburg, wart geköffet umb zehen pfunt, und wa si mochtent komen zû kumpost, den hant sú och vergiftet und hant win in der von Keppenbach trotten, die her Růdolf Schafners waz, och beschissen und och die trottbette beschissen. Und hant och den graben beschissen, daz ist schon worden an fischen und an frôschen, die alle töt sint. […] und nanten dise mit namen, daz sú daz hiessint die tûrsten juden, die zû Strasburg weren, und nanten dise mit namen, zem ersten Jacob den richen und Sůzekint und Abraham juden von Strasburg." - UB Strassburg, 5:177, no. 188.

[98] I do not analyze here a letter sent from Breisach am Rhein to Strasbourg, although the UB Strassburg states that it was written at the end of 1349: UB Strassburg, 5:177-178, no. 189. In fact, as others have noted, this letter discusses well-poisoning by Jewish converts, and it is much more likely that it was written in summer 1349: Schneider, "Der Tag von Benfeld," 272; GJ 2:746.

was a small booklet sent from Freiburg im Breisgau. It included a record of the investigation of the Jews there, as well as of one Jew arrested in the town of Waldkirch. This man, Vivelin, confessed to poisoning several water sources, mostly wells, and said that he was assisted by two other Jews, Jacob and Gotleib. The latter was eventually arrested and investigated in Freiburg, and left a long confession. The record from Waldkirch was originally a separate document from the booklet created at Freiburg, and was attached to it later.[99] This indicates that these two towns were in continuous communication about the issue of well poisoning before the booklet documenting their findings was sent to Strasbourg. It seems that first several Jews, including Gotleib, were arrested and investigated in Freiburg, and the information about this investigation reached Waldkirch. Then, Vivelin was arrested, and his confession was sent back to Freiburg, where it was added to the existing booklet containing the confessions of local Jews, and sent to Strasbourg.[100] This indicates that officials of different towns in Alsace worked together to gather evidence against the Jews, and to create official documents containing information about the plot.[101]

Unlike the record from Waldkirch, which contains mainly a list of alleged suspects and infested water sources, the one from Freiburg is rich in detail. It contains the confessions of four local Jews: Meiger Nasse; Gotlieb, the Jew mentioned in the document from Waldkirch;

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[99] AVS III 174/3, no. 28. The part describing the investigation in Waldkirch was clearly created separately: it is written by a different hand, on a smaller piece of paper, and inserted in a way that split the record from Freiburg mid-sentence. In UB Strassburg, 5:174-176, no. 186, the document from Waldkirch is printed at the end, but in fact it is attached in the middle.

[100] We have seen that the castellan of Chillon received such a record from the officials of Châtel, and that those of Bern received information from the authorities of Solothurn. However, only in the document from Freiburg is it possible to see two separate records physically joined together, and conclude how they were created. UB Strassburg, 5:165, no. 180, 167-174, no. 185. The document from Chillon is lost, as we have seen. The letter from Bern, obviously created by a single hand, is preserved in AVS III 174/3, no. 9.

[101] In many of these documents one can find some mark of the original official seal. Particularly good examples are: AVS III 174/3, no. 6 (Letter from Brukart from Münsingen, UB Strassburg, 5:167, no. 184); AVS III 174/3, no. 12 (a letter from Obernai, UB Strassburg, 5:176-177, no. 187); AVS III 174/3, no. 13 (a letter from Kenzingen, UB Strassburg, 5:177, no. 188); AVS III 174/3, no. 27 (a letter from Lausanne, UB Strassburg, 5:164-165, no. 179).

Jekeli Jolieb; and Liebkint. Meiger Nasse claimed that the Jews of Basel, Strasbourg, Freiburg and Breisach am Rhien knew about the plot, and those of Breisach indeed poisoned wells in their town.[102] Gotlieb confessed under torture to poisoning a well at Waldkirch, as Vivelin stated, but when he was asked what the origin of the poison was he told exceptional stories. Allegedly, a Jew called Anshelme of Veringen had brought the poison from Jerusalem, and reached Freiburg and Waldkirch after he passed on his way through Strasbourg. The poison was created in a way that made it safe for Jews to drink, but lethal for Christians. Later, Gotlieb changed his mind and said that the poison was brought to Freiburg by a woman named Guthild, or sent to Strasbourg by the Jews of Avignon.[103] Jekeli Jolieb presented a much more organized confession, naming eight Jews from different locations who were allegedly involved in the plot. In particular, he emphasized the role of a Jew from Strasbourg called Swendewin, who supposedly brought poison to Freiburg and bribed four local Jews to apply it. Originally, he said, the poison came from Basel, and was spread in Freiburg, Breisach and Endingen. All the Jews in these locations, and also in Strasbourg, knew about the plot, which was organized in advance.[104] Liebkint said only that

[102] "Er het öch geseit, das die juden ze Strasburg, ze Basel, ze Brisach, und ze Friburg alle wol wissen umbe die gift und die juden ze Brisach den berg und die stat behebt wǒlten han öch das er da bi were, do die brunnen ze Brisach vergift wurden" - UB Strassburg, 5:174-175, no. 186. Breisach and Basel indeed also launched investigations against their Jews, but it probably happened only later: UB Strassburg, 5:177-178, no. 189, 196-197, no. 209, 198-199, no. 212; Hermann Hoffmann, "Die Würzburger Judenverfolgung von 1349," *Mainfränkisches Jahrbuch für Geschichte und Kunst* 5 (1953), 99, no. 2; Schneider, "Der Tag von Benfeld, " 272.

[103] "Gotlieb der juden verjehen het an alle marter, das er einen brunnen ze Waltkilch vergift hab […] das ein jude, Anshelme von Veringen, das úber mer von Jerusalem keme gen Strasburg und öch gen Friburg. […] Do seit ime Anshelme, das er die gift úber mer har brachte hêt […] und das dúselbe gift mit solichen zoverlisten zůbracht were, wa man sú in einen brunnen leit, wer dennen des wassers trúnke an juden, den sǒlte es nút schaden, [wer es aber trúnke an christen] der můste davon sterben […] das fro Gůthilt dú judinne úber mer fůre und das si ein landen vol gift mit ir gen Friburg brechte […] das den juden gen Strasburg ein brief von den juden Aviun gesendet wurde, zem ersten, ob sú der gift herus wǒlte." - UB Strassburg, 5:175.

[104] "Jekeli Jolieb der jude von Friburg verjehen het […] Do ze jungste wart, do kam eine jude von Strasburg, der heisset Swendewin. Mit dem kamen wir úberin, das er den ursprung vergift sǒlte, und gaben im darumbe 26 guldin; die guldin gab Manne, Jekeli von Kestenholtz, Meiger Friburg und Leblange […] das dú gift zem ersten von Basel her ab kême […] das si alle die brunnen, die swischan Friburg, Brisach und Endingen sigen, vergift haben […] das alle die juden ze Strasburg, ze Basel, ze Brisach und ze Friburg wol heir umbe wissen" - UB Strassburg, 5:175-176.

all the Jews were involved in the plot, but interestingly, stated that the conspiracy was a Jewish revenge for the Armleder persecution, which had happened a decade earlier.[105] These four confessions, documented in the Freiburg booklet, present very different details regarding the origin of the poison and the people involved. Still, they all agree that the plot was extensive, and that local Jews, including from Strasbourg, played an important role in it.

And so, an influx of information about the well-poisoning conspiracy reached Strasbourg between November 1348 and January 1349. It included official documents, confessions, and perhaps even live witnesses and physical evidence, all stating that the plot was a reality, and some claiming that local Jews were involved. The alleged plot encircled a vast area, from Châtel in the south to Strasbourg in the north, some 160 miles away. As the letter sent from Cologne on December reveals, unsubstantiated popular rumors circulated independently of the official documents.[106] So much information regarding a terrifying crime such as well poisoning could hardly be concealed or ignored. According to Fritsche Closener, a chronicler who lived in Strasbourg, many in the city resented the protected legal status of the Jews and their engagement in interest loans. When they heard the rumors about the plot, they were more than willing to believe them, and demanded that the Jews be executed.[107] The officials rejected this demand at this point, but had to open an investigation into the

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[105] "Liebkint het verjehen, das alle juden geworben haben nach der gift. Do wart er gefreget, war umbe sú das teiten. Do seit er nút wan umbe das, das die christen so mennigen juden verdarbten, do kúnig Arnleder was." - UB Strassburg, 5:176; Breuer, "The 'Black Death' and Antisemitism," 140-141. For the Armleder persecution: Cluse, "Blut ist im Schuh," 378-383; Rubin, *Gentile Tales,* 55-57; Müller, "*Ereẓ gererah,*" 254-256.

[106] UB Strassburg, 5:165, no. 181.

[107] "Der zu viel ein gezig uf die Juden, daz sů soltent die bürnen un die waszer han vergiftet. Des murmelte daz volk gemeinliche, un sprochent man solt sů verburnen." - Fritsche Closener, *Chronik,* 127. Jakob Twinger von Königshofen, *Chronik,* 2:759-764 also writes about the events in Strasbourg, but he created his chronicle at the beginning of the fifteenth century, and based it on the two available contemporary chronicles: that of Fritsche Closener and that of Mathias von Nuwenburg: Schneider, "Der Tag von Benfeld," 257. Thus, I cite here only the earlier accounts.

matter. A few suspects were arrested and broken at the wheel, but revealed nothing.[108] Mathias of Nuwenburg, who was also well informed about the events in Strasbourg, suggests that it was not a coincidence that the investigation failed to discover anything: "In order to restrain the protest, several Jews were placed on the wheel in Strasbourg, and immediately killed, so they would not be able to say anything about the [other] living suspects. As a result, a great suspicion arose against the governors."[109] In other words, the investigation was a deception intended to appease popular clamor, rather than to find additional proof that the Jews were guilty. It is unclear if this was indeed the case, but as we will see, Mathias was right to emphasize the popular resentment against the *ammannmeister* and his peers. Yet, despite the unrest surrounding the subject, the officials in Strasbourg continued at this point to protect local Jews.[110]

Ammannmeister Peter Swarber and the other officials of Strasbourg soon discovered that protecting the Jews would require more than a fictitious inquiry, as they were dealing with much more than popular rage. They quickly found themselves facing a formidable coalition of political forces, both external and internal, determined to compel the killing of the Jews. One of the major leaders of this coalition was the bishop of Strasbourg, Berthold II. He had a history of rivalry with the council, and may have been a supporter of anti-Jewish persecution in areas where he held political sway, most notably in Solothurn.[111] When it

[108] "Daruf fieng man ir etwie vil, un kesteget sů sere mit dumende, der verjohent drie weis viere andere sachen, der sů schuldig worent, darumbe man sů radebrehte. Doch verjohent sů nie, daz sů an der vergift schuldig werent." Fritsche Closener, *Chronik,* 127.

[109] "Aliqui [Iudei] autem Argentine, ut sedaretur clamor, sunt positi super rotis statimque necati, ne super reos viventes quid dicere possent; ex quo contra maiores maior suspicion est suborta." - Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 267.

[110] Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 265-267; Fritsche Closener, *Chronik,* 127-128; Jäckel, "Judenmord-Geißler-Pest," 170-171; Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 62-63; Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 366; Schneider, "Der Tag von Benfeld,“ 258-259.

[111] Schneider, "Der Tag von Benfeld," 261-265; Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 371.

came to this issue, the bishop found allies in many of the leaders of the imperial towns of Alsace. At some point in January he convened a meeting of local leaders in the town of Benfeld, not far from Strasbourg, to discuss the alleged plot and decide the fate of the Jews. Most of the lords of Alsace, and the bishop himself, thought that the Jews were guilty, and should be executed, or at least expelled.[112] The fact that they took this approach is not at all trivial. A decade earlier Bishop Berthold was the one to organize the military action of municipal leaders against the mobs of Armleder, and the protection of local Jews.[113] To explain this shift, several historians pointed out that the lords of Alsace stood to gain from the execution of the Jews since many of them owed large amounts to Jewish creditors. Indeed, while official persecution against the Jews could produce economic benefit, a popular pogrom against them was expected to produce destruction and civil unrest.[114] Moreover, the political situation had changed. King Karl IV, who was elected by some of the German princes in 1346, was in a continuous struggle with the contending kings from the Wittelsbach party. In his attempt to raise money for his wars, he decided to exercise his right to tax the Jews in the Imperial towns of Alsace. Municipal leaders were required to collect the tax for the king, and at the same time lost some of the revenues that they usually obtained from the Jews. Thus, they turned against the Jews in an action which both proved they were unobligated to obey the king's mandate and allowed them to take over Jewish property. The violence was not

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[112] Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 265-266; Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Gesta Betholdi Episcopi Argentinensis*, 535; Jäckel, "Judenmord-Geißler-Pest," 171; Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 63; Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 180-181; Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 371-372; Schneider, "Der Tag von Benfeld," 258-259; Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," 17-18; GJ 2:802.

[113] Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 350-360; Müller, "*Ereẓ gererah,*" 255; Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 177-178.

[114] Breuer, "The 'Black Death' and Antisemitism," 144-146; Schneider, "Der Tag von Benfeld," 261-262; Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 371; Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," 17-19.

major, but it seems that many of the local leaders changed their attitude towards the Jews.[115] And so, when the opportunity presented itself in 1349, they were inclined to execute the Jews and take over their property rather than protect them. However, we have seen that much information accusing the Jews of well-poisoning circulated around the towns of Alsace in the months preceding the Benfeld meeting.[116] It is reasonable that some lords simply believed that the Jews were guilty, regardless of the political situation.

The representatives of Strasbourg opposed the bishop and the other lords in Benfeld, and they were not alone. The city of Basel, which was in an alliance with Strasbourg, also defended its Jews, and probably supported this position at the meeting.[117] Freiburg was also a member of the same alliance, and seems to have protected its Jews originally, yet by the time of the meeting in Benfeld the authorities there had probably already turned against them.[118] In any case, before the meeting in Benfeld they, and officials in other in towns in Alsace as well, refrained from any major action against the Jews.[119] However, the anti-Jewish party seemed to have a winning argument against those who claimed that no well-poisoning took place: "Yet when the representatives of Strasbourg said that they do not know of anything malicious about their Jews, they [the opposition] asked them why they removed vessels from their wells. And indeed, everyone protested against them [the protectors of the

[115] Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 361-363; Hlaváček, "The Habsburgs," 551-553; Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 68-71.

[116] UB Strassburg, 165-167, nos. 181, 183; 174-177, nos. 186-188.

[117] Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 265; Schneider, "Der Tag von Benfeld," 258; Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 178.

[118] UB Strassburg, 5:174-176, no. 186. For more about the fate of the Jews of Freiburg: Heinrich Schreiber, ed., *Urkundenbuch der Stadt Freiburg im Breisgau* (Freiburg: Herder, 1828), 1:385-391, nos. 196-201; GJ 2:255-256.

[119] Schneider, "Der Tag von Benfeld," 259-261; Cluse, "Zur Chronologie der Verfolgungen," 299-231. Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 161-162 assumes that the executions of Jews quickly followed the dates in which investigations against them commenced, but this was not always the case.

Jews]."[120] Indeed, the officials of Strasbourg were not strong enough politically to force their position regarding the Jews in Benfeld, and mass executions soon followed throughout Alsace.[121]

For the question of the importance of well-poisoning accusations in driving the events of 1348-1349, we must pay a special attention to the argument of the anti-Jewish party at Benfeld. From the fact that their claim that the authorities in Strasbourg prevented access to public wells remained unanswered (according to Mathias of Nuwenburg), one can conclude that they were right. And so, we must wonder, if the officials of Strasbourg rejected the accusations, why did they limit the access to urban water sources? It is possible that they feared that the Black Death was indeed transmitted by water, but thought that the wells were not maliciously poisoned. A more likely explanation is that considering the extensive information they received about the plot, they were not completely sure that the Jews were innocent. Despite Mathias' statement that the investigation was but a fraud intended to appease public opinion, the authorities in Strasbourg truly tried to come to an informed decision about the matter.[122] But if this was the case, it is unclear why they took such effort to protect the Jews facing popular rage as well as external political pressure. One good reason may have been their traditional obligation to protect the Jews. As we have seen, the right to exercise power over the Jews was a sign of authority in the Empire, as it had been elsewhere, and the leaders of Strasbourg were unwilling to waver on such a matter.[123] Moreover,

[120] "Nunciis autem Argentinensibus dicentibus se nil mali scire de Iudeis suis, quesitum est ab eis, cur urne de eorum putis sint sublate. Omnis enim populus clamabat contra eos." - Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 265.

[121] Schneider, "Der Tag von Benfeld," 259-261; Cluse, "Zur Chronologie der Verfolgungen," 231; Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 371-373.

[122] Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 267.

[123] Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 361-363; Jäckel, "Judenmord-Geißler-Pest," 166-167; Breuer, "The 'Black Death' and Antisemitism," 144-147; Müller, "*Ereẓ gererah,*" 246, 256-257;

protecting the Jews came with the right to tax them, and the community in Strasbourg was particularly wealthy.[124] Peter Swarber and his peers may have preferred a steady income over one act of plundering, especially since some of the money was likely to end up in private hands.[125] Another factor which probably played a part in the decision to protect the Jews was the fact that they were considered to be under the official protection of the king. At the end of 1348 Karl IV reiterated that he was the patron of the Jews of Strasbourg.[126] He was eventually proven to be far from enthusiastic in protecting them, and even pardoned the city of Strasbourg for the crime of executing them unlawfully, as he did in other cases. But at the beginning of 1349 this was still in the future, and it was impossible to predict the royal response to a mass execution of a whole Jewish community.[127] In addition to these political and economic factors, it is possible that some of the officials of Strasbourg were simply horrified by the idea of a massacre of inocent people, as other Christians were.[128]

But the most important reasons for the decision of the authorities in Strasbourg to protect the Jews probably stemmed from internal municipal tensions and politics. A letter sent from Cologne to Strasbourg on 12 January reveals much about these issues. First, it

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Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 68-76. For a general model: Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 48-51, 56, 66-68, 243.

[124] Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 129-131; Jäckel, "Judenmord-Geißler-Pest," 166-167; Breuer, "The 'Black Death' and Antisemitism," 146-149.

[125] Fritsche Closener, *Chronik,* 104, 130; UB Strassburg, 5:198, no. 211; Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 378; Jäckel, "Judenmord-Geißler-Pest," 172.

[126] Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 63; Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 362-363; Jäckel, "Judenmord-Geißler-Pest," 167; Müller, "*Ereẓ gererah,*" 246, 256-257.

[127] UB Strassburg, 5:197-198, no. 110; 207, no. 217; Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 68-76, Jäckel, "Judenmord-Geißler-Pest," 170-171; Müller, "*Ereẓ gererah,*" 257; Breuer, "The 'Black Death' and Antisemitism," 146-149; Schneider, "Der Tag von Benfeld," 268-271; Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 185.

[128] Conradus Megenbergensis, *Tractatus de mortalitate in Alamannia*, 866-867; Fritsche Closener, *Chronik,* 104; Henricus de Hervordia, *Liber de rebus memorabilioribus*, 280; Jean de Venette, *Continuationis Chronici Guillelmi de Nangiaco Pars Tertia*, 2 :213-214; Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, 1:396-398, nos. 372-374. Also see n. 27 above.

states that the rumors claiming that the Jews poisoned the wells resulted from fear of the Black Death. News about the mortality quickly reached the cities of Alsace and the Rhineland, and many blamed the Jews.[129] This connection, almost trivial from a modern perspective, is rarely mentioned explicitly in the early documents discussing the accusation in the Empire, as we have seen. This is a consequence of the fact that unlike the letter from Cologne, most of these documents were compiled after their writers were already convinced that poisoning indeed took place. Information about the plague was surely one of the reasons which brought them to this conclusion, but confessions of suspects or physical evidence were much more pertinent, and the writers focused on these. Yet the letter from Cologne shows that news about the plague was central in inflaming anti-Jewish sentiments. Second, this document mentions that the officials in Cologne were unsure whether a poisoning plot had taken place, and that the authorities in Strasbourg were unable to answer this question for them.[130] This supports the hypothesis that the *ammannmeister* and his peers were truly undecided on this issue around the time of the meeting in Benfeld, and simply refused to act before they were sure that the Jews were guilty. Most importantly, the letter warned the officials of Strasbourg that acknowledging the accusations would quickly lead to a civil disturbance:

> *If a massacre of the Jews were to be allowed in the major cities (something which we are determined to prevent in our city, if we can, as long as the Jews are found to be innocent of these or similar actions) it could lead to the sort of outrages and disturbances which*

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[129] "de tam subitanea et inprovisa mortalitate Christi fidelium […] diversi et varii contra judaismum et populum judaicum volant jam undique rumores" - UB Strassburg, 5:178-179, no. 190. Translated in Horrox, *The Black Death*, 219-220.

[130] "de quibus meram adhuc contra judeos nec apud vos nec alibi experiri potuimus voluntatem, sicut et vos, quemadmodum nobis noviter scripsistis, de hiis veritatem adhuc non habetis." - UB Strassburg, 5:179.

would whip up a popular revolt among the common people – and such revolts have in the past brought cities to misery and desolation.[131]

In short, the officials of Cologne cautioned the leaders of Strasbourg that accepting the public demand to execute the Jews would put their rule, and possibly their lives, in danger.

Peter Swarber and the other leaders of the council were probably well aware of the consequences of the accepting popular demands to act against the Jews even without the warnings from Cologne. Moreover, they knew that they faced not only the rage of the "common people", but an organized coalition of urban political forces. According Mathias of Nuwenburg, after the meeting in Benfeld:

The head of the council, Peter Swarber, and some other people of Strasbourg attempted to defend the Jews at this point, by saying to the people: 'if the bishop and the barons prevail in this matter, they will not rest until they prevail in other matters as well.' But popular clamor grew stronger nonetheless.[132]

To understand this argument, one must remember that the predominance of the lower nobility and the guilds, represented by the *ammannmeister*, in the municipal council was fairly new. Before 1332, the families of the high nobility controlled the council, and before them, in the thirteenth century, the local bishop.[133] Peter Swarber warned the people of Strasbourg that

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[131] "Et quia ex hujusmodi Judeorum strage, si in majoribus admittererur civitatibus, quemtamen in nostra civitate removere intendimus nostro posse, quamdiu ipsos repperimus talis et consimilis facti innoxios et immunes, plurima possent scandala et gravamina suboriri et posset per consequens communis populus per hoc assuescere ad faciendum concursus populares, per quos aliquibus civitatibus et opidis, in quibus heu tales concursus contigerunt, plures miserie et desolaciones sunt suborte" - UB Strassburg, 5:179; Horrox, *The Black Death*, 220.

[132] "Nitebatur autem Petrus Swarber magister scabinorum et aliqui alii Argentinenses adhuc defendere eos, dicentes populo: 'Si episcopus et barones in hoc eis prevaluerint, nisi et in aliis prevaleant, non quiescent.' Set nichilomnius invaluit vulgi clamor." - Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 266.

[133] Fritsche Closener, *Chronik,* 126-127; Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 369-374; Jäckel, "Judenmord-Geißler-Pest," 165-166, 171; Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 63-65; Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 176-177.

the old nobility and the bishop would use the popular unrest against the Jews to undo the revolution of 1332 and take over the council. As we have seen, Bishop Berthold was the one who organized the meeting in Benfeld, and apparently the high nobility of Strasbourg supported his position against the Jews. However, the *ammannmeister's* admonition was in vain.

On 8 February the bishop and nobles of Strasbourg met again to discuss the issue of the Jews, Mathias of Nuwenburg reports, but what they decided is unclear. Yet, the next morning a group of artisans, mostly butchers, gathered in front of Peter Swarber's house and demanded that some of the money that belonged to the Jews be distributed among the local craftsmen.[134] This demand may seem odd, since at this point only a few Jews had been arrested, and there is no reason to think that their property was confiscated. However, Fritsche Closener clarifies the matter by mentioning that many claimed that the *ammannmeister* and *stettmeister* must have been paid off by the Jews to protect them.[135] The artisans, who may have been instigated by the nobles and the bishop, wanted their share. The officials tried to appease the protesters, but they sounded a call for arms, and other craftsmen who felt underrepresented by the council responded. Peter Swarber was officially a representative of the guilds, but apparently in his alliance with the low nobility alienated some of the artisans, who resented his rule. They now demanded that he and the two *stettmeister* resign their positions, and certainly had the power to force them to do so. Peter Swarber escaped, and a new council was quickly established under *ammannmeister* Johann

[134] "dominica ante Valentini convenientibus episcopo et dominis Argentine in negocio Iudeorum, et crastino venientibus quibusdam carnificibus ad domum Petri predicti et petentibus aliquid dari mechanicis de pecunia Iudeorum" - Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 267.

[135] "die drie meister mustent han gut von den Juden genomen, daz sů sů alsus fristetent wider alle menegliches wille" - Fritsche Closener, *Chronik,* 128.

Betscholt, one of the rebellious butchers. The high nobility also regained a stronger position within the council, and the Jews were left defenseless.[136]

The members of the new council surely had little doubt as to what the fate of the local Jews should be. Even if they still did, another letter arrived from the neighboring town of Offenburg on the very day when they gained power, and reported that Jews there had confessed to poisoning wells.[137] And so, on 14 February, only a few days after the revolt, the Jews of Strasbourg were burnt in a wooden house in their local cemetery. Around 1500 people were murdered, in what was the greatest single episode of mass execution in 1349. Only a few adults who agreed to convert and a few children who were taken to be forcibly baptized were spared.[138] The authorities in Strasbourg allied with other towns to defend their right to take over the wealth of the Jews. The king eventually had to concede, and the property was distributed between local craftsmen and friars.[139] This was a quick and disastrous end to the attempt of former local officials to defend the Jews from well-poisoning accusations.

After analyzing the events that led to the execution of the Jews in Strasbourg according to the sources, we can now revisit the historiography on the role that well-poisoning accusations played in these developments. Overall, the historians who discuss the reasons for the persecution in Strasbourg tend to focus on political and economic factors, with some

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[136] Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 267-268; Fritsche Closener, *Chronik,* 127-130; Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 372-374; Jäckel, "Judenmord-Geißler-Pest," 167, 171-172; Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 62-64; GJ 2:802.

[137] UB Strassburg, 5:184-185, no. 196, written on 10 February.

[138] Fritsche Closener, *Chronik,* 104, 130; Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 268; Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 183-184, 249; Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 374-377; Jäckel, "Judenmord-Geißler-Pest," 172.

[139] UB Strassburg, 5:197-198, nos. 210-211; 207, no. 217; Fritsche Closener, *Chronik,* 104, 130; Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 378; Jäckel, "Judenmord-Geißler-Pest," 171-172; Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 184-186.

acknowledgment of religious tensions. Their writings present clearly the economic benefits which some of the parties in Strasbourg could gain from executing the Jews, and the political implication of supporting the execution or opposing it.[140] As we have seen, they are generally right: there is no doubt that these factors played an important part in triggering anti-Jewish sentiment in Strasbourg. At the same time, these historians underestimate the importance of well-poisoning accusations in causing the violence, and some of them even claim that they were merely an excuse. Allegedly, when deciding whether to defend the Jews or execute them, the relevant actors considered mostly, or even only, the economic or political benefits, and not the reliability of the charges.[141] This position can be partly explained by the fact that one primary source, the chronicle of Fritsche Closener, indeed presents the economic status of the Jews as the main reason for the hatred against them.[142] It seems that historians give precedence to this source over others due to the tendency of twentieth-century historians to prefer economic or political explanatory factors over cultural ones.[143] Yet, we have seen that most of the sources give little reason to assume that the people of Strasbourg did not truly believe the well-poisoning allegations at the time. The letter sent from Cologne on 12 January states that news about the plague indeed led many burghers to accept the claims made against the Jews.[144] A great influx of confessions and evidence supporting the existence of a plot

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[140] Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 364-378; Jäckel, "Judenmord-Geißler-Pest," 166-172; Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 174-186; Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 62-65; Breuer, "The 'Black Death' and Antisemitism," 146-149; Schneider, "Der Tag von Benfeld," 255-261; Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," 17-20, 25; Ritzmann "Judenmord als Folge des 'Schwarzen Todes'," 111-114, 120.

[141] Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 174-186, 333-334; Schneider, "Der Tag von Benfeld," 255-261; Ritzmann "Judenmord als Folge des 'Schwarzen Todes'," 111-112.

[142] Fritsche Closener, *Chronik,* 104, 127-128.

[143] An example of an interesting, and controversial, attempt to read against similar historiography can be found in: Jay Rubenstein, *Armies of Heaven: The First Crusade and the Quest for Apocalypse* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), xii-xiv.

[144] UB Strassburg, 5:178-179, no. 190.

reached Strasbourg from many of the towns of the western Alps and Alsace.[145] Faced with this information, which they themselves requested, the officials of Strasbourg had no choice but to open an investigation, even they were reluctant to do so. At the meeting in Benfeld, the wining argument against the authorities of Strasbourg focused on the fact that they prevented access to their own wells, i.e., accepted the idea of a plot de facto.[146] Indeed, none of the sources state that the officials of Strasbourg completely rejected the notion that Jews might have poisoned the wells (as did the authorities of Cologne, initially). It is likely that the *ammannmeister* was simply unwilling to act against the Jews, with all the economic and political implications that such action entailed, without completing his investigation. We can only guess what his final decision would have been if his enemies had failed to stir public opinion against him. Finally, the fact that they were indeed able to do so is the strongest evidence that well-poisoning accusations influenced the fate of the Jews in Strasbourg to a large extent. The artisans seem to have thought, or were made to think, that only bribery could explain the decision of the authorities to support the Jews despite what was already common knowledge: that they surely poisoned the wells.[147]

We can conclude that well-poisoning probably played an important part in triggering the persecution of the Jews in Strasbourg, and most likely in Alsace in general. This conclusion does not negate the existing historiography, which insists that political, economic and religious factors were also significant in determining their fate. Instead, it claims that many of the citizens of Strasbourg did not separate their belief that the charges were true from their will to gain from the killing of the Jews. Indeed, the very fact that well-poisoning

[145] UB Strassburg, 5:164-177, nos. 173, 179-188.

[146] Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 265-267.

[147] Fritsche Closener, *Chronik,* 127-128; Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 267-268.

rumors were believable was the reason that the political enemies of the Jews and the council considered utilizing them. The struggle around the fate of the Jews in Strasbourg soon lined up with existing class loyalties, economic interests and political positions. At the same time, most of the sources give little reason to think that the protectors of the Jews or their enemies disregarded the accusations without seriously considering them. Moreover, it seems that the bishop and the high nobility were able to use the rumors to convince a significant number of craftsmen to turn against the council, which supposedly represented the guilds. Many of these people probably saw the decision of the council to protect the Jews as another sign of the illegitimacy of its rule, exactly because they thought the Jews were guilty. And so, we note again that well-poisoning accusations indeed operated within political and economic circumstances, and at the same time conclude that they were a compelling, and even central, motive for the killing of the Jews.

Variations on a theme – Basel, Würzburg, Cologne and Regensburg

In no other city in the Empire is it possible to analyze the historical factors that led to the persecution as we have for Strasbourg, due to a lack of sources. Thus, it is unclear which of the characteristics of the events there can be viewed as a manifestation of general trends, and which as unique phenomena. For example, Graus suggests that, as in Strasbourg, artisans usually showed anti-Jewish tendencies, while Cohn insists that, like in Strasbourg, the nobility was the driving force behind the persecution. Haverkamp, however, claims that neither of these facts is generalizable, and that different classes led the persecution in different locations.[148] Thus, it is clear that even if we understand the events in Strasbourg,

[148] Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 175-184; 335-339, 360-361; Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," 17-20; Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 32-35, 61-68.

more information is needed in order to decide what lessons we should draw from them about the persecution of Jews in general. More specifically, the present section aims to determine if well-poisoning accusations played as important a role in causing the persecution of Jews in other locations as they did in Strasbourg. Yet, as we have noted, there are only a few cases in which this is possible, as the surviving primary sources are limited. Thus, we should focus on the few cases in which some information is available, and examine the possible scenarios.

Basel is located about halfway between Chillon and Strasbourg, that is in the middle of the area in which well-poisoning accusations became popular at the end of 1348. As we have seen, some of the Jews who were investigated in Freiburg claimed that the Jews of Basel were involved in the plot. One of them even stated that the poison originated in Basel, thus presenting it as the center of the conspiracy.[149] Yet, the initial response of the local council, consisting mainly of representatives of the local guilds and the nobility ("knights"), was to protect the Jews.[150] This decision, according to Mathias of Nuwenburg, led to some civil unrest:

> *The council members and mayors of Basel, Freiburg and Strasbourg insisted on defending the Jews. And actually, certain noble men from Basel were banned [from the city] for a long period for acting unjustly against the Jews. Thus, the people rushed carrying banners to the palace of the council. After they were deterred [from entering?] and the mayor asked them what they wanted, they answered that they would not leave unless the ban [against the said nobles] was be removed. It was transmitted to the council members, who would not agree to come out while they [the protesters]*

[149] "Jekeli Jolieb der jude von Friburg verjehen het […] das dú gift zem ersten von Basel her ab kême […] das alle die juden ze Strasburg, ze Basel, ze Brisach und ze Friburg wol heir umbe wissen" - UB Strassburg, 5:174-176, no. 186.

[150] Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 168-169; Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 51-52, 61-62.

were [there]. And the people added that they would not agree that any Jews should remain in this place [Basel] any longer. And [so] the council members and the people pledged that no Jew would reside in that place for two hundred years.[151]

Thus, it seems that as in Strasbourg, the mayor and council of Basel faced a coalition of anti-Jewish forces. Some local nobles, presumably not council members, acted against the Jews despite the official decision to defend them. "The people", probably referring to members of the lower classes, supported these nobles for their own reasons. We do not know the position of the bishop, a prominent political figure in Basel.[152] In any case, the protesters were powerful enough to force the council to agree to expel all local Jews.

The expulsion, however, never took place. In the first half of January, as described above, representatives of the towns of Alsace met in Benfeld to discuss the fate of the Jews. It is unclear if Basel, not officially part of this area, was represented. Still, we have seen that its major ally, Strasbourg, defended the Jews vigorously but was unable to prevent the decision to execute them en masse.[153] This decision seems to have also sealed the fate of the Jews of Basel, who apparently had not yet been forced to leave town. Soon after the meeting, on 16 or 17 January, the entire Jewish community of the town, some 600 Jews, was executed. Other than several young children, who were taken away to be baptized, all the Jews were

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[151] "consulibus Basiliensis, Friburgensis et Aregntinensis civitatum, maioribusque ad defensionem nitentibus Iudeorum, ac quibusdam eciam nobilibus Basilee pro quadam inuiria Iudeis illata ad longum tempus bannitis: ecce irruit populus cum baneriis ad palacium consulum. Quibus territis et querente magistro, quid vellent, responerunt se nolle abire nisi bannitis reversis. Pro quibus illico est transmissum, consulibus non audentibus egredi, quosque venerunt. Adiecitque populus se nolle, quod inibi amplius remanerent Iudei. Et iuratum est per consules et populum, quod in ducentis annis inibi nunquam residerent Iudei." - Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 265.

[152] Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 168-169.

[153] Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 265-266; Jäckel, "Judenmord-Geißler-Pest," 171; Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 63; Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 180-181; Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 371-372; Schneider, "Der Tag von Benfeld," 258-259; Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," 17-18.

enclosed in a wooden shed built for this purpose on an island in the Rhine, and burnt.[154] Clearly, based on the decision in Benfeld, the officials of Basel understood that many of the towns of the upper Rhine were about to execute their Jews and adopted a similar policy as an alternative to the planed expulsion.[155]

Officials in Basel faced anti-Jewish forces quite similar to those which challenged the authority of the council in Strasbourg, that is, members of the lower classes with the support of some of the nobility. As in Strasbourg, the officials first tried to calm the protest, but in contrast, when they understood that their rivals were determined, they decided to sacrifice the Jews to save their rule. But what role did well-poisoning accusations play in this decision? The chronicles state that the Jews of Basel, like those of other locations, were killed since they poisoned the wells, but add very little.[156] Yet, two letters, which were sent from Basel to Strasbourg a few months after the execution, suggest that well-poisoning accusations were indeed significant in these developments. The first letter was written by the office of Conrad der Munch of Landeskrone, the head of the council of Basel, and described the investigation against Jewish converts there. On 4 July all of the local converts of Basel were arrested, and four of them were tortured on the wheel. They said that converts poisoned all of the wells in Basel, and elsewhere, and described a network of converts that included at least ten other members. The group was allegedly organized by one brother Koppins of Bernau, and spread poison through the areas of Basel and Luzern. Interestingly, one Christian

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[154] Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 266; Heinricus de Diessenhoven, *Chronicon,* 70; Nikolaus Stulmann, *Chronik des Nikolaus Stulmann vom Jahre 1407*, 23-24; *Die grosseren Basler Annalen,* 5:21; Jakob Twinger von Königshofen, *Chronik,* 760; GJ 2:53-54.

[155] Schneider, "Der Tag von Benfeld," 258-261.

[156] Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 266; Heinricus de Diessenhoven, *Chronicon,* 70; Nikolaus Stulmann, *Chronik des Nikolaus Stulmann vom Jahre 1407*, 23-24; *Die grosseren Basler Annalen,* 5:21; Jakob Twinger von Königshofen, *Chronik,* 760.

was arrested with them, who said that he had received the poison from a beguine from Colmar.[157] The second letter, written by Conrad to the officials of Strasbourg on 18 July, adds information about the alleged crime of converts and Jews. It presents the plot of the converts, who were executed in the meantime, as a continuation of the crime committed by local Jews, clarifying that both groups were convicted for poisoning water sources, the air and foodstuffs. Moreover, the converts were allegedly able to convince a few Christian citizens of Basel to assist them.[158] The letter also reported about the persecution in the nearby village of Hasenburg (modern day Asuel), where three Jews were forced to confess that "all the Jews, whether they were converts or not […] knew about the poison".[159]

These two letters show that a second wave of persecution, clearly motivated by different mass-poisoning allegations, occurred in Basel and its surrounding areas in early July 1349. This wave, which was not unique to Basel, was aimed against Jewish converts, as well as other marginalized Christians, and some Jews who still survived. It may have been caused by the arrival of the plague in the area in May, which seems to have convinced many that despite the execution of the Jews, some poisoners still remained.[160] In any case, it is

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[157] "die getöftn juden allesament haben gevangen, sunt ir wissen, das wir nu an samstag an sant Ůlrichstag von vier getöftn juden richten und uf reder sasten, die öch offenlich vor gerichte verjahen und seiten, das si die brunnen ze unserre stat etlich vergift hettent […] Und seitent ir drie, daz in Bernhart der getöft jude was, Kůppins brůder, die gift gebe. […] Wir hatten öch kurtzlich ein cristenman uf ein rat gesetzet vor disen, der seit öch, wie er vil brunnen ime lande und etlichen brunnen in unser stat vergift hette und daz ime ein begine ze Colmer die gift gebe." - UB Strassburg, 5:196-197, no. 209.

[158] "so wir von den juden umhe das vergiften wissen und befunden haben, tůn wir úch ze wissende, das wir nu kurtzlich von etwie maugen getöftn juden gericht hant, der ein teil uf reder gesetzet und öch ein teil verbrennet sint, die bedi ungemartert und öch nach der marter offenlich verjahent und seitent, das si mit gift umbegangen werint. Etlich seitent, das si die gift in die bruunen geleit hettent. So seitent etlich, das si gift cristanen lúten in irú húser ze unserr stat in ir wasser und in ir heven geleit hettent. So seitent öch etlich, das si unsern burgern vergeben hettent mit wine, daz si den vergiftent, so si inen ze trinckende buttent." - UB Strassburg, 5:198-199, no. 212.

[159] "Wir hattent öch unser gůten botten von unsern rèten ze Hasenburg, do man von den juden richte und da verderbt wurden, die uns öch seiten, das der juden drie da verjehen hettent, das si die gift selber kůnden machen und das alle juden, si werint getöft oder nút getöft, die in deheim alter werint, von der gift wisten." - UB Strassburg, 5:199.

[160] Benedictow, *The Black Death,* 194; Jäckel, "Judenmord-Geißler-Pest," 172.

quite clear that the persecution of converts was caused by well-poisoning accusations, and the letters imply that the earlier persecution of the Jews was generated by a similar motive. Moreover, the fact that the accusations against marginalized Christians (including converts) continued to evolve, in Basel and other locations, after the great majority of Jews had already been killed, suggests that these were more than an excuse to eliminate the Jews. [161] These Christians did not hold a similar political and economic position to the Jews, nor was there any clear benefit in executing them. Sure enough, converts and suspects of heresy were marginalized and sometimes persecuted in medieval society.[162] But most of the reasons that historians point to as major factors in the persecution of Jews are irrelevant in their case. Why were they persecuted at this time and place, unless many of the citizens of the Empire truly believed that someone indeed was poisoning the wells?

We should now turn or attention to the city of Würzburg, in Franconia, where the persecution of Jews in 1349 is also well documented. Eight letters sent to Würzburg from different towns regarding the Jews are preserved in one sixteenth-century manuscript; some fully copied, others only listed.[163] Three letters were sent to Würzburg on 23 January or

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[161] UB Strassburg, 5:177-178, no. 189; "sicut postea per eorum confessionem et etiam christianorum corruptorum per iudeos patuit, qui per iudeos inducti fuerant ut predictum facinus perpetrarent. Et idem fatebantur quidam ex iudeis noviter baptizati, quorum quidam remanserunt in fide, alii quidem apostotaverunt, et tamen positi super rotas fatebantur se venenum sparsisse et aquas intoxicasse. Et sic nullum dubium remansit eorum fraude detecta." - Heinricus de Diessenhoven, *Chronicon,* 69; "Qui per Iudeos baptizatos et Christianos multa intoxicasse dicuntur, multique talium fatentes ea, postea sunt cremati. Pluresque Christiani torti fassi sunt se recepta a Iudeis pecunia et dictis quibusdam verbis super eos per Iudeos, promissoque per eos de intoxicando in tantam pervenisse demenciam, quod libenter omnes Christicolas occidissent. Unde succesive omnes quasi baptizati Iudei sunt cremati, quia fatebantur eos omnes culpabiles." - Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 268; Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 42-43; Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 380-384; Schneider, "Der Tag von Benfeld," 260.

[162] For heretics, see above: Ch. 1, pp. 80-85. For converts: Jonathan M. Elukin, "From Jew to Christian? Conversion and Immutability in Medieval Europe," in *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages*, ed. James Muldoon (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 171-189.

[163] Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek Würzburg, M. ch. f. 140, ff. 275r.-277r. The letters are all copied by a single hand, probably by a sixteenth-century notary who had the originals available. It is unclear why he chose to copy some of the letters in full and others only partly. All letters are transcribed in: Hoffmann, "Die Würzburger Judenverfolgung von 1349," 98-103.

around this date, since the officials there started to investigate the matter at that time, and wrote to other towns asking for information. It may not be a coincidence that they did so shortly after the meeting in Benfeld, which determined that the Jews of Alsace indeed poisoned wells and condemned them to be executed.[164] One of the letters was sent to Würzburg from the council of Obernai, which also sent a letter to Strasbourg about the issue of well poisoning around the same time.[165] The officials of Obernai opened with a promise to clarify the issue of the Jews, which was then being debated across the land, according to the information that they had. They reported that two Jews, a man and a woman, were arrested and investigated in their town, but said nothing about any poison. However, after they were tortured, the woman said that an old Jew poisoned a local well. According to the officials, some poison was indeed found in that well, as the woman testified. Another Jew allegedly confessed to similar crimes, and so all were executed at the stake.[166] A second letter was sent to Würzburg from the head of the council of Breisach. It reports about the investigation of a local Jew named Salmon, who allegedly poisoned a local well. Salmon said that he had bought the poison in the town of Villingen, with money that he received from another Jew named Schobelin. A Christian servant, who allegedly went there with him,

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[164] Hoffmann, "Die Würzburger Judenverfolgung von 1349," 98-100, nos. 1-3. Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 265-266; Jäckel, "Judenmord-Geißler-Pest," 171; Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 63; Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 180-181; Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 371-372; Schneider, "Der Tag von Benfeld," 258-259; Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," 17-18.

[165] UB Strassburg, 5:176-177, no. 187.

[166] "Als ir uns entpoten habt von der rede und sachen wegen, dye itzunt in dem lande ist umb die Juden, das han wir wol verstanden. […] wir ein judein und einen juden bey uns fingen und auch dye hingend von phennige wegen, dy sy bescrotten hattend, und frachten sye vast, ob sy ichts westen umb dy vergift, do sprachen sy nein. Und do sye gehingen an dem galgen bis uf den obent, do sprach dye judein, der sye herwider ab ließ, so wolt sy sagen umb dye vergieft. Und sagt auch also hangende uf einen alten juden bey uns, das der brunnen heth entreyniget und do mit er sye enthreiniget solt han. Des gleichen funden wir in den brunnen, als dy judein gesagt heth. Den und ander juden bey uns satzten wir zur rede. Der juden verjahent ethwe manicher, das sy vil brunnen bey uns entreiniget hetten. Do furten wir alle unser juden fur unser gericht und wart do uf sye erteylt mit rechtem gerichte, das man sy solt brennen. Und also hant von in gericht und sy verbrant." - Hoffmann, "Die Würzburger Judenverfolgung von 1349," 98-99, no. 1.

testified against him on this matter. The servant also added that the poison was spread in Breisach and elsewhere, and that all the Jews knew about the plot.[167] A third letter was sent to Würzburg from Frankfurt am Main, that is, not from the towns of Alsace, where the investigation against the Jews was already ongoing. The letter reported about the arrest of three Jews in the nearby village of Bergen, stating that one of them confessed to poisoning wells for payment in order to cause mass mortality. A Christian man was also arrested and said that he received payment from Jews to poison wells throughout Hesse, and particularly in Fulda, and that he knew of other Christians who did the same.[168]

These three letters show that by the end of January the authorities in Würzburg had already conducted an organized investigation into the plot and received significant information that it indeed took place. The nature of this information was not very different from the reports received in Strasbourg in previous months. It included documentation of arrests and confessions of potential suspects, who testified that they or others engaged in mass poisoning. The major difference is that there seems to have been more indication for the involvement of Christians in the conspiracy in Würzburg than in Strasbourg. Yet, the sources say nothing about any action of authorities in Würzburg against local Jews or other

[167] "So wyst, das uns verjach ein jude, der hyeß Salmon, und was der selbe jude us unser stat, das er dye giefte brecht von Fillingen gein Breysag. Er sagt uns ach, das dye gieft kostet 20 fl. Dyselben gulden leyhe ein ander jude dar, der hyes Schobelin. […] Do sagt der knecht, er wer mit Salman dem obgnanten juden gein Fillingen gangen, das geschee vor Pfingsten. Ir solt auch wyssen, das Salman uns verjach, do er die gift brecht gein Breysag in unser stat, das er do dye brunnen vergift mit sein selbs henden. Er hat auch verjehen, das dye juden alle wol wyssen umb dye gift, sye sein zu Breysag oder anderswo." Hoffmann, "Die Würzburger Judenverfolgung von 1349," 99, no. 2.

[168] "Do besahen dy amptleut von dem dorf drey juden, dy fingen sye und furten zu Burnheymer berg an gericht. Do bekant der ein jude, daß sye dye brunnen vergift hetten am manchen enden und das in dy judißheyt dar umb gelont heth. […] Auch wurden uns ander cristen Ieute beruget und aussetzige leute, dy man dar umb hat angegriffen und uber sy gericht. Dy bekant hant, das sye dy brunnen an manchen enden entreinigt haben und das dy juden in dar umb gelont haben, und haben auch die gieft getragen gen Hessen und gein Fulde und das land umb. Auch haben dy selben leut bekant, das ir noch wol viertzig sein, dy dye gift in allen landen umb tragen und dy brunnen entreinigen." - Hoffmann, "Die Würzburger Judenverfolgung von 1349," 100, no. 3.

suspects at this point.[169] It is possible that as in Strasbourg and Basel, they waited for additional evidence.

Three other letters arrived at the end of January and during February. Hanman Snewlin, an official from Freiburg, reported on 30 January that the son of a certain Jew who was executed in his town was taken by some women to be baptized.[170] The fact that this letter contains so little information suggests that either it was only partially copied, or that it was an addition to a letter that was sent earlier to Würzburg and did not survive. As we have seen, the officials of Freiburg had much to say about the involvement of local Jews in the plot, and it is unlikely that they would have hidden this information from their peers at Würzburg.[171] Another letter was sent from Strasbourg on 14 February, the very day when the Jews there were executed.[172] Its content was unfortunately not copied, but one can safely say that the authorities in Strasbourg were thoroughly convinced at this point that the Jews were guilty and probably wrote something along these lines to Würzburg. A third, much more detailed letter was sent from the nearby town of Heilbronn on 24 February. The officials there were unsure if the rumors against the Jews were indeed true, but stated that they received much

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[169] The letters only mention that Würzburg asked other towns' officials about the plot, but not that it took any other action. The only contermporary chronicler is vague about the exact timing of the action against the Jews, but states that it probably happened around 20 April: Michael de Leone, *Cronicis temporum hominum modernorum*, 1:475-476. It is unclear if later chroniclers from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, which add a few more details, should be trusted: Hoffmann, "Die Würzburger Judenverfolgung von 1349," 91-97; Klaus Arnold, "Pest-Geißler-Judenmorde: Das Beispiel Würzburg," in *Strukturen der Gesellschaft im Mittelalter: interdisziplinäre Mediävistik in Würzburg,* ed. Dieter Rödel, Joachim Schneider, Rolf Sprandel (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1996), 358-362; Hans-Peter Baum, "Die Vernichtung der jüdischen Gemeinde in Würzburg 1349," in *Strukturen der Gesellschaft im Mittelalter*, 371-376.

[170] "Als ir uns entboten habt von unser juden wegen, sol ewr weyßheyt wyssen, das wir sye verbrennet haben an kint und tragende frawen, dy des taufs [be]gerten." - Hoffmann, "Die Würzburger Judenverfolgung von 1349," 102, no. 5.

[171] UB Strassburg, 5:174-176, no. 186. By the end of January, Freiburg already acted against its Jews: Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 266.

[172] Hoffmann, "Die Würzburger Judenverfolgung von 1349," 103, no. 8. For Strasbourg: Fritsche Closener, *Chronik,* 104, 130; Mathias von Nuwenburg, *Chronica*, 268; Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 183-184, 249; Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 374-377; Jäckel, "Judenmord-Geißler-Pest," 172.

information from different locations which claimed that they were. In particular, they received letters from the town of Gmünd (Schwäbisch Gmünd), from towns in the area of Lake Constance, and from those of Alsace, where the Jews had already been arrested and executed. One of the letters from Alsace included information about four Jews in custody, one of whom claimed that a Jewish woman named Gutlin brought with her the poison from overseas and organized the poisoning there.[173] This story is quite similar to one of the testimonies copied in the Freiburg booklet (with Guthild as the woman's name), which also includes the statements of four Jews.[174] Thus, it is almost certain that Freiburg was one of the towns which contacted Heilbronn, as it did Strasbourg and Würzburg, and that it sent them something similar to the same booklet.[175] Thus, it seems that some of the towns of Alsace and the southern parts of the Empire continued to circulate the incriminating testimonies of Jewish suspects even after they had executed their communities. In this way, the towns of Franconia, and probably other areas as well, received fairly similar information about the plot, supported by similar evidence.

Yet further to the north, in Fulda and Erfurt, well-poisoning accusations were still insignificant. A letter sent from Fulda on 27 March reported that the authorities there acted

[173] "Als uns ewr freuntschaft gescriben hat von der juden wegen, also lassen wir euch wyder wyssen, das wir noch kein warheyt nye erfaren noch ervinden mochten, dan alle dye rede, dye wir noch gehort hon, das ist ein gemein lewmunt in aller cristenheyt. Auch sollet ir wyssen, das wir unser erber burger gesant hatten vor der vasnacht gein Gemunde uf eynen nemlichen tag, do alle ander stette unser mitgnossen uf dem selben tag bey einander waren. Nu kamen dy stete von dem Bodensehe auch dar. […] an stund gescriben, das ethliche stette zu Elsas vier juden fingen und dy waren gar hertiglich. Des sprech der ein jude, der in genesen ließ, er wolt dy warheyt sagen, des wart im zcu hant sicherheyt, das er genesen salt. Der selbe jude sagt fur dy gantzen warheyt, als uns unser burger gesagt han. Es wer ein Judein, dy hyeß fraw Gutlin, zu Elsas gesessen in einer stat. Dye selbe judein were mit irs selbs leibe gevaren uber mere und bracht mit ir ein veßlein vol gift, das was wol tzwen eymer. Dye selben gift teilt sy unter dy juden, das dye cristenheyt do mit verderbt wurde. Nu daucht sy, das der gift zu wenig were und vermuschte sye mit anderen sachen, do von de selbe gift alle verdarb, als got sein gnade selber der heilgen cristenheyt mitteyln wolt." - Hoffmann, "Die Würzburger Judenverfolgung von 1349," 101-102, no. 4.

[174] Compare: "das fro Gůthilt dú judinne úber mer fůre und das si ein landen vol gift mit ir gen Friburg brechte" - UB Strassburg, 5:175.

[175] UB Strassburg, 5:174-176, no. 186; Hoffmann, "Die Würzburger Judenverfolgung von 1349," 102, no. 5.

against the Jews, but not because they poisoned wells. Allegedly, a group of Jews dressed as Christians appeared in Church on a Sunday during the Mass, and the crowd was convinced that they were about to kill some of those present. Later, another Jew was caught planning to stab one of the officials with a knife.[176] A similar story was also recorded in Hebrew sources, and so it is very likely that the Jews of Fulda were not persecuted due to well-poisoning accusations.[177] Another letter, sent from Erfurt on 31 March, stated that the officials there knew of no crime committed by the Jews, yet it seems that they quickly changed their opinion.[178] Despite these two letters, most of the information that arrived in Würzburg on the first months of 1349 indicated that a well-poisoning plot indeed occurred.

And so, according to the chronicler Michael de Leone, who lived in Würzburg at the time, local Jews were executed around 20 April.[179] The reason, he stated, was that "the inhabitants of Würzburg could not put up with the local Jews any further, because of the

[176] "Des wurden an dem suntag, do mitfasten was, do man dy messe sang, ethliche juden in der kirchen gesehen in einer verwandelten weyß, also als sye nicht juden weren. Und das do von ein auflauf und gescrey wart, das dy juden gemeiniglich das cristen volck in der kirchen ermorden wolten, und ir ein teyl uf den weg kamen. […] In des kam auch ein jude in eyner verwandelten weyse bey unsern herrn und beweyst sich mit seinen barren messer, als er in wolt leiblos machen." Hoffmann, "Die Würzburger Judenverfolgung von 1349," 102, no. 6.

[177] David, "Tales Concerning Persecutions in Medieval Germany," 82-83; Shelomoh Ibn Ṿirgah. *Sefer Sheveṭ Yehudah*, 91; Raspe, "The Black Death in Jewish Sources," 485-489. This story may have also inspired Gilles le Muisis, *Chronique et annals*, 226-227, yet he placed these events in Cologne; Henricus Rebdorfensis, *Annales Imperatorum et Paparum*, 534, reports about similar events in Mainz.

[178] "Item dy von Erfurt haben de[n] von Wurtzpurg gescriben, si haben kein untat van iren juden vernomen, dar umb wollen sye sy halden und hegen." - Hoffmann, "Die Würzburger Judenverfolgung von 1349," 103, no. 7. This statment seems very odd, as the letter was sent on 31 March, and chroniclers claim that the Jews of Erfurt were persecuted on 21 March. And so, either the dating of the letter or the date given by the chroniclers is wrong: *Cronica Sancti Petri Erfordensis Moderna, continuatio II*, M.G.H SS, 30, 1:470; *Cronica Sancti Petri Erfordensis Moderna, continuatio II*, M.G.H SS, 30, 1:462-463. A detailed record referring to the persecution of the Jews in Erfurt survived, but it does not clarify this issue: Carl Beyer, ed., *Urkundenbuch der Stadt Erfurt* (Halle: Otto Hendel, 1897), 252-257, no. 314. For analysis of the persecution in Erfurt: Werner Mägdefrau, *Thüringer Städtebund im Mittelalter* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1977), 168-183; GJ 2:220; Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 189-193; Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 30, 33, 53-57.

[179] Michael de Leone, *Cronicis temporum hominum modernorum*, 1:475-476; Hoffmann, "Die Würzburger Judenverfolgung von 1349," 91-97; Arnold, "Pest-Geißler-Judenmorde: Das Beispiel Würzburg," 358-362; Baum, "Die Vernichtung der jüdischen Gemeinde in Würzburg 1349," 376-380; GJ 2:932; Cluse, "Zur Chronologie der Verfolgungen," 233-234.

charge that the Jews poisoned the Christians, [and] this was caused due to their treacherousness."[180] Indeed, based on the information that arrived in Würzburg from other towns in the Empire, it is possible to understand how the authorities there reached this conclusion. According to Michael, the Jews were enclosed in their houses and burned "indeed by the sentence of the secular court, where they were condemned to death due to the reason mentioned above."[181] Thus, the officials of Würzburg seem to have concluded their investigation and found the Jews guilty, probably based on the letters discussed here. These documents reveal more about the information possessed by the authorities in Würzburg than about the political factors which influenced their decision. Still, the most likely explanation for their actions is that they simply considered the well-poisoning accusations convincing.

So far, we have seen that in many of the towns of Savoy, Alsace, Franconia and Swabia well-poisoning accusations played a central role in causing the persecution of Jews. We have also seen that it is doubtful that this was the case in Fulda and Erfurt, further to the north. These are not the only cases in which the influence of well-poisoning accusations was limited, and next we will study two more of these cases, the cities of Cologne and Regensburg. One could certainly choose to examine additional cases in which well-poisoning accusations were very significant (Freiburg or Bern, for example). Yet, this would provide us with little new information about the importance of the accusations in causing the events of 1349: we could simply review more protocols, more letters, and fairly similar allegations and descriptions of mass execution. Instead, we will briefly study two examples

[180] "Deinde cum incole Herbipolenses Iudeos ibidem, propter reatum intoxicationis Christianorum per Iudeos perfidos hinc et inde effecte, diutius sustinere non possent" - Michael de Leone, *Cronicis temporum hominum modernorum*, 1:475.

[181] "per sententiam quidem in iudicio seculari ibidem propterea condempnati ad mortem." - Michael de Leone, *Cronicis temporum hominum modernorum*, 1:476.

which will show that the power of well-poisoning accusations was not unlimited. We will also inquire into the reasons for this deviation from the norm.

The city of Cologne questioned the veracity of well-poisoning accusations and argued against the persecution of Jews, as we have seen from the letters it sent Strasbourg. On 10 August 1348, officials there had already heard rumors that the Jews poisoned wells and wrote to Strasbourg to inquire about the subject. On 19 December they wrote again, to ask for additional information, as they were informed that Strasbourg had received new evidence from the city of Bern. Finally, on 12 January, the officials of Cologne wrote to warn Strasbourg against a popular uprising which might occur if they acknowledged the accusations. They added that they were investigating the matter thoroughly, but were unable to get enough reliable information. On their part, they tended to reject the accusations, and to believe that the plague was caused by the will of God, that is by natural causes and not by intentional poisoning. Thus, they had every intention to protect their own Jews from any harm.[182] These statements seem very unusual when contrasted with the general agreement of the towns in the southern parts of the Empire that the plot was real and the Jews should all be punished. It is likely that Cologne wrote to other cities in this area and so probably received other protocols of investigations against Jews, which confirmed the allegations. If so, then the officials of Cologne found this evidence unreliable in some way, perhaps because it was extracted using torture.[183] In any case, it is clear that they knew about well-poisoning accusations, investigated them, and rejected them.

[182] UB Strassburg, 5:162, no. 173; 165, no. 181; 178-179, no. 190. The last letter is translated in: Horrox, *The Black Death*, 219-220.

[183] This kind of argument regarding confessions extracted from Jews was not completely unprecedented, as we have seen in the case of the anti-Jewish allegations in Savoy in 1329: Esposito, "Un procès contre les Juifs," 786-793; Bardelle, *Juden in einem Transit- und Brückenland*, 244-246.

This policy apparently made Cologne into a safe haven for Jewish refugees whose communities were destroyed throughout the Empire. Gilles le Muisis reports that:

> *In that city [Cologne] there was a great number of Jews, and they had an arranged place [the Jewish neighborhood], and they stayed also in nearby villages, and were separated from the Christians. And it happened that many refugees came to Cologne from other places where the Jews were sent to their death, and stayed there with other Jews, so there was a great multitude of Jews in that place. But the city and its inhabitants, since they saw this, had a council, like in other locations, and are here [now] pressing to destroy them.*[184]

Gilles may have been right to claim that one of the reasons that the Christian inhabitants of Cologne turned against the Jews was the great number of Jewish emigrants who arrived there during 1349. However, he was probably wrong to state that an official decision of the city led to the violence against them. The attack against the Jews of Cologne took place on 23 and 24 August, and about a month later, on 26 September, representatives of the clergymen of the area of Cologne wrote to the town's officials on the matter. Most of all, the religious wished to make sure that they would not suffer any financial damage due to this attack. They provided a description of the attack, based on information that they received from officials in Cologne, which clarifies why they had to appeal on this matter: "In those days several people, both men and women, both during the daytime and the night time, approached the street of the Jews. And they violently entered the houses or dwellings of the Jews, and killed

[184] "Non est autem pretermittendum illud quod accidit in civitate Coloniensi, que est metropolis. In illa civitate erat magna copia Judeorum; et habebant locum ordinatum et vicos ubi invicem morabantur, et separati a Christianis. Et accidit quod de aliis locis, ubi Judei ad mortem mittebantur, multi fugientes venerunt Coloniam et se ibi cum aliis Judeis posuerunt, fuitque ibidem magna multitudo Judeorum. Cives autem et habitatores civitatis, hoc videntes, habito consilio, sicut in aliis locis, eos nisi sunt destruere." - Gilles le Muisis, *Chronique et annals*, 226.

many of the said Jews."[185] The document then proceeds to depict the great plundering of Jewish property, which surely included some goods or money owed to clergymen. Clearly, this is a description of a pogrom performed by a random, unauthorized mob. Naturally, the local clergy was worried that any properties they might be entitled to would be lost with the rest of the Jewish wealth, and applied to municipal officials to act on the matter.[186] Obviously, the attack was neither initiated nor sanctioned by religious or secular authorities, as Gilles le Muisis claimed, but was rather an outbreak of popular violence.

But what could have caused the Christian inhabitants of Cologne to suddenly turn against the Jews? As we have seen, the reason was probably not well-poisoning accusations, as these had been known in the city for almost a year and were rejected by the authorities. It was also not the plague, as it only appeared in Cologne around December, and the news about it was far from new.[187] The growing number of Jewish refugees may have played a part in this development, like the economic status for the Jews, as we have seen. Yet, their economic status was a constant reality, and there is no evidence that the number of Jews in the city grew significantly around August, when the violence occurred. The chroniclers point to two other events as possible causes for the pogrom. First, to the fact that Walrams, the archbishop of Cologne, died in Paris on 14 August, nine days before the attack. The Jews of Cologne were under a joint sponsorship of the archbishop and the city council, and it is

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[185] "hiis diebus nonnulli utriusque sexus homines vicum iudeorum in civitate Coloniensi tam diurno quam nocturno temporibus accessissent et habitationes seu domos eorumdem iudeorum violenter intrassent et quamplures de dictis iudeis interfecissent." - Leonard Ennen, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte der Stadt Köln* (Cologne: DuMont-Schauberg, 1870), 4:322-323, no. 314.

[186] As did the local archbishop: ed. Bernhard Brilling and Helmut Richtering, *Westfalia Judaica: Quellen und Regesten zur Geschichte der Juden in Westfalen und Lippe,* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 1992), 1:278-282, no. 23.

[187] Benedictow, *The Black Death,* 163, 194-195.

possible that the death of their protector encouraged their enemies to act.[188] More importantly, the chroniclers point to the arrival of the flagellants to the city as the main cause for the anti-Jewish violence. The exact time when the flagellants arrived in Cologne is unclear, but some of the sources suggest that it was shortly before the pogrom and claim that there was a direct connection between the two events.[189] Levoldus de Northof, right after he describes the radical tendencies of the movement, states that "indeed, at that time all of the Jews in Cologne were killed during the event mentioned above [i.e. the arrival of the flagellants]."[190] Another contemporary chronicler describes the flagellants and the massacre of the Jews as two manifestations of popular uprisings which characterized the towns around Cologne at the time.[191] A writer from Lübeck simply depicts the massacre of the Jews as performed by the flagellants.[192] And so, the most likely explanation for the pogrom is that factors like the economic activity of the Jews and the growing number of Jewish refugees built up anti-Jewish feelings in Cologne.[193] The death of Archbishop Walrams, and

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[188] *Annales Agrippinenses,* 738; Levoldus de Northof, *Chronica comitum de Marka,* 86; *Kölner Jahrbücher des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts*, 22; Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde,* 204-205; Schmandt, *Judei, cives et incole*, 89-90.

[189] Schmandt, *Judei, cives et incole*, 89-90; Kieckhefer, "Radical Tendencies in the Flagellant Movement," 162; Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 44-46. Groups of flagellants were present in the area of Cologne around August: Cluse, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden in den mittelalterlichen Niederlanden*, 264.

[190] "Tunc vero omnes Iudei in Colonia interfecti sunt sub occasione predicta." - Levoldus de Northof, *Chronica comitum de Marka,* 86.

[191] "Eisdem temporibus anno videlicet Domini MCCCXLIX. per universum regnum Germanie tumultu populari furente et in sedicionem concitato in omnibus civitatibus, opidis et municipiis Iudei universi utriusque sexus, cuiuscumque etatis tam parvuli quam infantuli unius diei crudeli nece sine misericordia fuerunt trucidati, incensis domibus et habitacionibus ipsorum et thesauris omnibus spoliatis. Huic autem populari sedicioni non nulli de secta flagellariorum supradicta, quasi carbones extinctis incendiis adhuc super cineribus latitantes, primi incursores crudelitatis sue officium vel pocius maleficium prebuerunt." - *Die Kölner Weltchronik*, 91.

[192] "dit hovedlose volk warn de gheiselbrodere, de dar ghinghen in manighen landen unde sloghen sik mit swepen, der natelnstifte inne weren. [. . .] ok hadden de sulven hovedlosen lude to Kolne an deme Ryne de joden dod geslaghen" - Detmar von Lübeck, *Detmar-Chronik von 1101-1395,* 521.

[193] Such feelings were not unusual: Yacov Guggenhiem, "Meeting on the Road: Encounters between German Jews and Christians on the Margins of Society," in *In and out of the Ghetto: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany*, ed. R. Po-chia Hsia and Hartmut Lehmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1995), 125-136.

especially the arrival of the flagellants allowed these feelings to erupt in an act of popular violence, which the authorities were unable to contain. Well-poisoning accusations played a minor part in this process, if at all.

In Regensburg, Bavaria, there seems to have been no anti-Jewish violence during the first outbreak of the Black Death. This was surely not because well-poisoning accusations were unknown there, as Jews in several neighboring cities were persecuted in 1349.[194] Moreover, Conrad of Megenberg, who lived in Regensburg at the time, wrote against these accusations, and clearly knew them well. For example, he pointed out that many of the towns in Bavaria (including Regensburg) are located on the River Danube or other navigable rivers. The inhabitants, who feared that the wells might have been poisoned, drew water from the river as a precaution, and yet they died from the plague. And thus, since such a large river could surely not have been poisoned, the claim that the Jews caused the plague by poisoning wells must be false.[195] This argument shows that the people of Bavaria knew about well-poisoning accusations and tried to defend themselves from such a threat. It is possible that Conrad's position on the matter also reflected the opinion of others in the city, but it is hard to conclude for certain.[196] In any case, it is clear that despite the fact that the accusations were familiar in Regensburg, the Jews were not attacked.

The political status of the Jews in the city may explain this fact to some degree. First,

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[194] "in plerisque locis, ubi remanserat populus Hebraicus, ipse crebro ceciderat casu modo mortalitatis communis, quemadmodum in Vienna civitate Austrie et in Ratispona civitate Bawarie necnon in castris ac fortaliciis, ubi per quosdam christianos nobiles abscondebantur." - Conradus Megenbergensis, *Tractatus de mortalitate in Alamannia*, 867; *Continuatio Mellicensis*, M.G.H SS, 9:513; Henricus Rebdorfensis, *Annales Imperatorum et Paparum*, 534; Cluse, "Zwischen Vorurteil und Vertrauen," 369-370; Schmid, "Die Judenpolitik der Reichsstadt Regensberg," 127.

[195] "Nec valet, si dicatur, quod peccora fluviis magis adaquantur, que sic infici non possunt quemadmodum fontes et rivi pusilli, quoniam totus populus Bawarie in civitatibus vicinis Danubio et aliis fluviis navigalibus tantum utebatur aqua eorundem fluminum et se ab aquis putealibus cautissime cavit et nichilominus moriebatur." - Conradus Megenbergensis, *Tractatus de mortalitate in Alamannia*, 342-343, 366-368, here 367.

[196] Cluse, "Zwischen Vorurteil und Vertrauen," 367-369.

despite some anti-Jewish incidents throughout the Middle Ages, local Jews enjoyed continuous legal protection, which included a special court which discussed any matters involving local Jews and Christians.[197] Also, in addition to the local council and bishop, the dukes of Bavaria, of the house of Wittelsbach, were usually inclined to protect the Jews.[198] Indeed, these factors can probably explain the initial instinct of local officials to protect the Jews. Yet, we have seen that officials in Strasbourg, Basel, Freiburg and Cologne also presented a similar response to the accusations, but were forced to allow anti-Jewish violence by different political forces. Thus, the question is not necessarily why the council of Regensburg was willing to protect the Jews, but rather how it was able to do so consistently.

The answer can be found in an official municipal decree issued in Regensburg on 3 October, 1349. It restated the commitment of the local council to protect the Jews from any harm, and named it as the only body authorized to judge the Jews or punish them. Thus, any complaint against the Jews was to be brought before the council, and any unlawful action against them was to be punished. The document was naturally signed by the mayor and the seventeen council members, but also by 236 representatives of the noble families of Regensburg.[199] By this procedure, which was also used on other occasions, the council established general approval of the urban nobility for its decision.[200] In this manner, they prevented dissent within the ruling class regarding the question of the Jews, as had happened in Basel and Strasbourg. They also deterred popular violence against the Jews, since they

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[197] GJ 2:679-680; Cluse, "Zwischen Vorurteil und Vertrauen," 370-371; Schmid, "Die Judenpolitik der Reichsstadt Regensberg," 125-127.

[198] Schmid, "Die Judenpolitik der Reichsstadt Regensberg," 132-133; Cluse, "Zwischen Vorurteil und Vertrauen," 369-372; Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 81-83.

[199] *Regensburger Urkundenbuch,* vol. 1, in *Monumenta Boica,* vol. 53 (München: Verlag der Königlichen Akademie, 1912), 671-674; Schmid, "Die Judenpolitik der Reichsstadt Regensberg," 123; Cluse, "Zwischen Vorurteil und Vertrauen," 371-372; Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 82.

[200] *Regensburger Urkundenbuch,* 1:532-539; Cluse, "Zwischen Vorurteil und Vertrauen," 371.

made clear that possible attackers would not be supported by any local officials or nobles and would be punished. To be sure, only a few cities could take such a step. One cannot imagine Peter Swarber, the contested *ammannmeister* of Strasbourg, achieving this kind of support from local nobles, who were seeking any opportunity to challenge his rule. And so, Regensburg represents a rare case in which unusual political circumstances allowed the formation of a collation of forces committed to protect the Jews.[201] When this indeed happened, even well-poisoning accusations could not turn the tables against them.

Yet, as we have seen, the cases of Cologne and Regensburg were truly unusual. In the south-western cities of the Empire, mostly in Savoy, Alsace, Franconia and Swabia, well-poisoning accusations often prevailed. The castle of Chillon, Strasbourg, Basel and Würzburg, which we examined more closely, seem to represent the common anti-Jewish dynamic in the Empire during the days of the Black Death. However, the examples of Basel and Würzburg can teach us that even within this dynamic there were variations. In each city there were different political constellations and social circumstances, which determined the nature of the action against the Jews, its timing, whether there was a second wave of accusations, and whether these were directed also against Christians. Even when the authorities decided to reject the accusations, they sometimes were unable to prevent popular violence against the Jews, as we have seen in Cologne. And so, one who wishes to draw general conclusions from the well-documented case of Strasbourg should be cautious. Not every city had similar social classes with identical positions, nor were similar accusations accepted with an identical level of trust. Still, we can safely say that well-poisoning accusations were compelling enough to drew public attention and require official action in

[201] Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 68-74.

almost all of the cases studied. The nature of the public response to the accusations and the effectiveness of the protection which the authorities provided the Jews (if at all), often varied. And yet, the additional case studies mostly support the conclusion that well-poisoning accusations played a major role in determining the fate of German Jews in 1348-1350.

Conclusion

This chapter opened with a review of the chronicles and the narrative accounts recounting well-poisoning accusations and the persecution of Jews in the Empire in 1348-1350. Most of these sources point to well-poisoning accusations as the major cause for the persecutions, and suggest that they were triggered by the plague or spread by the flagellants. Thus, many of the early historians who wrote about the issue explained the accusations and the persecution as an irrational, popular response to the plague, driven by fear of the mortality and the long-existing hatred towards the Jews. However, recent historiography has taken a different approach, as historians shifted their focus from the chronicles to documentary evidence. They have highlighted the importance of political and economic factors as causes for anti-Jewish violence, since the existing records reveal a very different situation than an outbreak of mass hysteria. Indeed, the decision to execute the Jews was often taken, after an investigation, by the official authorities: municipal councils, princes, bishops and local lords. Thus, it was only fitting to focus on the long-term interests of these agents and to try to explain how their actions in the Jewish matter fitted well with their general policy. However, this new historiography has tended to minimize, or ignore, the role that well-poisoning played in causing the violence. To be sure, historians are well-aware of these allegations, but they see them simply as a pretext for the true political, social and economic forces in play,

which were more substantial in determining the fate of the Jews. Yet, this approach fails to pay enough attention to the fact that many of the existing sources – and not just chronicle accounts – claim, often with great conviction, that well-poisoning accusations indeed took place, and that the majority of the people in the Empire believed them. Thus, this chapter aims to revise the explanations presented by recent historiography to include well-poisoning accusations as a major factor in driving the persecution.

To do so, the chapter analyzed events in which it is possible to recognize the particular influences of the accusations. We focused on six case studies: the two major ones were Lake Léman and Strasbourg, and the four minor ones Basel, Würzburg, Cologne and Regensburg. The study of the record of the investigation against the Jews of northern Savoy, produced in Chillon castle and in Châtel, showed that the evidence against the Jews was not incredible as some historians have suggested. In particular, the testimonies from Chillon often corroborate each other, refer to known places and people, and present the plot as a local, and perfectly plausible, operation. Based on these records, other officials, in particular those of Strasbourg, had a good reason to believe the accusations, or at least open their own investigation. Indeed, when we analyzed the documents from Strasbourg, we discovered that this is exactly what the authorities there did. Their request for additional information about the subject was answered by several letters from the towns of Savoy and Alsace, mostly supporting the existence of a wide-scale poisoning plot. Yet, the officials of Strasbourg were not quick to act, and continued to protect the Jews while the investigation was pending, despite external and internal pressures. But eventually, popular anger about their hesitation to act was inflamed by their political rivals and led to a revolution which sealed the fate of local Jews. Thus, we learned that well-poisoning accusations played a major role in turning

the political situation against the Jews. It is true that the initial response of different political agents to the accusations was influenced by their political interests. Still, the fact that the political climate in Strasbourg changed so dramatically against the Jews shows that the accusations did not fall on deaf ears, neither in the city, nor in Alsace in general. The same was true for Basel, where the officials also changed their position against the Jews, following some civil unrest. Yet in Basel a second wave of persecution, aimed against converts and other marginalized Christians, soon followed. This wave, which was certainly motivated by poisoning accusations, shows that despite the execution of the Jews, the fears triggered by the plague still remained, and with them the search for poisoners. In Würzburg officials also conducted a thorough investigation into well-poisoning accusations against Jews by requesting information from other towns. We have seen that despite some contradictory information on the subject, the opinion represented by most of the cities, especially those of Alsace, prevailed, and the Jews were killed. These cases provide enough evidence that well-poisoning accusations played a major role in the decision of the authorities in different towns to execute the Jews. Yet, there were a few cases in which the officials decided to protect the Jews despite knowing about the accusations and consistently did so. In Cologne, this policy ended with a pogrom performed by local mob, probably with some influence of the flagellants. In Regensburg, due to specific political conditions which allowed the council to achieve the support of local nobility for their policy, the Jews were not harmed. Still, these cases were fairly unusual, and one can safely say that well-poisoning accusations played a major role in causing the persecution of Jews, especially in the southern parts of the Empire.

Now, let us consider how these conclusions fit with the existing historiography. As we have seen, political, economic and social factors were indeed significant in determining

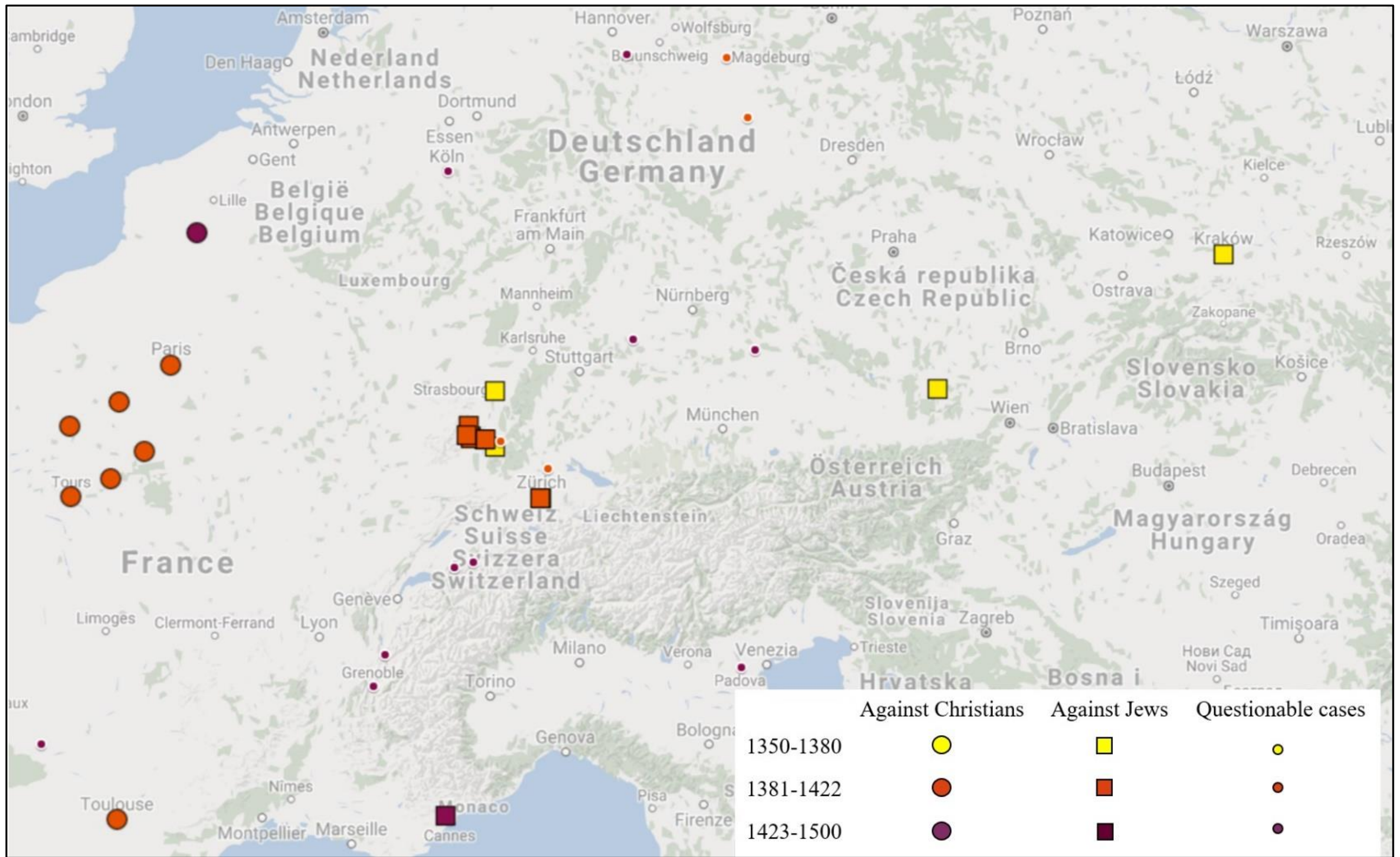
which towns were willing to protect their Jews, and which were more inclined to execute them. However, well-poisoning accusations were often powerful enough to change this initial dynamic, as we have seen in the cases of Strasbourg and Basel. To be sure, some cities, especially in Alsace, were only waiting for an opportunity to act against the Jews, and (very few) others could not be swayed to act against them regardless of external and internal pressures. And still, in towns which were undecided on the matter, well-poisoning accusations often played a decisive role in changing the political climate against the Jews, and eventually allowing their destruction. Indeed, considering the political reality in the Empire during the mid-fourteenth century, it should not be surprising that this was the case. As we have seen, many cities constantly featured a delicate balance of power: municipal councils often had to manage political pressures from the king (or one of the contesting kings), bishops, princes, local nobles and other towns. In addition, within each town there were often constant struggles between the high nobility, the lower nobility, artisans, merchants and the lower class. Municipal governments were often weak and could defend the Jews only to a certain degree, so it was not difficult to force them to change their position on the matter. Moreover, as we have seen in the cases of Strasbourg and Basel, their enemies sometimes used the fact that they protected the Jews to stir popular resistance against them. The fact that well-poisoning accusations were indeed convincing, and were supported by copious evidence and by the spread of the plague, made them an effective political weapon. We should conclude that well-poisoning accusations affected the political system in each city according to its preexisting circumstances. Still, the very fact that they had such influence in so many towns should certainly persuade us that many indeed believed that they were true.

Considering this conclusion, one wonders why well-poisoning accusations declined after 1350. They were indeed popular enough to cause major political changes in different locations in Europe both in 1321 and in 1348-1350. They circulated quickly, and were found believable by people of different classes, in different circumstances. And still, we will see that only a few cases of well-poisoning accusations occurred after 1350, and even less after 1420. The cases which did take place usually remained very local and limited. The next chapter will try to explain this fact.

Chapter 6: The Decline of Well-Poisoning Accusations after 1350

The four previous chapters, the heart of this study, focused on the events of 1321 in France and Aragon, and of 1348-1350 throughout Europe. Each wave of violence included dozens, or even hundreds, of cases, and the allegations spread quickly over vast areas. The accusations were transferred from one minority group to another, and powerful political agents intervened in order to benefit from the violence. These events transformed completely the experience of minority groups throughout the continent, in particular of lepers and Jews. Such massive waves of persecution based on well-poisoning accusations did not, however, reoccur in later centuries. The idea of well-poisoning did not disappear, and isolated cases of persecution inspired by such allegations did take place, but there was nothing that resembled the mass violence of the first half of the fourteenth century. This chapter reviews the known cases in which well-poisoning accusations were presented between 1350 and 1500. It studies the dynamics of each case, and describes how well-poisoning allegations changed their nature in general. In addition, it presents some of the existing cultural references to this idea, focusing on the gap between the rhetoric which surrounded it and the decline in actual cases of persecution. It concludes by suggesting explanations for the decline of this historical phenomenon.

Well-poisoning accusations after 1350



* Questionable cases (against either Jews or Christians): Either the existence of the incident is doubtful, or the accusations were only presented in retrospect, or other accusations of mass-poisoning (of the air, or by a doctor) took place.

Cases of well-poisoning accusations against Jews between 1350 and 1500

As we have seen, the major episodes of well-poisoning accusations in 1321 and 1348-1350 appeared in waves, which quickly spread over entire kingdoms. Officials reported to their peers about the alleged plot, and rumors about this issue circulated spontaneously. In a matter of weeks or months dozens of cases occurred, and the major rulers of the relevant areas had to intervene. In the process, the accusations evolved to claim that the poisoning was a result of an international conspiracy led by one or a few minority groups. However, a review of post-1350 cases of

persecution based on well-poisoning accusations would show that these characteristics were not maintained. Later cases were usually limited in scope, to one or a few towns, or even directed only against particular individuals. The victims were usually Jews, but some marginalized Christians also faced similar charges. Yet in none of these cases did a wave of allegations and persecution evolved.

There seems to have been a cluster of episodes of anti-Jewish persecution based on well-poisoning accusations in eastern Europe during the second outbreak of the Black Death in the area, that is around 1359-1360. A chronicler from north-eastern Austria reported that in 1359: "the Jews faced great persecution, due to a plague that prevailed in many places, as if it was caused by these cursed ones using poison. Floods caused by rain erupted during the whole summer."[1] As noted in previous chapters, environmental crisis was a likely contributing factor in the accusations and subsequent persecution.[2] Similarly, a chronicler from southern Poland wrote that in 1360:

> *There was such mortality in all of Christianity, and most of all in the kingdom of Poland, under the rule of King Casimir [III], that barely a third of Christianity remained [alive], especially in Kraków. The Jews were charged with [causing] this disease through poisoning, [and] they were burned at that time in Kraków and elsewhere.*[3]

The plague was apparently so severe that even King Casimir, who was known as a protector of the Jews, was unable to prevent the massacre.[4] Another Polish writer was amazed by the great

[1] "Iudei in magna persecucione habebantur propter pestilenciam que in aliquibus locis prevaluit, quasi ab illis procedat execralis toxicacio. Inundaciones pulviarum per totam estate eruperunt." - *Continuatio Zwetlensis Quarta,* 688.

[2] This correlation is very common: Robert Warren Anderson, Noel D. Johnson and Mark Koyama, "Jewish Persecutions and Weather Shocks: 1100-1800," *The Economic Journal* (2016); GJ 3:2309.

[3] "1360. Talis fuit in tota christianitate et maxime in regno Polonie, regnante rege Kazimiro mortalitas, quod vix tercia pars christianitatis remanserat et maxime in Crocovia. Que mortalitas imputabantur Iudeis per intoxicacionem, qui tunc temporis Cracovie et alias cremabantur." - *Annales Mechovienses* M.G.H SS, 19:670.

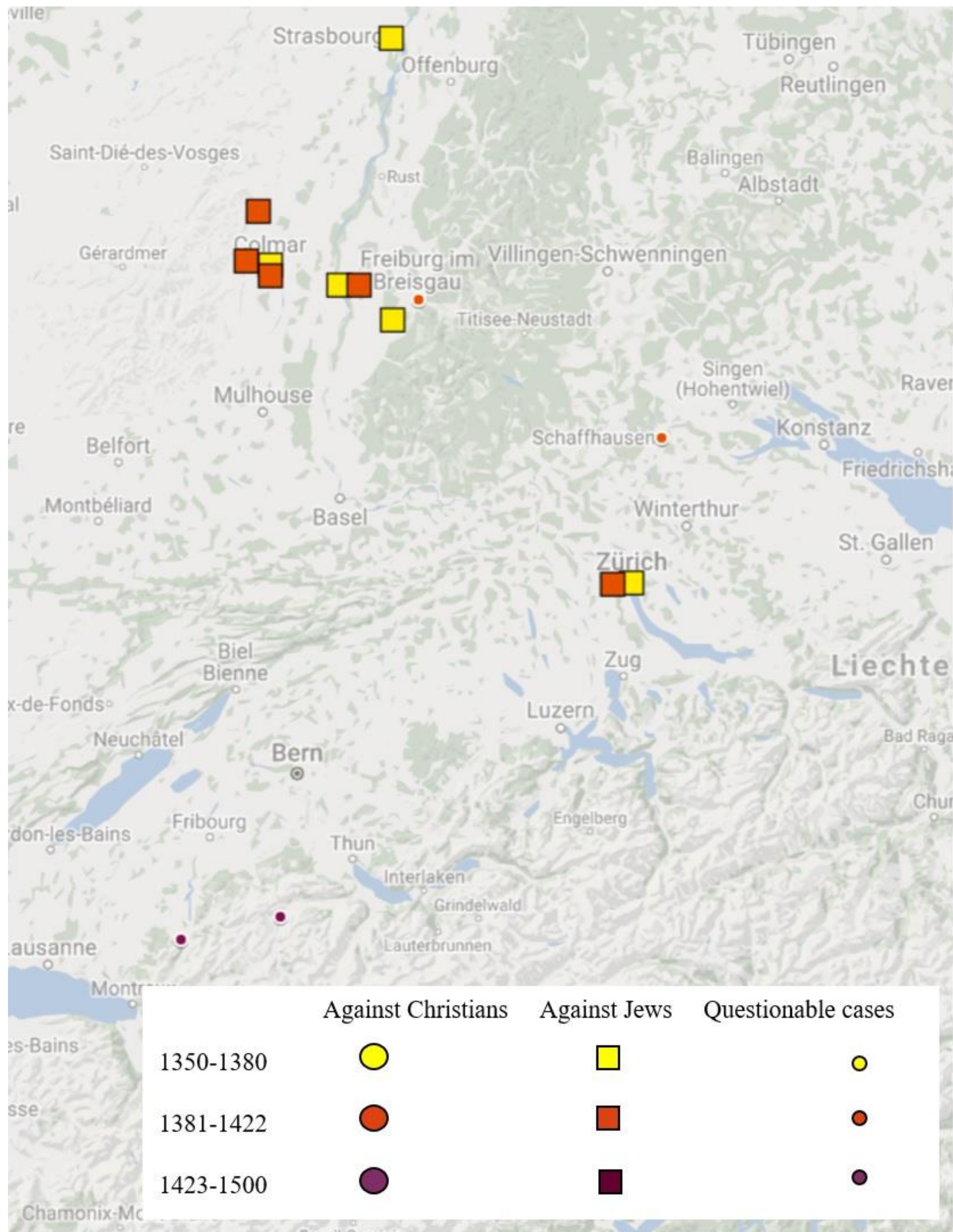
[4] Some historians attributed to the king the defense of the Jews during the Black Death and in later years. However, there are only a few sources about this subject, and many of them are not contemporary: Gordon M. Weiner, "The Black Death and the Jews: Casimir and Esterka in Poland, a Fourteenth-Century Legend," in *Essays on the History of*

massacre of the Jews following the plague and by acts of suicide performed by them, presumably to avoid forced baptism, but did not state the cause for the persecution.[5] These sources make clear that the Jews of eastern Europe were accused of causing the plague through poisoning around 1360, and that a series of pogroms against them occurred. Yet they do not indicate that the Jews were accused of poisoning wells in particular, nor do they provide much detail about the dynamic which preceded the violence. Without further evidence, it is difficult to say much about the 1359–60 case.

Myths and Legends, ed. Ernest M. Teagarden (Madison: University of South Dakota Press, 1977), 108-112. In our case, there is no evidence that the king attempted to stop the persecution.

[5] "1360. Fuit maxima pestilencia hominum in Polonia. Tunc eodem anno omnes Judey a Christinanis necati sunt and occisi, alii vero combusti, alii vero suspense, alii se ipsos, uxores et filios cum cultellis in gutture necaverunt." - *Roczink Sędziwoja*, in *Monumenta Historia Poloniae* (Pomniki dziejowe Polski), ed. August Bielowski (Lwów: Nakładem Wałs, 1872), 2:880.

Well-poisoning accusations in Alsace and the western Alps after 1350



It is much clearer that well-poisoning accusations against Jews reappeared in Alsace and the Western Alps in 1379. The main document describing these accusations, a summary of an investigation, exists in two copies in the municipal archive of Strasbourg.[6] It records accusations made by a Jewish woman named Hanne von Ehingen, sometime at the end of 1379 or the beginning of 1380. Hanne and several other Jews were probably arrested in the town of Schallstadt and were brought to Strasbourg for further investigation and judgment.[7] She confessed, probably under torture, to different crimes committed by her and other Jews, including fraud, and even murder, yet the main charge was well-poisoning. Allegedly, Hanne and two other Jews from Munich, both named Samuel, killed her own son together. Then, they used the boy's blood and feces to create a poisonous powder, which they threw in different wells.[8] The same document relates that poison was also spread by five other Jews around Alsace, in particular in Strasbourg, Breisach, Schallstadt and Colmar. For example, a man name Salmon was said to have scattered poison made of rotten meat throughout Colmar and Schallstadt.[9] The document does not reveal the fate of all of the accused, yet it is quite clear that Hanne herself was executed. Towards the end of the investigation,

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[6] AVS III 174/3, nos. 24-25. Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaβ*, 386-388 transcribes this document in full based on AVS III 174/3, no. 25. The version of the document in AVS III 174/3, no. 24 is a little shorter, and does not include several of the final passages which appear in no. 25 (the passage which opens: "item dz der selbe Salmon mit der fleschen foul vergiftes gen Sletzstat kam" and the three final passages, after "item dz su selber der vergift getragen habe"). The two copies of the document do not carry a seal, a date, a name of a composer or any other sign that they were sent, and so it is likely that they were both created in Strasbourg.

[7] For the dating and localization of this case: Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaβ*, 388. Though the relevant records were probably created in Strasbourg (see n. 6 above), Mentgen is right to point out that the documents present Schallstadt as the center of the plot in Alsace. And so, the most likely scenario is that the suspects were sent to Strasbourg to be investigated, and the two documents represent two stages of questioning.

[8] "item su hat ouch geseit dz der alte Samuel und der junge Samuel die juden zu Munchen hubent dz blut und dz kot mittenander uf, do der selben Hannen sun ermordet wart, ufden winnaht obent, anno domini etc. LXXIX und do by wz der Besel der kúrsener ein kristan und us dem blute und kote mahtent die egenannten juden vergift und pulfer und santent och dz us in dz lant, und starp ouch do von in dem lande gar vil lute, wande die burnen wurdent do mitte vergiftet und hub do der sterbat zu Landeshut an und starb do umbe gar vil lúte." Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaβ*, 387.

[9] "[…] Salmon, der jude von Peygern der zu Colmer gefangen wz, seite, dz er des selben vergiftes eine flesche foul hette und dz er ouch es in dz lant umb und umb truge, und dz er es ouch gen Colmer getragen hette. item dz der selbe Salmon mit der fleschenfoul vergiftes gen Sletzstat kam […]" - Mentgen, Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaβ, 387.

she asked whether conversion would save her from the stake, and was told that she would be killed in any case, thus she decided to die Jewish.[10] It is likely that other suspects were executed as well. Without further evidence, however, it is difficult to determine if persecution extended beyond this small group.

Gerd Mentgen, who studied this document in depth, pointed out that the plot was presented as originating in Bavaria: The two Jews who created the poison with Hanne allegedly came from Munich, and Salmon received his poison from the town of Ingolstadt. Mentgen added that it was probably not coincidence that 1379 was a plague year in Bavaria, and suggested that this may have been the inspiration for the accusations against Jews in Alsace.[11] The earlier history of well-poisoning allegations against the Jews of Alsace, and of Schallstadt and Strasbourg in particular, surely played a part, too.[12] Thirty years after the first appearance of the Black Death, the Jews who returned to Alsace were still occasionally suspected of causing the recurring episodes of the disease. Still, the scope of the persecution in 1379 was surely very limited in comparison to the mass executions of 1349.

In the same year, rumors circulated in Zurich that the Jews there committed well-poisoning. A local artisan named Welti Grebel claimed that they poisoned one well in the neighborhood of Niederdrof and another near a place called St. Leonhard.[13] These details were recorded in the notes

[10] "item sú begerte ouch alwent kristan ze werdende untz dz man sú us furte und sú soch dz sú sterben múste do sprach su, ich wil júdisch sterben" - Mentgen, Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaβ, 387. This part apperars only in AVS III 174/3, no. 25, which probably represent a later stage of the investigation.

[11] Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaβ*, 387-390.

[12] For well-poisoning accusations in Schallstadt in 1349: UB Strassburg, 5:195-196, no. 208; Gerd Mentgen, "Geschichte der Juden in der mittelalterlichen Reichsstadt Schlettstadt," *Annuaire: Les Amis de la Bibliothèque humaniste de Seléstat* 40 (1990), 52-56. For Strasbourg, see above: Ch. 5, pp. 341-364.

[13] "Man sol nach gan wer von den juden gerect [?] hab, dz si gift in die Brunnen gelten [?] hab. Banwart kanneneress die [?] dz im welti gerbel seit dz man sein die juden hetten [?] im den Bruunnen ze sant leonhart […] der Brunn in nidendorf in [?] vergift […]" – Zurich, Staatsarchiv des Kantons Zürich, B VI 190, f. 228v. This text appears in the records of the city council (Rats- und Richtbücher), and the entire text is crossed out and very difficult to read. It was partly cited, possibly from another manuscript, as the text is somewhat different, in: Johann Caspar Ulrich, *Sammlung jüdischer Geschichten* (Basel, 1768), 103.

of the council of Zurich for the year 1379. Notably, there is no mention there of any associated anti-Jewish violence. It is possible that the same rumors which circulated in Alsace reached the city. Although as in Alsace Jews had been accused of well-poisoning in Zurich in 1349, the new allegations were not acknowledged by the authorities.[14] Again, remembered accusations against the Jews might be linked to the newer ones, but the rumors were probably not popular enough to force the officials of Zurich to act.

Another wave of well-poisoning accusations occurred in Alsace in 1397, a plague year.[15] On 23 June officials from Colmar sent a response to their peers in Freiburg, who had inquired about rumors claiming that local Jews had once again plotted against the Christians. The authorities in Colmar knew little about the matter at this point, and stated only that one Jew had been arrested in the nearby village of Ribeauvillé (Rappoltsweiler), and another in the village of Turckheim.[16] At some point later, the records of the investigation of both Jews were sent to Freiburg from Colmar. The Jew arrested at Ribeauvillé, Meiger (Meir) of Aschaffenburg, was forced to confess to organizing a network of Jewish poisoners around Colmar. Allegedly, he had received some poisonous powder from an unknown Jew from Schaffhausen in a field near Colmar. Meir and other Jews threw some of it in a well near the village of Sigolsheim and in other wells in the area.[17] Then he went back to Ribeauvillé, where he left some poison hidden, and was convinced by a Jew named

[14] Heinricus de Diessenhoven, *Chronicon,* 70: "et xi kal. eiusdem [marcii] in Sulgen, et viiii in Schaffusa et Thurego"; Ettmuller, ed. *Die Jahrbücher der Stadt Zürich*, 71-72; Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 37, 49.

[15] Henri Fleurent, "Geschichte der Pest und ihrer Bekämpfung im alten Colmar," *Zeitschrift für Geschichte des Oberrheins* 65 (1911), 130-131; though not mentioned in Biraben, *Les Hommes et la peste*, 378.

[16] Schreiber, ed., *Urkundenbuch der Stadt Freiburg im Breisgau*, 2:108, no. 354.

[17] "Meiger der iude von Aschoffenburg verjehen […] daz er pulver gegeben der schilende iude […] und gab ime daz pulver zwüschen Könssheim und Colmar uff dem velde. […] Die iuden heissent in daz pulver werffen in die Burnen umb und umb, und hab ers geworffen in den burnen under Eigeltzheim." - Schreiber, ed., *Urkundenbuch der Stadt Freiburg im Breisgau*, 2:108-109, no. 355.

Menlin to poison local wells.[18] In the course of the investigation, Meir was connected to other crimes, such as a wide-scale Jewish scam against Christian debtors, yet the major offense was clearly well poisoning. The Jew arrested in Turckheim, David, confessed simply that he had poisoned a local well. He also accused two Jews named Jacob and Schekan of buying poison and putting it in wells in the town of Breisach. Interestingly, he also claimed that some Jews from Basel were with Schekan when he committed the crime.[19] Despite this detail, these events seem to have been limited to a relatively small area in Alsace, around Colmar, Breisach and Freiburg.[20] In this area, where well-poisoning accusations were very popular in 1349, the notion that the Jews maliciously caused the plague still prevailed.[21]

A wave of anti-Jewish allegations in 1401 around Zurich seems to have been more wide-spread than that of 1397. Again, several of the relevant documents survive in the archive of Freiburg, where the authorities were apparently eager to find out the details of any anti-Jewish allegation that arose in the area. This time, the allegations began in the town of Schaffhausen, to the north of Zurich, where a blood libel was brought against the Jews. At the beginning of May, a Jew from the nearby town of Diessenhofen was accused of organizing the kidnapping and murder

[18] "Und gieng des ersten in Menlins hus des iuden […] und do hiesse in Menlin der iude gon in die nider stat, und heis in dez pulvers zuo ime nemen, und heis in ouch werffen umb und umb in die burnen, ob er möhte." - Schreiber, ed., *Urkundenbuch der Stadt Freiburg im Breisgau*, 2:109.

[19] "David […] geseit, daz er ze Thüringheim in der stat einen Brunen mit gift vergifftet […] un seite, das in derselbe Jacob die gift hiesse tragen gen Thüringheim, und heis in die gift in die burnen werffen […] Er het ouch geseit, das do bi ein ander iude were, heisset Schekan […] das er die gift solte tragen und in die burnen werffen […] Und waz Schekan der iude mit den iuden von Basel ze Brisach bi der brunnsoffe." - Schreiber, ed., *Urkundenbuch der Stadt Freiburg im Breisgau*, 2:110-111, no. 356.

[20] Mentgen suggested that the accusations spread to Basel, yet there is no indication that anti-Jewish violence there was caused by well-poisoning allegations: Mentgen, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß*, 396-397.

[21] UB Strassburg, 5:174-178, nos. 186, 189; Hoffmann, "Die Würzburger Judenverfolgung von 1349," 99, no. 2; Schreiber, ed., *Urkundenbuch der Stadt Freiburg im Breisgau*, 1:385-391, nos. 196-201; GJ 2:255-256, 746.

of a Christian in order to use his blood.[22] Within a few days, the accusations expanded to include Jews from Winterthur, Schaffhausen and Zurich, who were said to plot against Christians in different ways. As in other cases, the Jews were forced to incriminate each other, and the information about the investigation was sent from town to town. Overall, the accusations focused on the idea of ritual murder or blood libel, yet some elements of mass-poisoning allegations were incorporated into them.[23] One of the victims, named Aron, confessed, in addition to involvement in the murder plot, that the Jews poisoned the air. He reported that they created a poisonous powder out of the blood that they extracted from Christians, and spread it in the air in order to cause a plague that would kill more Christians.[24] When officials from Freiburg informed the local prince, Duke Leopold IV of Austria, about the accusations against the Jews, they included this charge in their account.[25] When Zurich joined the investigation against the Jews, sometime in late July of early August, the accusations included well-poisoning.[26] Still, it is fairly clear that unlike in 1379 and in 1397, in 1401 mass poisoning charges did not play a major role in justifying legal action against Jews. In fact, these charges seem instead like they were added, without much consideration, to a blood libel which was already formed.

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[22] "Da hat ein iud über komen mit einen christen knecht verhiesse im ze gebent drie guldin, daz er im einen cristenen knaben stäche und blut von im ziehe, und hat dem knechte sechs finde gezeiget." - Schreiber, ed., *Urkundenbuch der Stadt Freiburg im Breisgau*, 2:167, no. 365.

[23] Schreiber, ed., *Urkundenbuch der Stadt Freiburg im Breisgau*, 2:167-173, nos. 365-370.

[24] "daz juden den luft vergifftend darumb, daz die cristanheit gedempt werde, hat er verjehen, daz sü das cristanblut laffent dorren, und stossent es zem pulver, und sahgent ese s frü uff ein towe, und davon so kome denne ein sterbat" - Schreiber, ed., *Urkundenbuch der Stadt Freiburg im Breisgau*, 2:170.

[25] "und ouch gedenkent cristenheit ze demment mit vergifftende den lufft" - Schreiber, ed., *Urkundenbuch der Stadt Freiburg im Breisgau*, 2:172.

[26] Ulrich, *Sammlung jüdischer Geschichten*, 103-106 mentions that the Jews were accused of well-poisoning in Zurich in 1401, yet the documents he cites do not state so clearly. Other sources documenting these events also do not refer to well poisoning: *Chronik der Stadt Zürich mit Fortsetzungen,* 161, 164; Heinrich Zeller-Werdmüller, ed, *Die Zürcher Stadtbücher des 14 and 15 Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1899), 1:341-343, nos. 173-174.

Still, it seems that well-poisoning accusations against Jews did not die out, and were possibly brought up again in Zurich in 1420, although without leading to significant violence.[27] In any case, review of these episodes to 1401 reveals a pattern. First, at least in 1379 and 1397, the reemergence of the plague probably played some part in causing the accusations. Second, these accusations were particularly popular in Alsace and the western Alps, with Freiburg and Zurich as the two centers of the phenomenon. Also, these accusations targeted only Jews, and were sometimes connected with other anti-Jewish allegations, like blood libels or poisoning of the air. At the same time, they were directed against individual suspects, not against entire communities.

These conclusions seem reasonable, if one assumes that the memory of the events of 1349 was still vivid in these areas.[28] As we have seen, Freiburg was very active in spreading the allegations in 1349, as officials there investigated Jewish suspects, meticulously collected and recorded their confessions, and sent these documents to other towns.[29] It is very likely that new generations of local administrators learned about the accusations from their predecessors or from the town's archives, and continued to look for evidence proving that the Jews were repeat offenders. On the other hand, while the Jews of Zurich were persecuted in 1349, there is little evidence that it was a significant center of well-poisoning accusations.[30] Still, a glance at the chronicle of Gerhard Sprenger, who wrote in Zurich in the middle of the fifteenth century can teach us something about the manner in which the events of 1349 were remembered there:

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[27] Ulrich, *Sammlung jüdischer Geschichten*, 106-107. Again, it is unclear if the primary sources support Ulrich's claim that well-poisoning accusations took place; I found no evidence of anti-Jewish violence in Zurich in 1420 in other contemporary sources.

[28] And maybe even of the events of 1321, since some lepers were executed at Lausanne: Morard, "Lépreux brûlés à Lausanne en 1321," 238; Borradori, *Mourir au monde,* 84-86, 116.

[29] Above: Ch. 5, pp. 349-352, 372-373; UB Strassburg, 5:174-176, no. 186; Hoffmann, "Die Würzburger Judenverfolgung von 1349," 99, no. 2; Schreiber, ed., *Urkundenbuch der Stadt Freiburg im Breisgau*, 1:385-391, nos. 196-201; GJ 2:255-256.

[30] Heinricus de Diessenhoven, *Chronicon,* 70; Haverkamp, "Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes," 37, 49.

> *In the year of our Lord 1349 the great murderous rumor went out concerning the Jews that they had poisoned all the waters that could be poisoned, whether springs or streams. This same poison first came from the Red Jews, and it was strengthened, they say, with serpents [their venom], and was so foul and devilish, that any person touched by this poison could live no longer than three days. [...] Thus, the Jews were burnt in all countries, nearly all the adult Jews; many children were baptized and adopted. Therefore the Jews were smashed because of the great murder they had committed, and not without just cause.*[31]

Sprenger clearly knew many of the allegations that were directed against the Jews during the days of the Black Death, and even added to them.[32] It is impossible to know to what degree he represented the opinion of the other citizens of Zurich. Still the fact that rumors of 1379 were first presented by the artisan Welti Grebel proves that not only scholars knew these stories.[33] Carlo Ginzburg suggested that the roots of well-poisoning accusations, as well as early witch hunts, in the western Alps stemmed from a long popular tradition. Stories about mysterious evildoers who gathered in the night to craft magic against the public could have been known there for centuries, and may have contributed to the persistence of well-poisoning accusations there.[34] This theory is very difficult to prove, but in any case, it is clear that the idea of well-poisoning was still quite popular in this area and in Alsace in the decades following 1349. Moreover, it was still considered

[31] Translation: Andrew C. Gow, *The Red Jews: Anti-Semitism in an Apocalyptic Age 1200-1600* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 225-227. Also printed in: Ettmuller, ed. *Die Jahrbücher der Stadt Zürich*, 71-72.

[32] Sprenger continued the work of an anonymous fourteenth-century chronicler. It seems that no other contemporary writers associated well-poisoning accusations with the story of red Jews: Gow, *The Red Jews,* 81-85.

[33] Zurich, Staatsarchiv des Kantons Zürich, B VI 190, f. 228v.

[34] Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 66-80. And somewhat more systematically: Martine Ostorero, "The Concept of the Witches' Sabbath in the Alpine Region (1430-1440): Text and Context," in *Witchcraft Mythologies and Persecutions*, ed. Éva Pócs et al. (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008), 22-24. Both authors were apparently unaware of the above-mentioned cases of well-poisoning after 1349, which could actually support their theory. Still, even if one considers these cases, the association between well-poisoning accusations and witch trials is questionable, as we will see.

more than a fable, but an actual scenario, which could, and did, lead to the arrest and execution of Jews.

The allegations just surveyed against the Jews in Alsace and the western Alps in the second half of the fourteenth century represent most of the documented episodes for this period. It is possible that minor cases also happened in Halle in 1382, in Magdeburg in 1384,[35] and in two villages in the mountains of Calabria in 1422.[36] This phenomenon was apparently significant enough, or at least remembered as such, to warrant some attention from Pope Martin V. On 20 February 1422 he reissued the bull *Sicut Iudeis*, which orders the protection of the Jews living under Christian rule, and added to it a list of recent anti-Jewish injuries that forced him to restate the papal position on this matter. One issue was that:

> *Occasionally, it also happens that many Christians, in order that the said Jews would have to pay a ransom, and so that the [Christians] would plunder their goods and wealth, assert fictitious pretexts and excuses [to harm the Jews], so the [Christians] will be able to avoid any obstacle [in achieving their goal]. And they add, in a time of a plague or another disaster, that the Jews throw poison into the springs, and that they mix human blood in their unleavened bread. And [add that] due to such crimes, which they thus charge the [Jews] with unjustly, the [Jews] bring about calamity on [all] people. And because of these*

[35] Siegbert Neufeld, "Die Zeit der Judenschuldentilgungen und -schatzungen in Sachsen-Thüringen," *Thüringisch sächsischer Zeitschrift fur Geschichte und Kunst* 12 (1922), 67 mention these two cases, but I have found no primary sources which refer to them.

[36] Oreste Dito, *Storia* calabrese *e la dimora degli Ebrei in Calabria dal secolo V alla seconda meta del secolo XVI* (Calabria: Licinio Cappelli, 1916), 271 mention these events without referring to primary sources. Other historians cite this source: Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," 27, n. 87; Paolo Preto, *Epidemia, paura e politica nell'Italia moderna* (Roma: Laterza, 1987), 10. However, the most extensive book about the history of the Jews in Calabria, Cesare Colafemmina, *The Jews in Calabria* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), does not refer to well-poisoning accusations in this area.

excuses, the people are moved against these Jews, and abandon them, and bring and afflict on them various persecutions and troubles.[37]

Thus, the pope claimed that natural disasters, and plague years in particular, serve as an excuse to bring well-poisoning accusations or blood libels against the Jews, in an attempt to take over their property. A similar argument was presented by Pope Clement VI in 1348, yet Pope Martin did not cite this earlier text, but discussed the issue as an existing problem.[38] It is hard to say whether the pope was right in his explanation for the accusations, yet it is clear that he saw them as an existing reality, not as an historical tale.

Thus, well-poisoning could have been used effectively as a political leverage against the Jews. The best example of this is the political struggle which surrounded the decision to expel the Jews from Cologne in 1424. As we have seen, the city's large Jewish community was destroyed in 1349 (not due to well-poisoning accusations, though).[39] The Jews returned to Cologne in smaller numbers in 1372, as the local council issued a charter protecting them. However, around 1420 the council faced popular pressure to act against the Jews. First, some of them provided interest loans for living, a trade which often raised Christian objections, as we have seen. Second, many resented the council's decision to ruin the Christian unity of the town by allowing the Jews to return. The issue of Jewish converts in particular drew popular outrage, as many doubted the sincerity of their conversion. In addition to these regular issues, during the crusades against the Hussites, many zealous crusaders passed through Cologne. They blamed the Jews for cooperation with the

[37] "Nonnunquam eciam plurimi Christiani, ut dictos Iudeos redimi facere, ac eos bonis et substanciis suis spoliare, et lapidibus cedere possint, fictis occasionibus et coloribus asserunt, mortalitatum et aliarum calamitatum temporibus, Iudeos ipsos venenum in fontibus iniecisse, et suis azimis humanum sanguinem miscuisse, ob que scelera, eis sic iniuste obiecta, talia astruunt ad perniciem hominum evenire; ex quibus occasionibus populi commoventur contra Iudeos ipsos, eosque cedunt, et variis persecucionibus et molestiis afficiunt et affligunt." - Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, 2:711-712.

[38] Ch. 4, pp. 294, 302-305; Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, 1:396-398, nos. 373, 374.

[39] Above: Ch. 5, pp. 373-376.

heretics, and so the council had to extend special protection to them. But since the charter protecting the Jews was about to expire, the council decided not to renew it, and in August 1423 determined that all Jews would have to leave the city on 1 October of the following year. The Archbishop of Cologne, Dietrich II, opposed this decision, since he insisted that he had partial authority over local Jews, and the council could not expel them without his permission. The archbishop, a powerful political figure, approached King Sigismund and convinced him to support his position.[40] The council of Cologne turned to Pope Martin but did not receive clear support from him.[41] Nevertheless, the Jews were expelled sometime at the end of 1424 or in 1425. In August 1431 the council of Cologne sent a letter to the King Sigismund justifying their decision to expel the Jews in the face of the objections of Archbishop Dietrich (who probably continued to pursue the matter). According to the letter, some of the reasons for the expulsion were the Jewish engagement in usury, the need to protect the Jews from the crusaders, and the desire to keep Cologne a completely Christian city. However, the letter also states that around 1423 there was an outbreak of a plague in the area, and, probably as a consequence the Jews were accused, and convicted, of poisoning wells.[42] It seems that this allegation was added in retrospect to the letter

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[40] Anna-Dorothee von den Brincken, "Das Rechtfertigungsschreiben der Stadt Köln wegen Ausweisung der Juden im Jahre 1424: Zur Motivierung spätmittelalterlicher Judenvertreibungen in West- und Mitteleuropa," *Mitteilungen aus dem Stadtarchiv von Köln* 60 (1971), 305-306, 313-339; Schmandt, *Judei, cives et incole*, 197-207; Shulamit S. Magnus, *Jewish Emancipation in a German City: Cologne, 1798-1871* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 16-18; *Kölner Jahrbücher des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts*, 150.

[41] On 29 August 1424, one of the cardinals set a date for a discussion concerning the claims of Cologne's council against the archbishop on the matter of the expulsion of the Jews: Franz Ritter, "Erzbischof Dietrich von Moers und die Stadt Köln in den Jahren 1414 bis 1424," *Annalen des Historischen Vereins für den Niederrhein* 56 (1893), 72-79, for more about the protection given by archbishop Dietrich to local Jews: 68-71.

[42] "Sunderlingen darumb, want do eyn Schall und Geruchte ussgebrochen was, daz die Juetscheit die Putze und Bronnen bynnen unser Stat fenynet seulden haben gelych sy auch eynsdeils in den Landen umb uns geleigen getain batten, die darumb gericht und untlyft wurden. Davan wir uns do groeslichen besorgeden, eyn Gelouffe von unser Gemeynden zu untsteen, so alz sere kurtzlich dabevor und auch darna die Lude bynnen unser Stat doch gerincklich sturben." - Brincken, "Das Rechtfertigungsschreiben der Stadt Köln," 316-317.

sent to the king in 1431, as the petition sent to the pope on the issue does not include it.[43] The council members were probably eager to justify the expulsion and were worried that the usual arguments against the Jews would not do, especially since they had acted in violation of the king's original decision. Well-poisoning accusations would have strengthened their case.

This was not the only case in which well-poisoning allegations were used to justify or call for a political action against the Jews. The preacher Johann Staler attempted to use well-poisoning allegations, among other accusations, to change the official policy against the Jews of the town of Crailsheim in 1480. He drafted a series of regulations which were intended to limit the presence of Jews in the town. One states:

> *Likewise, [when] one of the faithful [Christians] rents houses to them, he must announce to the Jews, that they must not act wildly […] and [must] not come together against the civil community, nor against the church. [And announce that they must not] use poison or witchcraft, nor infect fountains with poison. And the [Jews] must give an oath about all this."*[44]

The fact that Staler wished all Jews to regularly disavow the practice of well poisoning suggests that he believed, or maybe wanted others to believe, that they might do so unless they were well supervised. This opinion fits well into his regulations, which clearly depict the Jews as usurers, who would plot against Christians and Christianity, given the opportunity. However, these regulations were not an official document, but a draft added to Staler's sermon book. There is no

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[43] Franz Ritter, "Erzbischof Dietrich von Moers," 72-79. The papal decision on this matter is unclear, yet considering Pope Martin's attempt to defend the Jews only two years earlier, it seems unlikely that he supported the council in this case. Moreover, if well-poisoning accusations indeed took place in Cologne in 1423 and were not just invented in retrospect, the council members were probably wise not to mention this to the pope.

[44] "Item quicumque fidelium eis locat domos pro census, debet indicere Iudeis, ne furentur masculos, ne in eis exerceant prestigia, ne tractent aut conspiracionem faciant Cristianis, ne convenient contra commune civitatis nec contra ecclesiam nec utentur veneficys aut maleficys, ne fontes inficiant veneno. Et debent super hoc prestare juramentum." - Johann Staler, *Ordinacio Judeorum*, in Wilhelm Crecelius, "Crailsheimer Juden- und Hebammenordnung von 1480" *Alemannia* 4 (1877), 12.

evidence that the authorities in Crailsheim ever acknowledged them, much less put them into practice.[45]

The cases of Cologne and Crailsheim show that well-poisoning accusations served more as anti-Jewish propaganda than as an actual reason for violence against Jewish communities after 1420. Accusations were presented by the council of Cologne *after the Jews were already expelled*, and by Staler as part of his attempt to promote anti-Jewish legislation in Crailsheim. The contrast with the allegations presented against Jews in Alsace and the western Alps between 1350 and 1420 is clear. Still, some individual Jews were in fact accused of poisoning after 1420. On 12 July 1452, the town of Grasse in Provence opened an official investigation of a Jew named Abraham Bonefoy le Roux. He was accused of poisoning public drinking water sources there, in order to infect Christians.[46] This episode may have been a result of the growing anti-Jewish tendencies in Provence around this time, yet there is no evidence that other Jews were accused of well-poisoning.[47] On 9 March 1474 a Jew named Moses was executed in Regensburg for making poison, though he was not accused of actually using the poison against Christians.[48] Again, this was a time of great tension between Christians and Jews in Regensburg, but this accusation was not directed against other Jews.[49] Jewish doctors were also sometimes accused of poisoning their

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[45] Crecelius, "Crailsheimer Juden- und Hebammenordnung," 16-18. GJ 3:216.

[46] "certos fonts potionare aut infra conductus dictarum fontium certos gropos potionatos inducer et ponere ad finem enpoysegandum christianos" - Gilette Gauthier-Ziegler, *Histoire de Grasse depuis les origines du consulat jusquà̀ la réunion de la Provence à la courone (1155-1482)* (Paris: Picard, 1935), 132, n. 2.

[47] Ram Ben-Shalom, "The Blood Libel in Arles and the Franciscan Mission in Avignon in 1453: 'Paris Manuscript', Hé́b. 631 / 1453," *Zion* 64 (1998), 393-405; Gauthier-Ziegler, *Histoire de Grasse*, 131-132.

[48] "daβ er etlich person in der Stadt Regensburg böse gift zu machen gelert und darumb gelt genomen hab, und hab auch solliche ding darzu dienende aus der appertecken ... begert, das man im aber nit hat geben wöllen und hat auch zugesagt, das er in sollich gift noch Machen wölle, und hab dorumb auch gelt genomen, und wer solich gift … Neuβet, der müβ sterben. Und wie er das gelert hat, findt man in dem püschel, darauf Mosse Jud geschriben steet." - Raphael Straus, *Urkunden und aktenstücke zur geschichte der Juden in Regensburg, 1453-1738* (München: Beck, 1960), 37-38, no. 140.

[49] Elisheva Carlebach, "Between History and Myth: The Regensburg Expulsion in Josel of Rosheim's Sefer HaMiknah," in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi*, ed. Elisheva Carlebach et al. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998), 41-42.

patients. Bernardino of Siena, in a sermon he gave in Padua in 1423, claimed that a Jewish doctor from Avignon killed "many Christians" with his medicine.[50] A Jewish convert who practiced medicine was executed in the Dauphiné in 1433 for a similar charge, as well as other allegations.[51] In Chambéry, a Jewish doctor, and two other Jewish women, were accused of killing some of his patients by giving them potions made out of the head of a dead Christian.[52] In all of these cases, however, the accusations seem to have foucsed on particular individuals rather than whole communities. An actual wave of well-poisoning accusations against Jews most likely did not take place after 1420.

Overall, then, the general trend seems to be a gradual decline of well-poisoning accusations after 1350. The second outbreak of the plague around 1360 led to a wave of anti-Jewish violence in Austria and Poland, which was caused, at least to some degree, by such accusations. In Alsace and the western Alps, an area in which well-poisoning allegations were historically popular, they reemerge several times between 1379 and 1420. However, while in the first case in 1379 well poisoning was the main charge, in later instances this accusation took an ancillary role. Despite a few more questionable examples, it seem that when Pope Martin V denounced well-poisoning accusations in 1422, he was already referring to a declining phenomenon. When such allegations were presented after this date, they were either directed against individuals, as in Grasse in 1452, or were used to justify anti-Jewish legal actions. After 1422, there is no case, as far as the surviving evidence shows, in which a large a number of suspects was put on trial, or in which the accusations

[50] Franco Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons: Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Early Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 178.

[51] Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine and Medieval Society,* 86; Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*, 189.

[52] Costa de Beauregard, "Notes et documents," 115-116, no. 4; Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*, 189.

spread from town to town, as had been the case in 1321 or in 1348-1350. Gradually, well-poisoning accusations ceased to trigger, or be used to justify, anti-Jewish violence.

Well-poisoning accusations against Jews in Christian culture after 1350

As we have just seen, one often can learn about well-poisoning accusations against Jews from trial records, letters written by officials, or legislation. Still it is important to note that the notion that Jews were likely to poison wells was sometimes represented in medieval culture as a general idea, without the context of particular poisoning charges, or anti-Jewish political activity. Before 1321, this kind of cultural representation was used to characterize mostly heretics, and to some degree also lepers and the Muslims of the East although none of these faced particular well-poisoning charges before 1321. Conversely, when it comes to the Jews, these representations were rare before 1321, despite the ongoing tension with Christian majority.[53] This situation changed after the great persecution of 1348-1350. In many places Jews were convicted of well-poisoning, and rumors about the alleged plot to poison Christianity surely reached other places as well, even if authorities chose not to act on them. Maybe as a consequence, the notion that the Jews were mass poisoners appears as a general characterization in various aspects of culture.[54]

The popular *Mandeville's Travels*, which circulated in France starting around 1357, contains a passage that explicitly accuses the Jews of poisoning. As Sir John Mandeville arrives in a certain city in the East, he sees a kind of trees that can be used to produce poison. He then declares: "The Jews sent for this poison one of these years [recently] in order to poison all of Christendom, as I have heard them confess at their death. But thanks be to God they failed in their

[53] See above: Ch. 1, pp. 55-87.

[54] Initially, the accusations of 1321 also gave rise to such cultural representation, but apparently, they were not extensive enough to create a long lasting narrative: Ch. 3, pp. 204-205; *Roman de Renart le contrefait,* 206-207; Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV, and the Jews," 305-306.

undertaking, although they did cause many deaths."[55] This short statement raises several questions: First, one wonders whether the unknown author of this work actually witnessed the persecution of Jews in 1348-1350. Chronologically, this is very possible, yet if the author indeed lived in England or northern France, as some clues in the work indicate, he almost certainly never met Jews there.[56] Moreover, it seems that the author was unsure whether the Jews had failed at their plot or not. This may be another reason to think that he heard about the accusations through distant rumors, and was not actually present at a trial or an execution of Jews suspected of this crime. *Mandeville's Travels* survived in some 300 manuscripts, making it one of the most popular works of the later Middle Ages.[57] One can only guess how many readers (or listeners) were exposed to the notion that the Jews were well poisoners through this text. At the same time, this subject is mentioned only in passing, and does not play an important part in the story.

The French poet Guillaume de Machaut refers much more specifically to accusations against the Jews in a poem he wrote in Reims towards the end of 1349, titled *Jugement du roy de Navarre*. After he describes the horrors of the plague, as well as of the ongoing war with the English, he states:

> *It was the hated Jews,*
>
> *The malicious, the disloyal,*
>
> *Who truly desire and love every evil,*
>
> *Who gave so much gold and silver,*

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[55] "De ce venin auoient enuoie querre les Iuyfz vn de ces ans pour empoisonner toute crestiente, si comme ie leur ay oy dire a la mort en leur confession. Mais Dieu grace ilz faillirent a leur propos. Neentmoins si en furent ils grans mortalites." Malcolm Letts, *Mandeville Travels: Texts and Translations* (London: Ashgate, 1953), 337; Gow, *The Red Jews,* 84; David B. Leshock, "Religious Geography: Designating Jews and Muslims as Foreigners in Medieval England," in *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York: Routledge, 2002), 219-221.

[56] Letts, *Mandeville Travels*, xvii-xix; Francis Tobienne, *Mandeville's Travails: Merging Travel, Theory, and Commentary* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2016), xi-xii.

[57] Tobienne, *Mandeville's Travails*, x-xii.

And promised [these] to Christian people,

So [these Christians] the wells, the rivers and the fountains,

Which have been clear and healthy,

Would poison in many places.

And so the life of many ended,

Because all [the people] who used these [water sources],

Suddenly suffered [and] died. [58]

Thus, Guillaume continues, the Jews were justly punished and killed in many places. He leaves no doubt among his audience regarding the nature of the crime committed by the Jews: they were truly successful in causing the plague through poisoning, and killing many Christians. Interestingly, this passage suggests that the Jews did not poison the wells themselves, but paid (presumably poor) Christians to do so for them. This narrative seem to be more representative of the accusations of 1321 than of 1348-1350.[59] It is possible that Guillaume de Machaut used some of the texts describing the anti-Jewish allegations of 1321 as a basis for his description of later events. If one keeps in mind that there were no Jews in France in 1349, and that Guillaume probably did not witness the persecutions against them, this conjecture seems even more likely. In any case Guillaume was a very influential poet, composer and writer, and while his work was not as popular as *Mandeville's Travels*, he offered a clearer picture of the Jews as well poisoners.[60]

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[58] "Ce fu Judée la honnie, / La mauvaise, la desloyal, / Qui bien het et aimme tout mal. / Qui tant donna d'or et d'argent / Et promist a crestienne gent, / Que puis, rivieres et fonteinnes / Qui estoient cleres et seinnes / En pluseurs lieus empoisonnerent, / Dont pluseurs leurs vies finerent; / Car trestuit cil qui en usoient / Assez soudeinnement moroient." - Guillaume de Machaut, *Jugement du roy de Navarre*, in *Oeuvres de Guillaume de Machaut,* ed. Ernest Hoepffner, vol. 1 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1908), 144-145.

[59] See above: Ch. 3, pp. 176-177, 196-208; on the other hand: Ch. 5, pp. 311-314.

[60] For background about Guillaume de Machaut's work and influence: Deborah McGrady and Jennifer Bain, *A Companion to Guillaume de Machaut* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 1-14. Ernest Wickersheimer used the text cited above as a major example of contemporary views on well-poisoning accusations: Wickersheimer, *Les Accusations d'empoisonnement portées pendant la première moitié du XIVe siècle contre les lépreux et les juifs; leurs relations*

One can find a few mentions of Jews as poisoners also in medical texts. Plague treatises were a common late medieval genre, and included theories about causes for the disease, analysis of its influence over the human body, and possible cures or preventative measures. Many of these texts circulated in several copies, and were very popular, probably due to the recurring nature of the Black Death.[61] As we have seen, Alphonso of Cordova claimed in 1348 that the plague was a result of intentional poisoning. Guy de Chauliac and Conrad of Megenberg mentioned as part of their explanation for the disease that the Jews were accused of poisoning wells, though both doubted the veracity of this claim.[62] Doctors of later generations continued to debate this issue. Heinrich Rybinitz, a doctor from Wroclaw, referred to the notion that the Jews caused the Black Death through poisoning in a plague treatise that he wrote around 1370. His explanations for the plague are mostly astrological, but when he considers the possibility that it was actually caused by poisoning, he states:

> *And in fact, there is some truth to that, because the Jews of the city of Milan know of one mountain, which lies by the city. There a certain herb grows, which is called Vapellus [possibly Aconitum Napellus or monk's-hood, which is indeed very toxic] and it is the worst of all other poisons, and can kill a man instantly. […] And also the Jews are not allowed to approach this mountain, so they may not acquire this herb, lest they destroy the whole world, or many Christians, with this poisonous herb.*[63]

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avec les épidémies de peste - communication faite au IVe Congrès international d'histoire de la médecine, Bruxelles, avril 1923 (Anvers: De Vlijt, 1927), 3-5.

[61] Guerchberg, "The Controversy over the Alleged Sowers of the Black Death," 209-210.

[62] Above: Ch. 4, pp. 256-260, Ch. 5, p. 380; Alphonso of Cordova, "Epistola et regimen Alphontii Cordubensis de pestilentia," 223-226; Guy de Chauliac, *Inventarium sive chirurgia magna*, 1:118; Conradus Megenbergensis, *Tractatus de mortalitate in Alamannia*, 366-368.

[63] "et in rei veritate habet in se aliquid veritatis, quia Judei in Mediolana civitate noscunt unum montem iacentem prope civitatem Mediolanensem, in quo monte crescit una herba, quae vocatur vapellus et est venenum pessimum inter omne venenum et interficit hominem in instanti […] nec etiam permittunt Judeos adire talem montem, ut non

As other historians have noted, the argument presented in this passage is very odd.[64] Was the doctor from Wroclaw really more aware of the folklore in Milan than of the accusations which were actually directed against the Jews in the Empire in 1348-1350, or in Poland in 1360? Why did he turned to this unusual story to justify the notion that the plague was caused by poisoning, and not to other sources of information on the subject, which were surely available to him? The answer may be that Heinrich Rybinitz was indeed convinced that the plague was caused by astronomical factors, but also knew of the tradition blaming the Jews for it. Rather than rejecting this tradition offhand, he included it in his treaties, but clearly treated it as a legend, and not as a medical argument.[65]

Heinrich Lamme, a German physician who wrote at the beginning of the fifteenth century, may have also considered the notion that the Jews poisoned wells to cause the plague plausible. When describing the plague of 1410 in Saxony, he noted that it spread so quickly, as if caused by poison.[66] This reminded him of a story about a potent poison produced in India from a certain kind of a tree, which could kill its victims instantly. This is probably a reference to the passage from *Mandeville's Travels* cited above.[67] As for the Jews, Lamme referred to Guy de Chauliac who mentioned the accusations against them, and like him, was unsure whether these accusations were true.[68] While Lamme was not an influential writer, his essay shows that he read and analyzed some

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aquirant sibi istam herbam, ne forte totum mundum vel quasi multos Christianos cum hac herba venenosa interficiant." - Heinrich Rybinitz, "Tractatus de praeservationibus et remediis pestilentiarum", *Sudhoff's Archiv* 4 (1911), 215.

[64] Guerchberg, "The Controversy over the Alleged Sowers of the Black Death," 217; Gow, *The Red Jews,* 84.

[65] Gow suggests a somewhat similar explanation to Guerchberg's querys about this text: Guerchberg, "The Controversy over the Alleged Sowers of the Black Death," 217; Gow, *The Red Jews,* 84, n. 78.

[66] "Sic igitur versus orientem serpens venit nunc in Saxoniam, quod similiter est interdum ac si de cadaueribus bellorum fuisset progenita vel aliquarum herbarum intoxicatarum uel veneno a sapiente pol." – Heinrich Lamme, "Collectum de peste," *Sudhoff's Archiv* 11 (1918), 149.

[67] "Scribit enim miles anglicanus, in yndia fore arbores, que portant farinam, qui gustantur de ea, citius morientur"- Heinrich Lamme, "Collectum de peste," 149; Guerchberg, "The Controversy over the Alleged Sowers of the Black Death," 214; Letts, *Mandeville Travels*, 337.

[68] "de quibus diffamati errant Judei, quondam christianos intoxicasse, cum fuerit illa prima magna pestilencia, de qua scribit Gwido, quod fuerat anno domini 1348" - Heinrich Lamme, "Collectum de peste," 149; Guerchberg, "The

of the sources mentioned above to determine whether it was likely that the Jews were indeed poisoners. Others may have done the same, yet despite these examples, it must be stressed that medieval plague treatises contain only a few references to the issue of intentional poisoning. Close to 300 such texts survive, yet they mention the issue very rarely.[69] Usually, those who used medical texts to find a cure for the plague found no statements marking the Jews as poisoners, and surely no advice to limit their access to public water sources.

None of the writers mentioned in this section, whether authors of imaginative works or doctors, cited chronicles or other historical sources (at least not directly). Still, these were certainly available, as we have noted. Around thirty different chronicles written in Latin and German between 1348 and 1500 mention well-poisoning accusations against Jews.[70] Around ten more mention the persecution of the Jews in 1321, and the charges brought against them.[71] Most of these chronicles do not offer general observations about the Jews, but rather report about particular episodes of persecution. Thus, only a few of them state the writers' opinions about the veracity of the accusations, or suggest that the Jews were likely to repeat such actions in the future. Still, these chronicles served their purpose, that is to prevent these events from being completely forgotten. To be sure, none of these texts was nearly as popular as the poetry of Guillaume de Machaut and certainly not as *Mandeville's Travels.* Still, the events of 1348-1350 certainty left a mark in contemporary historical writing, and those who turned to this literature often found mentions of well-poisoning accusations. We have seen, for example, that when Hájek of Libočan composed

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Controversy over the Alleged Sowers of the Black Death," 214-215; Guy de Chauliac, *Inventarium sive chirurgia magna*, 1:118.

[69] Guerchberg, "The Controversy over the Alleged Sowers of the Black Death," 208-221. Based on the texts printed in: Sudhoff, "Pestschriften aus des ersten 150 Jahren nach der Epidemie des 'schwarzen Todes' 1348."

[70] See above: Ch. 5, pp. 315-316, n. 8.

[71] See above: Ch. 2, p. 112, nn. 64-65: The chronicles written in the south of France mention only the persecution of lepers, as do the papal chronicles by Petrus de Herenthales and Amalricus Augerii. The rest of the chronicles report about the persecution of the Jews.

his chronicle in the middle of the sixteenth century, he was so inspired by these descriptions, that he added a couple of invented well-poisoning episodes to his work.[72] Other chroniclers avoided such a distortion of their sources, but may have been no less inspired.

But not only scholars knew these stories, as well-poisoning accusations also continued to play some part in Jewish-Christian religious debate. Sometime in 1338 the small Jewish community of Deggendorf, in eastern Bavaria, was attacked and massacred. Around the same time, a new local church was established. Manfred Eder has shown that these two events were not connected originally, yet over time local folklore tied them together. Allegedly, the Jews were killed on September 1337 because they were found guilty of desecrating a host, and the church was built by the Christian community to atone for allowing such a crime to take place. This story, however, was not formulated until the 1370s or 1380s as a propaganda aimed to bolster the cult around the (relatively) new church. It provided a narrative which tied the church to a pseudo-historical act of protecting the host, or at least avenging its desecration, an act worthy of veneration.[73] This story continued to evolve and include more details, until at some point in the early fifteenth century a well-poisoning allegation was added to it. The earliest source containing this detail is a poem composed by an anonymous local writer, which is mainly focused on the tale of the host desecration in Deggendorf:

The Jews' heretical poison,

They all planted [it] in the wells,

In which it was found,

[72] See above: Ch. 1, pp. 19-22; Hájek z Libočan, *Kronika česká*, 2:316-318, 3:229-231.

[73] Manfred Eder, *Die "Deggendorfer Gnad" - Entstehung und Entwicklung einer Hostienwallfahrt im Kontext von Theologie und Geschichte* (Passau: Passavia, 1992), 189-229; Mitchell B. Merback, *Pilgrimage and Pogrom: Violence, Memory, and Visual Culture at the Host-Miracle Shrines of Germany and Austria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 33-36; Rubin, *Gentile Tales,* 54-56.

And many died a sudden death,

[As] Christians had a miserable hardship,

In the city and in the country.[74]

These few lines do not fit well into the narrative presenting the desecration of the host, the discovery of the act, and the punishment of the Jews and the building of the church. Thus, the structure of the poem is somewhat confused, and the order of events unclear. Still, the poet decided to include an allegation of well-poisoning in his work, probably as an additional manner to show the wickedness of the Jews. No other medieval writers included this detail in a description of the Deggendorf host desecration, yet some early modern ones did. In this way the narrative of well-poisoning in Deggendorf became a part of local folklore, even if it is fairly clear that no such accusation was ever directed against local Jews.[75]

The fact that the anonymous poet who told the legend of the Deggendorf host desecration chose to include the well-poisoning allegation in his work indicates that this kind of accusation was still somewhat popular during the fifteenth century, at least as a literary motif. Thus it may not be surprising to discover this accusation again in early modern anti-Jewish propaganda. Martin Luther, in *Von den Juden vnd jren Lügen* (About the Jews and their Lies, 1543), returned to this allegation. He told about a Jew who used poison made of basilisk to poison the air.[76] In two other

[74] "Der iuden keczerlich gifft / Legten sy al in dy prünnen / Inwendig gifft wart gewunden / Der vil und starb des iahen todcz / Crist hab klägligs nat / In der stat und auf dem landt" - Eder, *Die "Deggendorfer Gnad",* 233. Partly translated in Dean Phillip Bell, *Sacred Communities: Jewish and Christian Identities in Fifteenth-Century Germany* (Boston: Brill, 2001), 107.

[75] Eder, *Die "Deggendorfer Gnad",* 259-260, 268, 395, 569, 574.

[76] "Und wo du einen Jüden sihest oder hörest leren, da dencke nicht anderst, den das du einen gifftigen Basilisken hörest, der auch mit dem gesicht die Leute vergifftet und tödtet" – Martin Luther, *Von den Juden vnd jren Lügen* (Wittemberg: Hans Lufft, 1543), no page numbers. Luther developed this anti-Jewish sentiment over time, and it is more prominent in his later writings: Thomas Kaufmann, "Luther and the Jews," in *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation in sixteenth-century Germany*, ed. Dean Phillip Bell and Stephen G. Burnett (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 69-104.

cases, he mentioned well-poisoning as one of the crimes committed by the Jews, in addition to host desecration and ritual murder.[77] These three accusations originated in different times and places during the Middle Ages, but during the fourteenth century became the most popular anti-Jewish allegations.[78] Luther, in short, was using and reaffirming the medieval anti-Jewish narratives. This kind of language was not unique to Protestant pamphlets. The Catholic reformer Johann Eck published in 1541 a whole book dedicated to establishing a range of anti-Jewish accusations, including mass poisoning. He dedicated a chapter to the notion that the Jews caused events of mass mortality and described alleged historical events in which the Jews poisoned wells, including the persecution of 1321.[79] These statements should be contextualized and understood as part of the heated debate regarding the role of the Jews in Christian society during the Reformation.[80] For the purpose of this study, they show that well-poisoning accusations did not disappear from Jewish-Christian debate, and were still in use during the sixteenth century.

Thus well-poisoning allegations continued to play some role in Christian culture into the early modern period, despite the fact that there were very few (if any) actual cases of anti-Jewish violence grounded in such accusations after 1420. Poets, historians, religious reformers and even doctors occasionally referred to this idea, without claiming that the Jews returned to their old ways. They often suggested that the Jews should not be trusted, or that they should not be forgiven for such a crime, but not that the wells had been poisoned again.

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[77] "Wie sie die Brunnen vergifftet, heimlich gemordet, Kinder gestolen, wie droben gemeldet." ; "Wie sie den offtmals drüber verbrand sind, das sie beschüldigt gewest, als hetten sie Wasser und Brün vergifftet, Kinder gestolen, zepfrimet und zuhechelt, damit sie an der Christen blut jr mütlin heimlich kületen." - Luther, *Von den Juden vnd jren Lügen.*

[78] Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Anti-Semitism*, 195-298; Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, 132-189; Toch, *Die Juden im mittelalterlichen Reich*, 55-68; Bell, *Sacred Communities*, 105-120; GJ 3:2299-2308.

[79] Johannes Eck, *Ains Juden büechlins verlegung* (Ingoldstat: Weissenhorn, 1541), Ch. 7, no page numbers. For background: Robert Bireley, "The Catholic Reform, Jews, and Judaism in Sixteenth-century Germany," in Bell and Burnett, *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation*, 250-254.

[80] Bell and Burnett, *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation,* 3-356.

Well-poisoning accusations against non-Jews

As we have seen, the accusations of 1348-1350 were not limited to Jews. Marginalized Christians, often poor or foreign, Jewish converts and even Mendicants were suspected of poisoning wells.[81] The Jews were indeed the main suspects, and so most of these accusations were directed against them after 1350, and they were sometimes depicted in European culture as poisoners. At the same time, non-Jews were still sometimes accused of mass poisoning, and even well-poisoning in particular.

In September 1390 six men were investigated, convicted and executed for well-poisoning in Paris; in November, another woman suffered a similar fate.[82] The trials were conducted in the Châtelet of Paris, the royal institution in charge of dealing with severe crimes, particularly those considered lèse-majesté. The suspects, as we will see, were brought from all around central France to face the royal court.[83] Since this was a major court, several judges, inquisitors, notaries and other officials were involved in each case, but three names appear again and again: Guillaume Porel, Jean Truquam and Gerard de la Haye, who served as either judges or lead investigators in almost all of the cases. These three were probably those who accepted the notion that a well-poisoning plot did occur, and forced the suspects to admit to this crime, under torture or the threat of torture.[84] But while they promoted the notion of a plot, they did not invent it. The chronicler Michel Pintoin, known as the monk of Saint-Denis, reports in his chronicle that rumors about well-

[81] See above: Ch. 4, pp. 248-267, 274-277, 290-293, 301; Ch. 5, pp. 311-314, 367-369.

[82] Trial records are printed in: Henri Duplès-Agier, *Registre criminel du Châtelet de Paris*: *du 6 septembre 1389 au 18 mai 1392* (Paris: C. Lahure, 1861-1864), 1:419-480, 2:1-6. See also Augustin Cabanès, and Lucien Nass, *Poisons et sortilèges* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1903), 1:158-170.

[83] Esther Cohen, "Patterns of Crime in Fourteenth-Century Paris," French *Historical Studies* 11 (1980), 308-309; Bronisław Geremek, *The Margins of Society in Late Medieval Paris*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 47-53.

[84] Duplès-Agier, *Registre criminel du Châtelet*, 1:438-339, 467, 475, 2:4.

poisoning began around Chartres in July. Suspects, however, were only arrested around the end of August.[85] Still, on 22 July Guillaume Porel presided over a case of a hermit named Jean le Porchier, who was accused, and convicted, of involvement in a plot to poison King Charles VI.[86] It is likely that the trials in September were the final act in an affair which started around July, in the area of Chartres.

Four suspects were investigated and convicted in the Châtelet between 5 and 10 September 1390. All were indeed arrested around Chartres, in Orléans, Blois and the village of La Ferté-Bernard. One of these men, Regnaut de Poilly, provided a long confession in which he acknowledged poisoning multiple wells, mostly around Orléans, but also in Paris and in the area of Reims. Allegedly, a mysterious man offered him a large sum to do so, and Regnaut, who was apparently not wealthy, accepted his offer.[87] The three other suspects supplied the same basic facts: different persons whom they did not knew well offered them large amounts of money to poison wells around Chartres, Le Mans and Orléans, and so they did. They admitted to poisoning wells not only in the cities, but also in many nearby villages, and so the record gives the impression that they whole area was infected. As in other official investigations of well-poisoning, the suspects were manipulated to frame each other. Regnaut de Poilly mentioned Jean de Blois as an accomplice, and Jean named Julien Bernier. Martin Le Breton accused both Regnaut de Poilly and Julien Bernier of involvement in the plot. The impression that a small group of poisoners acted

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[85] "mense jullio in partibus Carnotensibus fonts et puteos in toxicatos veneno rumor publicus refferbat" - Michel Pintoin, *Chronique du religieux de Saint-Denys, contenant le régne de Charles VI, de 1380 à 1422,* ed. Louis François Bellaguet (Paris: Crapelet, 1839), 1:682; Duplès-Agier, *Registre criminel du Châtelet*, 1:440, 446, 470.

[86] Duplès-Agier, *Registre criminel du Châtelet*, 1:310-322. This kind of crime was much more common than well-poisoning: Collard, *The Crime of Poison*, 87-93; Lewin, *Die Gifte in der Weltgeschichte*, 223-362.

[87] Duplès-Agier, *Registre criminel du Châtelet*, 1:419-439, here, 421-424.

together to systematically poison an entire area was the result of a thorough questioning by the investigators mentioned above.[88]

Another two suspects were put on trial for poisoning wells on 29 and 30 September, Pierre de Toulouse and Alips La Pichoise. A woman, Jehannin le Fournier, was also investigated and convicted for the same crime on 23 November.[89] Three more men were arrested sometime before 23 November, based on the confessions given by the suspects investigated in September, and faced similar charges. One of them named Jehannin as an accomplice and led to her arrest.[90] The scope of the alleged plot expanded now to include also Tours, where Jehannin was arrested, and Toulouse, where Pierre was. In these cases, the suspects did not mention each other, despite the fact that two of them were kept prisoner at the Châtelet at the same time. It is possible that Pierre from Toulouse knew nothing about Alips from Le Mans, and Jehannin was not aware of the men convicted two months before her trial. The judges, however, were still Guillaume Porel and Jean Truquam, while Gerart de la Haye was involved in two of the additional three cases. Thus, it may not be surprising that the charges remained fairly similar, as the suspects again confessed to poisoning a large number of wells for a large sum of money. And so they, like the four men who faced similar charges in early September, were executed.

What was the reason for this new wave of well-poisoning accusations in central France? The obvious possible cause, a new outbreak of the Black Death, is not convincing, as there was no such outbreak in the relevant areas in 1390.[91] The trial records point in a different direction. As we

[88] Duplès-Agier, *Registre criminel du Châtelet*, 1:419-469. Compare: Ch. 5, pp. 330-341; UB Strassburg 5:167-174, no. 185.

[89] Duplès-Agier, *Registre criminel du Châtelet*, 1:469-480, 2:1-6.

[90] Henri Sauval, ed. *Histoire et recherches des antiquités de la ville de Paris* (Paris: Charles Moette, 1724), 3:262.

[91] There was an outbreak around Paris in 1387, but in the next three years the plague hit mostly the South: Biraben, *Les Hommes et la peste*, 378.

have seen, the suspects, who were poor, were said to have been offered a chance to become rich by joining the plot. When Regnaut de Poilly met the two men who gave him the poison, one of them told him: "my friend, you have been a poor man, and if you would do what we have discussed, we will make you rich." The other alleged organizers of the plot conveyed a similar promise to the other suspects.[92] Michel Pintoin described the accused as "some worthless men, who are so oppressed by poverty that they search around for alms every day," or, simply put, beggars.[93] We have seen that the poor, and unknown beggars in particular, were accused of well-poisoning in Provence and Languedoc in 1348. The plague created at that time a great wave of refugees, who filled the cities, and were distrusted by local officials.[94] Similarly, the 1380s were also a period when an unusual number of beggars appeared in the cities of France leading to class struggles. The Hundred Years' War caused many to lose their homes and property, and when the fighting ceased (as was the case between 1380 and 1389), unoccupied soldiers joined the refugees. Recurring waves of the plague also made it difficult for these people to reestablish themselves in the countryside, and they found their way to the cities. This wave of refugees certainly increased social tensions, and the early 1380s were years of recurring urban revolts in northern France. Municipal authorities were unable, and unwilling, to support the many poor and beggars, and crime was on the rise.[95] In February 1389, for example, the *prévôte* of Paris issued a proclamation stating that vagabonds arriving in the city had to work, and were not allowed to live as beggars. Beggars were

[92] "Mon ami, vous eftes povres homs, et se vous voulez faire ce que nous vous dirons, nous vous ferons riche homme." Duplès-Agier, *Registre criminel du Châtelet*, 1:421. Also see: 1:422-424, 443-445, 453, 458, 471, 476, 2:3.

[93] "quorumdam contemptibilium virorum , qui cotidiana inopia pressi hostiatim elemosinas querebant." - Michel Pintoin, *Chronique du religieux de Saint-Denys,* 1:682; Geremek, *The Margins of Society,* 200-203.

[94] See above: Ch. 4, pp. 251-255, 263-267.

[95] Cohen, "Patterns of Crime in Fourteenth-Century Paris," 307-308; Léon Mirot, *Les insurrections urbaines au début du règne de Charles VI (1380-1383): leurs causes, leurs conséquences* (Paris: Ancienne Librairie Thorin et fils, 1905), 75-196; Biraben, *Les Hommes et la peste*, 378. These phenomena were, to some degree, a manifestation of general European trends: Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages*, 191-294; Cohn, "Popular Insurrection and the Black Death," 199-204; Geremek, *The Margins of Society,* 6-95.

presented in this document as lazy, wicked, and causing damage to the entire community by their carelessness.[96] Considering these circumstances, the distrust towards urban beggars seems clearer. Indeed, few of them were accused of poisoning wells, but once these rumors appeared, the unknown poor were perceived as the likely suspects.[97]

A political issue which probably gave rise to well-poisoning accusations was the royal aversion to the Dominican order. In 1389, King Charles VI was conducting a major effort to gain control of the kingdom, which was under the rule of his uncles, who served as regents until 1388. Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy, was the most powerful of these regents, and it was necessary to limit his power in order to control the Crown. Thus, Charles decided to act against the Dominicans of France, who were under the sponsorship of Duke Philip. Following a case in which a Dominican, Juan of Monzón, was convicted of heresy, he ordered the banishment of the Dominicans from the University of Paris and from the city.[98] It is not surprising therefore that the royal investigators in the Châtelet tried to implicate the Dominicans in involvement in the poisoning plot of 1390. Many of the suspects claimed that some of the men who asked and paid them to poison wells were Dominican friars (or, in their French name, Jacobins).[99] This detail occurs in the records so frequently that it cannot be a coincidence or the result of simple anti-fraternal tendencies. We have seen that in 1348, Mendicants in Aragon were suspected of

[96] Geremek, *The Margins of Society,* 35-36.

[97] Michel Pintoin also states that the reason for the crime was "avaricia et cupiditas" - Michel Pintoin, *Chronique du religieux de Saint-Denys,* 1:682.

[98] Michel Pintoin, *Chronique du religieux de Saint-Denys,* 1:576-583; Jan R. Veenstra, *Magic and Divination at the Courts of Burgundy and France: Text and Context of Laurens Pignon's Contre les devineurs (1411)* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 29-30; John B. Henneman, *Olivier de Clisson and Political Society under Charles V and Charles VI* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 131-140; Richard Vaughan, *Philip the Bold: The Formation of the Burgundian State* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2002), 39-58.

[99] Duplès-Agier, *Registre criminel du Châtelet*, 1:430, 434, 436, 442-444, 447, 451, 458-459, 473; 2:3,5.

poisoning wells, but in 1390 there was no plague.[100] The most likely reason for the implication of the Dominicans in this affair is that there was a royal decision to act against them, and the judges at the Châtelet followed it. Michel Pintoin adds interesting details about this issue:

> *Yet preaching brothers of the Jacobite Order were then held suspect for these things. This, however, was never proven, for they were found completely innocent by those in charge of the law in Paris. At the time, the main people responsible for these crimes, after their evil deeds were revealed, were executed, as they deserved, [and the judge] ordered. And then, they [the Dominicans] offered their necks to the magistrate to be pierced, stating that they knew nothing about the poisoners. Yet they knew that under their long and black robes, the [poisoners] indeed carried a white one, as religious do.*[101]

Thus, according to this account the Dominicans claimed that they did not know the poisoners, and at the same time that these poisoners were only dressed up as members of their order, and were in fact another kind of itinerant cleric (possibly Franciscans).[102] It is unclear how this peculiar argument saved them from punishment, yet it seems that at this time no major action was taken against them.[103] Still, it is clear that the investigators made an effort to implicate them in well-poisoning.

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[100] Ch. 4, pp. 274-277; Geltner, *The Making of Medieval Antifraternalism,* 45-75; Biraben, *Les Hommes et la peste*, 378. Interestingly, Dominicans were also suspected of well-poisoning around Ulm: Heinrich Seuse, *Das Buch von dem Diener*, in Heinrich Seuse, *Deutsche Schriften*, ed. Karl Bihlmeyer (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1907), Ch. 25, 74-78. Translated in: Horrox, *The Black Death*, 224-226.

[101] "Hujus tamen composicionis fratres predicatores Jacobite tunc habiti sunt suspecti. Quod tamen pro comperto non habui. Nam jussu Parisiensis prepositi insontibus absolutis, cum principals maleficii, scelere cognito, capite plecti, ut meruerant, precepisset, et cervices lictori preberent percuciendas , fassi sunt quod venencos ignorabant, sciebant tamen quod desuper habitum longum et nigrum, subtus vero album ut religiosi defferebant. - Michel Pintoin, *Chronique du religieux de Saint-Denys,* 1:684.

[102] One of the suspects, Alips la Pichoise, actually blamed a Franciscan: Duplès-Agier, *Registre criminel du Châtelet*, 1:477.

[103] One Dominican was indeed arrested and convicted, in addition two to other religious, but there is no evidence that Dominicans were generally arrested: Sauval, ed. *Histoire et recherches*, 3:262.

It is clear that King Charles was the one who initiated the investigation of the plot. On 17 August, less than three weeks before the trials at the Châtelet opened, he ordered the action of royal officials in the matter. Jean Truquam and Gerard de la Haye both received a letter signed by the king himself, ordering them to travel to the towns of Blois and Vendôme to investigate the issue. The king also promised them a significant amount for their efforts. On 12 September, that is two days after the first group of suspects was convicted in the Châtelet, the king issued additional letters, requesting the expansion of the investigation to additional locations, including Le Mans, Tours and Rouen, which, as we have seen, the investigators did. The payment for these two officials, who were working under royal mandate, was later approved by the *prévôte* of Paris.[104] Therefore, the investigation was not a private initiative of the officials at the Châtelet, but an effort ordered and financed by the king.

Another detail in the records clarifies further the political background to the accusations. One of the suspects, Pierre de Toulouse, claimed that he received the poison from a hermit called Jean de Flanders, who asked him to poison wells around his hometown. When Pierre wondered why he wanted him to do so, Jean answered:

> *Surely, my friend, [I ask] this because of the great damage that the king of France has caused, and is still causing, in Flanders. And because the people of Flanders cannot accept this, or consider what else he would be able to do to harm them. And they cannot have vengeance against the king of France or his allies, unless through poisoning*.[105]

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[104] Sauval, ed. *Histoire et recherches*, 3:665-666.

[105] “Certes, amis, c’est pour les grans domaiges que le roy de France a fais et fait faire en Flanders, et la cause que les gens de Flanders ne regardent pas ne ne pevent veoir que autrement ilz puissant grever ne avoir vengence du roy de France ne de ses aliez, se ce n’est par empoisonnement.” - Duplès-Agier, *Registre criminel du Châtelet*, 1:472.

This passage, which depicts the alleged plot as an attempt at revenge on the part of Flanders against the king of France, raises many questions. Indeed, Flanders and France had a history of disputes over the attempts of the French Crown to take over the county. Still, in 1390 there was no state of war between the two, and England, despite a ceasefire agreement, was by far the major enemy of France. The key to solving this puzzle seems to be, again, Philip the Bold. He inherited the right to rule Flanders through marriage, but needed to enlist the help of the French army to execute his right. The war against the rebels in Flanders lasted from 1382 to 1385, and indeed caused much destruction. However, when Charles took the Crown in 1388, the county was well under the control of Philip, and no actual violence occurred there.[106] Thus, it seems likely that the notion that rebels from Flanders organized the well-poisoning plot was another attempt to undermine Philip's political position. Indeed, Regnaut de Poilly also stated that some of the poisoners came from the duchy of Burgundy, Philip's major domain.[107] According to this narrative, his subjects, both old and new, were the mortal enemies of France, and he was unable to rule them. Moreover, the war to take over Flanders that he himself initiated as a regent was allegedly the reason for the danger facing the realm in 1390. Apparently, one or more of the investigators of the Châtelet, perhaps Guillaume Porel who presided over the case, was anxious to blame to plot on Philip the Bold, on his men, or his subjects. However, unlike the Dominicans who had to face actual charges, it seems that no Flemish were arrested or investigated.[108] In this instance, the attempt to transfer the accusations to another minority group was too ambitious.

[106] Henneman, *Olivier de Clisson*, 107-113, 136; Vaughan, *Philip the Bold*, 16-38.

[107] Duplès-Agier, *Registre criminel du Châtelet*, 1:433-434; Vaughan, *Philip the Bold*, 113-125.

[108] None of the other suspects mentioned Flanders, or suggested that the organizers of the plot were foreigners. Michel Pintoin also said nothing about this point.

To sum up, the alleged plot of 1390 probably started as popular rumor around Chartres and Orléans. Local officials there seem to have ignored it at first, but during the second half of August they arrested the usual suspects, that is a few unknown beggars. The affair, however, did not end at that, since the king intervened and sent his men to investigate the charges. The crime was soon declared as an action against the realm, and the suspects were sent to Paris to be prosecuted at the royal court. Some of the judges and investigators at the Châtelet, possibly by the orders of the king, attempted to use the situation to promote the political interests of the Crown. In particular, they tried to depict the plot as organized by the Dominicans or by the citizens of Flanders, both associated with Philip the Bold, the main political rival of King Charles VI. Yet there is no evidence that this political maneuver had much effect, as the Dominicans were apparently able to talk themselves out of the court, and no Flemish were arrested. The beggars were the only ones who eventually ended up at the stake.

This incident was a unique case of a widespread well-poisoning wave against Christians after 1350, as far as the evidence reveals. Still, the notion of well-poisoning appeared again in 1460 in the town of Arras, in northern France. At the time, one of the first major witch trials conducted outside of the western Alps took place there; some thirty men and women were accused, and some of them were eventually executed. The charges against these suspects included mostly acts of sorcery and heresy,[109] but well-poisoning found its way into the list. An anonymous account of the trials reports that: "they poison wells and streams in a fairly similar manner [i.e. through sorcery]".[110] Another anonymous summary of the charges, written around Lyon, states: "they [the

[109] Franck Mercier, *La vauderie d'Arras: une chasse aux sorcières à l'automne du Moyen-Âge* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2006), 7-13.

[110] "Inficiunt puteos et fluvios modo satis consimili" - *Recollectio casus, status et condicionis Valdensium ydolatrarum*, Hansen, 167.

witches] infect often fountains and drinkable water with the said poisons, so people or animals that drink from it would die. In fact, as they at some point confessed, they were throwing this diabolical poison in fountains, lakes and streams."[111] The original records from the trials at Arras do not survive. The fact that two of the existing accounts claim that the suspects of sorcery were also accused of well-poisoning may indicate that such a charge was indeed brought up, although the fact that other sources do not mention it, and that it is discussed only briefly in the sources above, suggests that it was not central to the case.[112] Unlike the allegations of 1390, those of 1460 lacked specific details, and were apparently no more than a rough attempt to denigrate the "heretics".

The evidence from Arras brings up a more general question: were witches often accused of well-poisoning? We have seen that these accusations were sometimes transferred from one minority group to another, and (so-called) witches were likely candidates. The list of allegations made against those suspected of sorcery is indeed a long one, ranging from administering love potions to manipulating the weather. Witches were also often accused of poisoning or causing sickness through magic, and the separation between these two crimes is not always clear in fifteenth-century texts.[113] As we have noted, Carlo Ginzburg claims that well-poisoning accusations and the first witch trials were rooted in the same cultural background, and it is not a coincidence that both phenomena prospered in the western Alps. He points out "Jewish" characteristics of the accusations against sorcerers, most notably the witches' Sabbath, as evidence for this connection.[114] Based on his theory, one would expect to see sorcerers accused of well-

[111] "fontes quandoque et aquas potabiles prefatis intoxicis, ut moriantur homines et pecudes inde potantes, inficiunt. Quinymo ut quandoque confessi sunt, in fontibus, stagnis et fluminibus dicta dyabolica venena iacientes." – *La Vauderye de Lyonois en brief*, Hansen, 194.

[112] Hansen, 183-187. Later sources expanded on the issue, but contemporary sources do not add much: Mercier, *La vauderie d'Arras,* 87-97.

[113] Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, 24, 34, 41, 49-50, 118-121, 124, 137-138, 147; Hansen, 38-254.

[114] Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 66-80; Ostorero, "The Concept of the Witches' Sabbath," 15-27.

poisoning. This is especially true given the fact that well-poisoning allegations against Jews continued in the western Alps until the early fifteenth century, that is almost until the time when the first witch trials occurred in the same geographical area.[115] However, other than in Arras, witches were not accused of well-poisoning during the fifteenth century.

Still, in a few cases, sorcerers were alleged to infect the air with poisonous powder. Johannes Nider, a Dominican theologian who wrote one of the first texts about witchcraft in 1437, reported about a man and a woman who were accused of sorcery in the village of Boltigen, east of Lausanne. People searched their houses to find the poison the sorcerers allegedly hid there, but they could not find any: "possibly because it was reduced to powder, or [because] they carried powders to be placed over the earth, and in the same year the women and all the farm animals were rendered infertile."[116] Peter of Greyerz wrote around 1450: "they make certain powders from the internal organs of poor men mixed with the said poisonous animals, all pulverized into one, [and] due to the said alliance [with the devil] [and] they spread it through the air on cloudy days. And those who touched these powders either died or became gravely ill, and suffered for a long time."[117] In 1453, a group of women in Marmande, southwestern France, was accused of causing an outbreak of the plague through magic.[118] And in 1477, in Hildesheim, northern Germany, two women were accused of poisoning the air.[119]

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[115] Ulrich, *Sammlung jüdischer Geschichten,* 103-107; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 68-73; Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, 118-134; Hansen, 82-195.

[116] "quia in pulverem fortassis redactus erat, pulveres seu terram desuper positam asportabant, et in eodem anno uxori et omnibus iumentis domus fecunditas restitute est." - Johannes Nider, *Formicarius,* Hansen, 92. For background, Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 69-71; Ostorero, "The Concept of the Witches' Sabbath," 15-16.

[117] "quidem pulveres fiunt ex interioribus puerorum mixtis cum predictis animalibus venenosis, que omnia pulverizata per unum ex societate predicta tempore nebuloso sparguntur per aerem, et tacti ab illis pulveribus aut morientur aut infirmitatem gravem et diuturnam patiuntur." - Peter of Greyerz, *Errores Gazariorum*, Hansen, 120; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 69-73; Ostorero, "The Concept of the Witches' Sabbath," 15-17.

[118] Hansen, 559-561; Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*, 189.

[119] "twe vruwen gebernet, toverige halven, dat se gift gemaket hadden, dar lude van gestorven weren" - Hansen, 580, no. 126.

Since sorcerers faced such charges of poisoning, it seems even more peculiar that no well-poisoning accusations were directed against them, other than in Arras. Some of the investigators and theologians who drafted the allegations against the witches surely knew about the well-poisoning accusations which were aimed against Jews at the same region shortly before. Still, they did not apply these allegations to witches. It is impossible to determine exactly why, but one may speculate that this stems from the fact that the main inspirations for the charges against witches were anti-heretical texts, rather than ones directed against the Jews. Wolfgang Behringer showed convincingly that the early imagery of witches was deeply influenced by charges made against heretics, Waldensians in particular.[120] As we have seen, heretics were depicted as poisoners, usually allegorically, yet they were never accused of well-poisoning.[121] If the accusations against witches were basically an exaggeration of the claims brought against heretics, as Behringer argues, it may not be surprising that well-poisoning accusations were not included among them. Accusing witches of poisoning, and even mass poisoning, was a concretization of the notion that they spread "the poison of heresy." However, since heretics never faced well-poisoning accusations, there was no basis to include such an allegation against early witches.

This conclusion leaves the affair in Paris and the accusations in Arras as the only two cases of well-poisoning accusations against non-Jews after 1350. Also, we have noted that these accusations were a fairly minor element in the charges presented in Arras. And so, the incident in Paris in 1390 stands out as an unusual case, in which royal officials may have attempted to promote well-poisoning accusations in order to advance the Crown's political interests. Still, they were

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[120] Wolfgang Behringer, "How Waldensians Became Witches: Heretics and their Journey to the other World," in *Communicating with the Spirits*, ed. Éva Pócs and Gábor Klaniczay (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005), 155-180; Ostorero, "The Concept of the Witches' Sabbath," 19-22.

[121] See above: Ch. 1, pp. 80-85.

unable to do so effectively, and eventually the victims were mainly paupers from central France. The decline of well-poisoning accusations against Christians was as quick, if not quicker, than the decline of such accusations against Jews.

The decline of well-poisoning accusations in the fifteenth century – discussion

Though the idea of well-poisoning did not disappear from medieval culture, very few such accusations were actually directed against Jews or Christians after 1420, whether communities or individuals. One wonders why this idea, which was very popular in the first half of the fourteenth century, was suddenly irrelevant. The sources, unfortunately, do not provide us with a clear answer. Chroniclers do not often describe events which did not occur, investigators do not labor to prove charges which were not brought forth, and rulers do not condone or outlaw actions that no one was thought to perform. In that sense, the bull issued by Pope Martin V in 1422 represents the final official action in the matter. Still, we can provide some tentative explanations for the decline of well-poisoning accusations, based on the dynamic of the few existing cases after 1350.

The first factor that contributed to this decline is the diminishing effectiveness of well-poisoning accusations in the political sphere. As we have seen, in 1321 and in 1348-1350 nobles, officials, and even rulers acknowledged the accusations and attempted to adapt them to be used to promote their own political goals. In the process, they gave the accusations a formal affirmation, added elements to them, and spread them to other locations. Not surprisingly, many of the surviving documents register either the formalization of the allegations in trial records or written confessions, or their spread from one official to another by letters. This process, however, did not occur again in the fifteenth century. Examining the evidence from the affair of 1390, one can see that in this case the judges and investigators of the Châtelet attempted to do exactly what their

predecessors had done. They formulated the accusations as edited confessions and manipulated the suspects (or the documents) in order to direct the allegations against the desired political target, in this case the Dominicans or the Flemish. Still, this tactic simply did not yield a similar effect. The Dominicans were able to deny the allegations entirely, and no Flemish were even arrested. If royal officials were hoping to create the impression of a major conspiracy and implicate in it men associated with Philip the Bold, they were soon disappointed. The same can be said about the attempt of the council of Cologne to justify the expulsion of the Jews using well-poisoning accusations, among other charges. King Sigismund did not change his position on the matter despite this grave accusation, as far as we know.

Of course, the next question should be why officials and rulers were less willing to accept the accusations after 1350. The answer may be that a history of false alarms followed these accusations almost from the beginning. Jacques Fournier, one of the leading investigators of the charges of 1321, asserted in 1338, as Pope Benedict XII, that both the lepers and the Jews were innocent of poisoning wells, and that the attacks against them constituted a sin.[122] King Charles IV probably agreed, as lepers were again allowed to leave their houses fairly soon after the persecution against them (with some restrictions).[123] As for the accusations of 1348-1350, some powerful rulers, including Pope Clement VI, rejected the accusations as they appeared.[124] At the time, their protests fell on deaf ears, yet over time they were proven right. The execution of the Jews, which in most of the towns of the Empire happened before the plague appeared, did not prevent the outbreak of the plague. Nor were the actions taken against converts or other

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[122] Vidal, "La poursuite des lépreux en 1321," 473-478; Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, 1:367-368, no. 350.
[123] Manteyer, "Chronique d'Uzerche," 413; Bériac, *Des lépreux aux cagots*, 139-191.
[124] See above: Ch. 4, pp. 303-305; Ch. 5 pp. 323-324, n. 27.

marginalized Christians effective in stopping the mortality.[125] Recurring waves of the plague, which continued throughout the late fourteenth and fifteenth century, hit all cities and kingdoms of Europe, whether they expelled the Jews or not.[126] The argument that the disease was caused by well-poisoning lost some of its appeal. To be sure, these facts could not prove beyond doubt that minorities never attempted to poison wells, but it seems that leaders and officials in Europe (and maybe the public as well) were less anxious to react to mass-poisoning rumors if and when they appeared.

But even if the accusations seemed less convincing, we have seen that they did not disappear from European culture, and that Jews were still presented as poisoners in different contexts. Considering the fact that Jews, and anti-Jewish feelings, were still present in most of Europe (the Empire is of course the most relevant area in this case), one wonders why the notion of the Jews as poisoners did not manifest as actual charges after 1420. Jews were often persecuted in the Empire, and faced recurring expulsions from different cities, expulsions which were often justified by different allegations. However, the role that well-poisoning accusations played in 1348-1350 was taken by two older, and more popular, charges, of ritual murder and host desecration.[127] Ritual murder accusations appeared in England and northern France in the middle of the twelfth century, and spread to other areas in Europe. They included different variations, including blood libels or ritual cannibalism, but did not usually cause waves of persecution like well-poisoning accusations. Host desecration accusations evolved towards the end of the thirteenth century in northern Europe, and were most popular in the Empire (though they certainly flourished also in other places). These accusations did in fact caused mass persecution of Jews, and were a

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[125] See above: Ch. 5, pp. 367-369.

[126] Biraben, *Les Hommes et la peste*, 363-391/

[127] Toch, *Die Juden im mittelalterlichen Reich*, 55-68; Bell, *Sacred Communities*, 105-120; GJ 3:2299-2308.

source of popular violence.[128] These two charges had a longer history than well-poisoning accusations, which were most common during the first half of the fourteenth century. Still the older allegations were not replaced by well-poisoning accusations, and remained popular after they declined.

This process can be partly explained by the decline of the political effectiveness of the accusations, but this was probably not the only factor. Several historians have noted that anti-Jewish allegations developed to serve Christian ritualistic and symbolic needs. The alleged victims of ritual murders became instant saints, and desecrated hosts highly venerated relics. Miracles were associated with the disclosure of these anti-Christian acts, miracles so great that they were said to cause the instant conversion of the Jewish perpetrators themselves. Around these miracles, relics and saints, new holy places were marked, and new churches were established. Anti-Jewish violence was in many cases a necessary first step in this process, an act which defined Christian identity through juxtaposition.[129] While ritual murder and host desecration accusations developed to serve these symbolic and ritualistic needs, well-poisoning accusations did not. To be sure, well-poisoning was perceived as a grave act of treason, an act that endangered the very existence of Christianity. It could, and did, justify acts of anti-Jewish violence, and also serve as a general symbol of the inherent evilness of the Jews. At the same time, well poisoning was an impersonal act, a random attack against anyone unfortunate enough to drink from the wrong well at the wrong time. It produced no saints, no relics, no holy places. Of the many sources examined in this study of well-poisoning accusations, none mentions a cult which developed around victims of such act,

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[128] Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Anti-Semitism*, 195-298; Mentgen, "Die Ritualmordaffäre um den 'Guten Werner", 159-198; Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, 1-189; Cluse, "Blut ist im Schuh," 371-392; Müller, "*Ereẓ gererah*," 245-260.

[129] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone, 2011), 144-145, 170-171, 183-184; 193-194; 210-214; 259; Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Anti-Semitism*, 195-298; Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, 132-189; Merback, *Pilgrimage and Pogrom*, 1-292.

or a shrine established to commemorate it. Ritual murder or host desecration allegations were simply better designed to be remembered and acknowledged as meaningful in late medieval Christian culture, and so it is no wonder that they were more popular than well-poisoning accusations.

Thus, the decline of concrete well-poisoning accusations can be tentatively explained by an external factor like the recurrence of the plague, but mostly by internal factors which had to do with the nature of this phenomenon. From the very beginning, these accusations depended on the support of different nobles, officials and rulers to spread and produce violence against minorities. Once these authorities were unwilling to do so, whatever the reason, the accusations declined. Similarly, well-poisoning accusations were never designed to create symbolic or ritualistic meanings for Christian believers. Thus, they lacked the characteristics which could allow them to reappear again and again when the need of a new saint, a relic or a church arose. They remained as an occasional anti-Jewish tale, but not as a recurring reality.

Conclusion

This chapter has mapped the gradual decline of well-poisoning accusations in medieval Europe. The heart of this process was of course the declining popularity of such allegations as a trigger, or justification, for anti-Jewish violence. This change happened gradually, and in areas where well-poisoning accusations were more popular, Alsace and the western Alps in particular, they continued to appear occasionally. Still, by 1420 the major incidents were over, and only rarely did Jewish individuals face similar charges. The same was probably true also for well-poisoning accusations against non-Jews, as the case of the alleged plot of 1390 was the only significant incident after 1350. The allegations did not transfer to witches, the new persecuted European

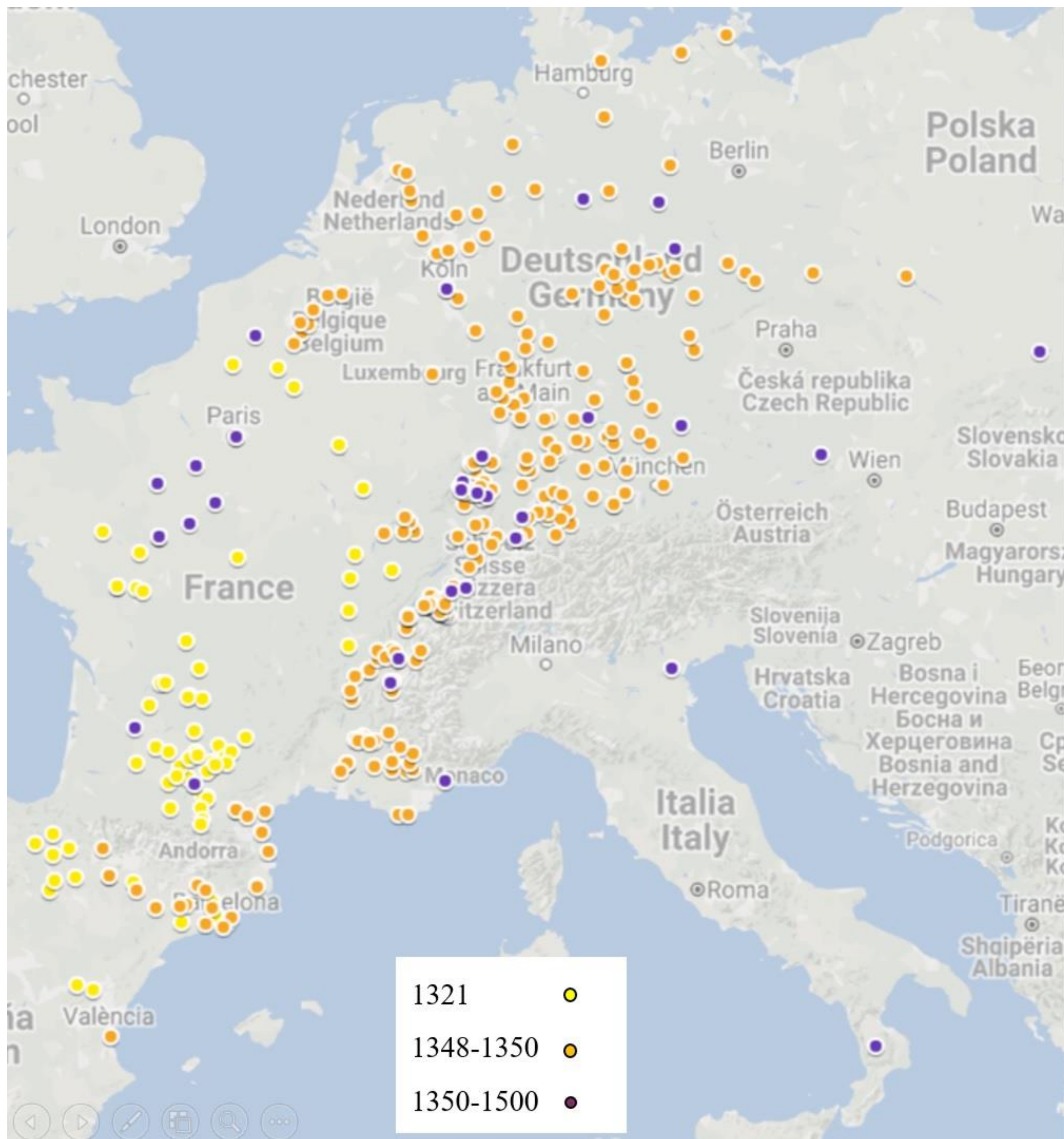
minority, as might have been expected. Instead, they remained only as an element of European culture, representing the enmity between Christianity and the Jews, the most well-known alleged poisoners. Among the explanations for this process, we may point to changes in the political climate, the recurrence of the plague, and the lack of ritualistic elements in the accusations. The early modern period had its fair share of poisoners, from political assassins to plague spreaders.[130] But the image of the Jews as well poisoners remained a fossil of what was in the later Middle Ages a dynamic, powerful and daunting historic reality.

[130] William G. Naphy, *Plagues, Poisons and Potions: Plague-Spreading Conspiracies in the Western Alps, c. 1530-1640* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 1-201; Lewin, *Die Gifte in der Weltgeschichte*, 92-120, 288-362, 405-450, 487-520; Cabanès, and Lucien Nass, *Poisons et sortilèges*, 2:1-356.

Conclusion

Well-poisoning accusations were fairly widespread geographically, but hardly a European-wide phenomenon. The allegations of 1321 began in southwestern France, but quickly spread to other areas of the kingdom, as well as into Aragon. Those of 1348-1350 began in the southern areas of Europe, that is Provence and Languedoc, and quickly spread westwards and northwards. They had some effect in Aragon, but they became much more popular in the Dauphiné and in Savoy, autonomous territories neighboring with German Empire. These territories were the gateway of the accusations into the Empire, were they spread much more quickly. The western Alps and Alsace were the areas in which the accusations were most popular, and from there they advanced east, and north along the valley of the Rhine, up to the Low Countries. And so, the notion of well poisoning was more popular in the southwest of the Empire than in the northeast, a pattern which continued to some degree also after 1350. Later well-poisoning allegations appeared in different locations, usually where there was some history of such allegations in 1321 or 1348-1350. The recurring accusations against Jews in Alsace and the western Alps and the charges brought against paupers in central France in 1390 where the major episodes in this period. The Jews of southern Poland and Austria faced some persecution based on well-poisoning accusations around 1360, but it is difficult to determine the scope. Overall, these allegations characterized western and central Europe. England, Castile, Italy, several areas of the northeast of the Empire and most of Poland never adopted them, as far as we know.

Well-poisoning accusations in medieval Europe – All Cases



The phenomenon of well poisoning developed sometime in the early fourteenth century, not long before the first major wave of 1321. The idea itself was not completely new, and some of the factors which contributed to its popularity developed during the thirteenth century, but one would find it difficult to actually point out particular well-poisoning charges in that period. The wave of 1321 was fairly short, and lasted from April to August, at which time both the lepers and the Jews were persecuted. For some 27 years later, no minorities faced such charges, until they appeared again in April 1348. Until September they spread through southern Europe, and were transferred from paupers to Jews. Then, from September 1348 to the end of 1350, they circulated through the Empire. They appeared again occasionally until around 1420, after which very few and limited episodes occurred (with Arras in 1460 as the one major example). The notion of the Jews as well-poisoners did not disappear from European culture, and lasted into the early modern period. Yet actual charges which led to official investigations, trials and executions declined during the fifteenth century.

Well-poisoning accusations are, therefore, a social phenomenon characteristic of the later Middle Ages, rather than a survival from earlier centuries, or a predecessor of modernity. To be sure, no historical event appears without developing from earlier circumstances, nor disappears without making any mark on the society, culture and memory of future generations. Still, well-poisoning accusations should be analyzed within the circumstances in which they developed, flourished and declined.[1] This statement, trivial as it may seem, is important in the context of this phenomenon. As we have seen, the vast majority of the existing historiography on the subject discusses the accusations either as a continuation of medieval anti-Jewish tendencies, or as a reaction to the plague. Both of these perspectives are problematic, since they define artificially

[1] Caroline Bynum makes a similar argument for other elements of late medieval culture: Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 21-22, 280-286.

some of the existing cases as representing the whole phenomenon, and disregard the importance of the rest. Thus, historians who viewed the accusations as resulting from the plague regarded the events of 1321 as a curious, but essentially minor, precursor. Those who see them as an anti-Jewish phenomenon, fail to acknowledge the fact that most of victims in 1321 were lepers, and that in 1348 too the allegations started with other minorities. Among the goals of this study are to present the context in which well-poisoning accusations developed, and to insist on the irrelevance (or lesser importance) of some factors which have been presented as crucial in existing historiography.

The fact that well-poisoning accusations developed to justify the persecution and marginalization of lepers, rather than Jews, is much more than a historiographical footnote. The sickness of the lepers, which was traditionally associated with sin, provided the justification for officials of south-western France to segregate them. In particular, they wanted to prevent lepers' access to public water sources, which they indeed believed the lepers could infect. To be sure, there is a great difference between considering this group dangerous to public health and claiming that its members would intentionally poison the whole kingdom. We have seen, however, that during the months of April, May and June 1321, the accusations, which started as limited charges against a few lepers, developed to include more and more elements, until they were seen as a global conspiracy. This process was likely promoted by municipal authorities and the local nobility of the South-West with some cooperation from royal officials, to suit the economic and political interests of the former. Jews were not implicated in these accusations until the end of June, that is until the allegations were already fully formed. Indeed, it was not easy to fit the Jews into the already accepted story, and they were not accused of poisoning wells themselves, but of paying lepers to do so. This transformation was by no means a spontaneous occurrence. Some of the high nobles of central France made an effort to implicate the Jews in the plot, and to convince King

Philip V and Pope John XXII to acknowledge their guilt. This attempt, which was generally successful, applied an accusation that was tailored for lepers to the Jews of France.

Despite the fact that the king officially declared the Jews to be involved in the plot, and chroniclers depicted their imagined crime, well-poisoning accusations did not became a "Jewish crime". When the accusations reappeared in 1348 in the southern part of Europe as a result of the great mortality, Jews were not the first suspects. During the months of April, May and June, paupers, vagabonds and even itinerant clerics or friars were considered more likely to commit well-poisoning. They were the ones who traveled unsupervised from town to town, and the ones associated with infectious diseases and contamination. The Jews of these areas suffered pogroms at that the same time (other than in France, where no Jews were present), but these were not caused by similar allegations. Rather, they occurred because the plague (in addition to other factors) weakened the ability of local rulers to protect the Jews, as they had been doing; this allowed their enemies to act freely. Christians resented the Jews primarily for their economic activity and their protected political status, not putative plots against Christendom. And so, for two or three months, Christians were accused of well-poisoning while Jews dealt with violence triggered by entirely different factors. Again, it took an organized political and bureaucratic action to transfer the accusations from marginalized Christians to Jews. This happened only when officials in the Dauphiné, and later in Savoy, began to arrest Jews, investigate them, force them to confess to poisoning wells, and spread their confessions forward. Similar actions of officials in the Empire caused the accusations to continue to spread there. Even when the charges became focused more and more on the Jews, marginalized Christians were still blamed for involvement in the plot. Converts, heretics, and paupers were never free of suspicion, especially after the execution of the Jews proved useless in stopping the mortality.

Even after 1350, Christians were accused of poisoning wells, as was the case in central France in 1390. There were in fact a few Jews in the kingdom at the time, yet they were not implicated in the plot.[2] Instead beggars were the main target, and an attempt was made to transfer the accusations to Dominicans and Flemish. Still, the fact that the allegations of 1348-1350 in the Empire were directed mostly against the Jews had important consequences. Most of the cases after 1350 targeted Jews, and the culture of the period began to include representations of Jews as poisoners. These representations, which lasted into the early modern period, did not depict Christian perpetrators, even if in reality some Christians were convicted of similar crimes. This is truly the period in which well-poisoning became a ”Jewish crime”, after most of the violence associated with it was already over. This development has misled many historians, who have tended to apply ideas about well-poisoning which originated in the fifteenth century to earlier periods. It is the source for Trachtenberg's depiction of the "Jewish poisoner" as part of medieval culture, which many later scholars adopted.[3] Following Trachtenberg, historians have searched for Jewish mass poisoners starting in the eleventh century, long before the social, political, economic and environmental conditions necessary for the development of the accusations even existed. Well-poisoning accusations simply cannot be considered as a crime associated mostly with Jews before July 1348, and even after than only to a degree. The representation of medieval culture in early modern sources is misleading.

This conclusion helps explain the decline of well-poisoning accusations against Jews (and in general) after 1420. We have noted that ritual murder and host desecration accusations included symbolic elements which allowed them to be reproduced and remembered, while well-poisoning

[2] Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*, 248-250.

[3] Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, Ch. 7, 97-108. Above: Ch. 1, pp. 16-30.

accusations did not. Why? The answer is probably that well-poisoning accusations were not created out of desire to persecute or denigrate Jews, but rather out the desire to marginalize lepers. There was no point in including in these accusations elements which could be used as the basis for a future cult, such as possible saints, relics or holy places. The point was to show the traitorous nature of the lepers, and so the allegations presented a connection between them and Muslim rulers, or stories about their desire to overturn the government of the kingdom of France. When the Jews were involved in the story, most of these details were already formed and officially acknowledged, so they could not have been easily changed. It was difficult to include saints, relics or miracles in this narrative, and it is unclear that those who transferred the accusations to the Jews even wanted to do so. They simply wanted to force the King Philip to expel the Jews from the kingdom, and in that they indeed succeeded. Still, well-poisoning accusations did not have the characteristics that allowed ritual murder and host desecration allegations to last for centuries, as they were never created with anti-Jewish symbolism in mind.

Another major conclusion regarding well-poisoning allegations, against Jews or Christians, was that they were usually spread, or even invented, by nobles, officials, investigators, judges or rulers. We have seen that in 1321 the accusations became more sophisticated from one trial to the next, as the investigators forced the suspects to provide more details, documented them, and sent them to other officials. At the same time, municipal councils of southwestern France made great efforts to convince King Philip of the existence of the lepers' plot. A few months later, some of the nobles of central France made a similar effort to persuade the king of the involvement of the Jews. In both cases, the king was initially reluctant to believe the accusations, but eventually acknowledged them, probably as he was presented with confessions or other relevant evidence. The events in Aragon in 1321 exemplify the great importance of royal support for the political

effectiveness of the accusations. King Jaime quickly accepted the accusations against lepers, instructed his men to arrest and punish the guilty and to segregate the rest, and so they did. But he rejected the involvement of the Jews and ordered royal officials to protect the Jews throughout the kingdom. Thus while the fate of the lepers of Aragon resembled that of their peers in France, yet Aragon ended up as a safe haven for Jewish refugees from France. Indeed, most of the lepers and Jews who were the victims of well-poisoning accusations in 1321 suffered arrest, torture and execution initiated and performed by local and royal officials, not popular pogroms.

Similarly in 1348, those suspected of well poisoning often suffered from institutional, and not popular, violence. Before the accusations were transferred to the Jews, they faced mostly random pogroms, yet afterwards they were arrested and executed. Indeed, the paupers and vagabonds who were accused of poisoning wells at the same time were investigated and punished by the authorities, not attacked by the public. The same pattern continued into the Empire, where Jews and Christian victims were usually executed after a trial or official investigation or at least discussion. We have noted one exception, Cologne, were Jews indeed faced a pogrom, yet well-poisoning accusations probably played only a minor part in causing the attack. Even after 1350 well-poisoning allegations led to trials, official investigations, and convictions, not to pogroms of angry mobs.

Is this simply source bias? Official action leaves a paper trail: investigations produce written confessions, trials produce records, and communication between authorities produces letters. Indeed, these are the main sources used in this study to understand well-poisoning accusations. In contrast, angry rioters do not record their actions, nor leave written explanations of the reasons that brought them to violence. The actions of the unidentified public are always less documented; popular poisoning charges are less likely to have been recorded. This argument has

some merit, considering the limitations of the written evidence that survives from the Middle Ages, yet it is not completely convincing. In fact, popular pogroms or riots were hardly left undocumented. For example, we have noted that in the case of the attacks against the Jews of Aragon in 1321 almost forty official letters discussing the violence have survived. The popular attack against the Jews of Cologne in 1349 was also recorded. But the nature of this evidence is different. Pogroms are usually described in writing by people who did not take part in them, and often objected to them. In Aragon, the king ordered his officials to arrest the attackers and protect the Jews, while in Cologne representatives of different religious institutions complained about financial damage they suffered due to the pogrom. We are thus left with a distorted impression of the attackers' ideas and motives. Still, we have reviewed much of this type of evidence and have found almost no mention of well-poisoning accusations, not even as an example of the erroneous notions that the attackers held. Therefore, the conclusion that the victims of well-poisoning accusations faced mostly institutional violence stands.

This is not to suggest that public opinion played no part in the development and spread of well-poisoning accusations. Many of the sources report "rumors" stating that wells had been poisoned, without specifying who exactly communicated this information. Some of these rumors probably originated among the lower classes, who simply believed the accusations and wanted to warn their friends, relatives or peers. In a handful of cases we can actually point out these individuals and see what they thought, and how they acted.[4] However, in most cases, these people did not organize attacks against alleged poisoners. When they did, the pogroms were minor in comparison to the official violence directed towards suspected minorities. Certainly, public opinion influenced the authorities and may even have led them to investigate the rumors in some

[4] Ch. 3, pp. 203-208; Heinrich Seuse, *Das Buch von dem Diener*, 74-78.

cases. But the evidence suggests that officials or other powerful agents were driven to action mainly by their own interests. For example, we have seen that members of municipal councils in southeastern France approached the king complaining that the lepers posed a threat to public water sources even before any rumors or actual violence appeared. Jews faced several protests and charges directed against them by nobles and officials after their return to the kingdom in 1315, before the idea of well-poisoning was current. Similarly, Dauphin Humbert II almost expelled the Jews of the Dauphiné in 1345, before he knew anything about the plague or the accusations. In Strasbourg, too, the Jews lost the protection of the local council when they found themselves on the wrong side of a political dispute that had started already in 1332. In 1390, Dominicans were probably implicated in a well-poisoning plot because they allied with one of the major political rivals of King Charles VI. In all of these cases, and one can surely find more, nobles, institutions, officials and rulers created, manipulated or accepted well-poisoning accusations mostly because it fit their political or economic interests.

In that sense, there was nothing spontaneous about the transfer of the accusations from one minority group to another, and most notably from Christians to Jews. Both in 1321 and in 1348, nobles or officials had to make an effort to transform the accusations so that the narrative that they presented would fit the Jews. Furthermore, they had to initiate formal procedures against the Jews, produce confessions which "proved" their guilt, and send these to their peers. Despite the fact that Jews were certainly a marginalized group during the Middle Ages, new accusations directed against other minorities did not simply stick to them. The story had to fit, and evidence had to be brought forward. True, the fact that medieval decision makers made the effort to implicate the Jews shows that were convinced that the Jews were hated enough for the accusations to be believed. But they knew that it would take more than rumors.

One should not, of course, oversimplify the motivations or the decision making process of the authorities. To be sure, they considered the political and economic benefits of major decisions, such as acknowledging well-poisoning charges and acting against the Jews. Still, we have seen that in many cases they certainly made an effort to examine the veracity of the accusations and were not always convinced. King Jaime II rejected the allegations against Jews in 1321 and was able to protect them almost completely. At the same time, he found the accusations against lepers believable and instructed his officials to act against them. In 1348, the council members of Chambéry initially rejected poisoning accusations against both Christians and Jews, but were later convinced that they were true. In the Empire, the council of Strasbourg executed a few Christians accused of poisoning but was reluctant to act against the Jews. The officials of Cologne also found the accusations unconvincing, and those of Regensburg organized an official commitment of the local nobility to protect the Jews. Duke Albert II of Austria, one of the major German princes, initially rejected the accusations, accepting them only under pressure of some of his subjects. Three popes, Benedict XII in 1338, Clement VI in 1348, and Martin V in 1422, issued official letters or bulls condemning the accusers. These rulers, officials and institutions did not simply accept the notion of well-poisoning, but took different political approaches to reject the charges and protect the Jews, if not always successfully.

Still, one might say, where some stood to gain from accepting the allegations, others expected to lose, and so rulers or officials simply chose their position in this matter according to their interest. This, again would be too simplistic. We have seen that some municipal councils and rulers indeed made an attempt to investigate the charges and came up with different conclusions. The council of Cologne wrote to Strasbourg three times over five months, and probably to other cities as well, asking for information about the plot. They probably received reports and evidence

similar to those that were sent to other towns, and still found the allegations unconvincing. The officials of Würzburg attempted to investigate the matter in the same manner for over two months but came to the opposite conclusion. As for the authorities in Strasbourg, they looked into the accusations for about six months, received letters, witnesses and physical evidence from other towns, and arrested and questioned some local Jews themselves. Surely, if councils or officials were simply deciding their position on well-poisoning accusations according to their interest alone, they would have no need for these efforts.

There is also other evidence that some officials, nobles, rulers and other agents truly believed the accusations. First, we have seen that some of the trial records and confessions produced, and those from Chillon are the best example, could indeed seem convincing. The details, such as places, names and dates were believable, and the testimonies often corroborated each other. Moreover, since these details were sent to different cities, similar stories circulated in different locations and gave the impression of a general consensus about the details of the alleged plot. Officials who attempted to investigate the issue received much information confirming the accusations which seemed reliable; it is plausible that at least some of them were convinced. In addition, we have seen that well-poisoning accusations were a powerful political instrument exactly because they were believable. In Strasbourg the enemies of the governing council were able to convince some of the artisans, who were supposedly well represented in the council, to turn against it. The explicit reason that these artisans gave for the fact that they actively supported the return of the old nobility to power was their distrust in the ruling officials since they did not punish the Jews. Similarly in Basel, the public (or a significant part of the citizens) decided to support nobles who actively challenged the ruling council on the subject of the Jews. In this case the council members decided to concede to the

demands of their growing opposition and kept their rule by sacrificing local Jews. Thus, well-poisoning accusations were apparently believable enough to shift political alliances and even change the government in certain cities. In the Empire, where many of the cities featured several competing parties, classes and institutions, well-poisoning accusations were very often powerful enough to transform the political dynamic against the Jews and lead to their demise.

It is notable, therefore, that well-poisoning accusations often flourished in unstable political or social situations. In 1321, the municipal councils of southwestern France initiated the persecution of the lepers at a time when King Philip was vulnerable politically and economically, hoping that he would simply allow them to take over the property of the leprosaria. Similarly, the nobility of central France used this situation, and the fact that the king had already acknowledged the charges against the lepers, to turn the accusations against the Jews. Indeed, the king was eventually unable to protect the Jews as he had done in the six years which preceded these events. In 1348, the plague was a major destabilizing factor, which influenced the entire continent. Rumors about the incredible mortality were enough to trigger social unrest, even before the first signs of sickness appeared in a given area. We have noted that cases of popular uprising and growing crime occurred independently of poisoning allegations. In this social climate, it was easier to shift the political atmosphere against the Jews (or other minorities), even in places where things looked stable before the plague. In addition, the plague naturally made poisoning rumors seem more reliable, especially since during the first outbreak the symptoms and attributes of it seemed different than any other known disease. Under these circumstances, places that were more politically and socially unstable before the plague were more likely to act against alleged poisoners.

This dynamic also explains, at least partly, the decline of well-poisoning accusations after 1350. Without the destabilizing factors mentioned above, the accusations were less likely to produce the same effect against minorities. Moreover, the fact that the execution of Jews or marginalized Christians did not prevent the plague from spreading and returning rendered them less convincing. This is another indication that in most cases the authorities did not use well-poisoning accusations simply as an excuse to act against the Jews (or others); if this were the case, they could have continued to do so after 1350. These allegations were indeed a powerful political tool, but only under specific social, economic and political circumstances, which did not often occur in the fifteenth century. Officials or others would not promote or support such charges if they did not seem convincing.

From the analysis of political and social conditions necessary for the occurrence of well-poisoning accusations, one can draw another important conclusion: that there was a major difference between considering well-poisoning as an idea and actually using it as a justification for the persecution of minorities. We have seen that there were many situations in which medieval Europeans thought about poison, intentional poisoning, and even mass poisoning. Legislators were concerned with condemnation of public water sources, doctors with the physical qualities of poison, and rulers with the fear of being poisoned by their enemies. At the same time, minorities such as Muslims, lepers, Jews, and most of all heretics, were described allegorically as poisoners of the public. These social phenomena all existed throughout the thirteenth century, that is before any actual charges of well-poisoning were put forward (as a careful study of the possible cases showed). In theory, the idea of mass well poisoning was available to medieval Europeans, but until the right political circumstances presented themselves in southeastern France in 1321, the allegations did not appear. It was

not enough to think that well poisoning was a plausible scenario, or even that the members of a certain minority would be willing to use this means to destroy the entire kingdom or continent. The accusers had to be willing to use their full political influence to promote the accusations, and their rivals had to be too weak to prevent them from doing so.

Well-poisoning accusations were not merely an idea, but a manifestation of an idea within the social and political conditions of specific places and periods. In other words, only in certain circumstances, which existed in France and Aragon in 1321 and in much of southern Europe and the Empire in 1348-1350, could this familiar idea cause violence against minorities. When these circumstances did not exist, before 1321 or after 1422, it is almost impossible to find cases of violence, institutional or popular, caused or justified by well-poisoning accusations. Even if the idea of well-poisoning, mostly in the context of anti-Jewish propaganda, survived into the early modern period, actual accusations were unique to the later Middle Ages.

Finally, we should consider the importance the study of well-poisoning accusations has for our understanding of medieval society and culture in general. Above all, it strengthens the need to explore the later Middle Ages as a distinct period, rather than only as a bridge between the high Middle Ages and the Early Modern era. Well-poisoning accusations were a social and cultural phenomenon characteristic only of this period. The attempt to understand it as starting in the eleventh century and continuing into the sixteenth has led to confusion about its nature. But while the framework of the later Middle Ages proves useful, other common distinctions are irrelevant to this research subject. First, there is the artificial separation between cultural or intellectual history on the one hand, and political and social history on the other. I have been careful in this study to separate cultural references to well

poisoning from actual violence against minorities caused by allegations based on the idea. But one cannot understand the cultural development of this notion without studying the political sphere, nor explain the social and political origins of violence without exploring its cultural background. The connection between the cultural and the practical was not always straightforward. For example, rulers seemed to be interested in what physicians had to say about intentional poisoning or the spread of leprosy, but at the same time they disregarded their claims that the plague could not be a result of mass poisoning. More broadly, though, many in medieval Europe seem (under particular social and political circumstances) to have thought that the accusations were real, since the idea of well-poisoning fit into what they knew and believed about the world in which they lived.

Second, the geographical separation between western and central Europe, common especially in the field of Jewish history (Sefarad / Ashkenaz), proves problematic in the context of well-poisoning accusations. In 1348, the allegation transferred easily from Romance speaking areas to German speaking ones, and flourished in both. Also after 1350, one can find such accusations in both France and the Empire. At the same time, areas that were fairly close geographically and culturally and could have easily adopted the accusations, such as Italy or Castile, did not do so. The distinction had more to do with political stability or the historical status of minorities than with cultural, geographical, or linguistic factors.

Finally, the separation between Jewish history and "general history" (that is, the history of the Christian majority, in our case) has been a major a source of misunderstanding regarding the nature of well-poisoning accusations. Several historians attempted to explain these accusations as a continuation of medieval anti-Judaism, and in particular of ritual murder charges, blood libels and host desecration allegations. Yet we have seen that well-poisoning

accusations originally developed to justify the persecution of lepers, rather than Jews, and this fact determined some of their characteristics. We have also noted that in 1348 these accusations targeted paupers, vagabonds and even traveling clerics before they were directed against Jews. This was not a coincidence, since there were particular social factors that marked these people as more likely to spread the plague. The fact that many of the historians have studied the accusations focused primarily on the Jewish angle has prevented them from recognizing the great significance of these facts for the understanding of this phenomenon. This is not to suggest that the categories discussed above are generally irrelevant or misleading, as this is simply untrue. However, it is worth putting them aside occasionally, if the subject of the study calls for it.

Beyond historiographical and methodological issues, the study of well-poisoning accusations opens a window into the complexity of late medieval society and culture. One might argue that it represents their darkest side, or that it exemplifies the deep crisis that characterized this period. That may be in fact be true. But before we put this society on trial, we must make an honest effort to understand the motives, fears and struggles of its members. This study has attempted to contribute to this effort through the prism of one historical phenomenon.

Bibliography

Abbreviations

ACA = Barcelona, Archivo de la Corona de Aragón.

AVS III = Strasbourg, Archives de la ville de Strasbourg, Série III

Baluze-Mollat = Stephanus Baluzius. *Vitae Paparum Avenionensium*. Edited by Guillaume Mollat. Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1917.

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Appendices

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Collection Périgord, vol. 93, ff. 86-88. –

A trial record of the leper Johan from Archignac, made in Salignac on 4 July 1321.

F. 86:

Noverint universi et singuli, quod Helias Grimal, parrochice archiniaci [Archignac], Bajulus, ut dixit, / de archiniaco, nobilio viri Raymundi de Valle domicelli de balaresi , reddidit pro dicto / Raymundo domino Geraldo de ferrerio milite de la bruniæ, bajule dominiorum / castri, et castellania de Salaniaco, ibidem prasentes et recipienti, Joannem leprroscem / leprrosia de archiniaco, unum et quemdam aliam leprosam morduum, pro feviendo [?] / de ipsis, quod justitia suadebit juxta consepiones faetas apud pelavesi [Paulin], ut dictum / per eundem actum Salagniaci, die Sabbati ante festum beati goanris [4 July] / ante portam latinam, anno Domini millesimo trecentesimo vigesimo primo, / regnante Domino Philippo reg Franciae et Navarra, testibus praesentibus / ad praemissa vocatis viri Petro Aynioyny, et Bernardo de Ferrerici militibus, / Hugine aynioyni, Raymundo Nigerii, Gaillelmo Laroca domicellis, Aymerico / Larzalhier et Bernardo Bratis, et me Petro de Brolio autoritate regiæ / public notario in jerescallia petrocericenri et calvrcensi, et ejus / reperto, cui fuit requisîtus quod de praemissis conficerem publicum / instrumentum, confessions dictorum leprosorum factae, audiatur, / per eosdem sequuntur sui verbis: actum apud pelavesi, in festo / Beati Nicolai mensis maii [9 May], anno Domini millesimo trecentesimo / vignesimo primo, Joannes leprosum leprosiae de archiniace, / recognovit gratis et sponte, et sine prisione [pressione] aliquæ, quod Heptianus / de Brogeciraco [Bergerac?] tradidit dicto Joanni pulverem ligatum in quædam / pochæ [pothæ?], et praecepit eidem quod ponere illum

pulverem in fontibus / parrochia de archiniaco, de quo pulvere posuit in fonte dalpon, et / dalmoti, et de la Renixudia, et de peuch varrelh, et de layga, et de / artis, et de peugoy, item recognovit quod idem Heptianus de / Bragaraco tradidit illum pulverem a festo nativitati Domini circa / castri prium, et post posuit illum pulverem in dicto fontibus ligatum / in panno, ad hoc, ut illi qui biberent de illæ aqua essent leprosi. / item recognovit quod ipse furatus fuit de solo Geraldi et holue [?], / fratrum ipsius, usque ad summam duorum sestariorum frumenti / in diversis temporibus; item r[ecogno?]vit quod ipse furatus sic / de fasenda fromentals, aver[ce?…] […]que ad summam usius / eminue rasae averce, et sup[…] […]luit fieri jus eidem / quod videbitur Domino f[…] […]io de Bosco, / Bertrando de Fromaritz [?], […] [… P]etro cordior, / et Eymerico de Manir[...][…]insessus [?]

F. 87:

Raymondus de Valle domicellus requisivit sibi fieri instrumentum / ipsis [ipsius] die et loco. Guillelmus Laroqua, alias vocatus folqual, dixit / per juramentum suum, quod ipse audit dicere sulico leproso leprosia / de archiniaco, quod ipse sulicas tradidit aliquas facilias, cuidam / nuncio qui morabatur tunc temporis eum magistro Eymerico de / Baselva, quas facilias dedit dictus nuncius dicto magistro Eymerico, / et propter dictas facilias decepit dictus magister Eymericus; item / dixit quod ipse sulias dedit duodecim denaris dicto nuncio, ut / traderet dictas facilias dicto magistro Eymerico, quia habuit verbatim / ipso, quia vetabat leprosis cimeterium de archiniaco. Item / dixit dictus Guillelmus Laroqua, quod ipse audit dicere / dicto sulico leproso, quod ipse posuerat facilias et pulverem in fonte / de la Fassigna [?], et in fonte de puchauda. item dixit dictus / Guillelmus, quod ipse audit dicere dicte sulice, quod idem sulias / furatus sit fuit usque ad unum cassonem [?] frumenti de domo / fratrum suorum, quem diviserunt. Item petrus salagnac dixit / per

Juramentum suum id quod Guillelmus Laroqua testis / peteret, ut de istis dictorum testium testes fierent Grimal, / petrus Cosi, petrus Fordier, Bertrandus de Fromenti, Petrus de / manots, Joannes Bardo, qui Joannes predictus leprosus / leprosia de archiniaco, dicta die Sabbati fuit ductus in / judicium apud Salagnacum, a lasconcas [?] magistro Joanne de / Besro, nunc proprio judice dominorum de salagnaco ibidem / presente, et pro tribunal sedente, cui Joanni, sic ducto in / judicium, ibidem dicte consepiones facte per ipsum, et dictum, / apud pelaveri, coram Raymundo de Valle nobili supra dicto / locro [?] fuerunt, et dictus Joannes sponte suæ et sine omni discutiere / stetit penitus in eisdem; quamobrem dictus judex condemnavit dictum / Joannem summaliter in scriptis ad mortem naturalem, scilicet, / quod combusetus in leprosiæ de Salaignaco. actum Salagnaci, / die Sabbati, pra[…] […]supra et regnante, testibus / praesentibus […] […]i milite, Petro de Saulo [?], / Raymond […] […Sala]ignaco et praesentibus aliis, / et pr[…][…]te regiæ, public notario in / se[…][…]i, et ejus report, qui

F. 88:

praesens instrumentus in protocollo meo notari, et de ipso / protocollo scriti et extrahi feci per Garbertum de Brolio, / coadjutorem meum mihi datum, et in formam publicam / redegi, signoque meo signavi, ad requestam bajuli de / Salaignaco supra dicti.

Chambéry, Archives départementales de Savoie, Trésor des chartes, MS SA 15, no. 28.

A letter sent by the council of Chambéry, to the castellan of Côte-Saint-André, protesting his actions against suspect of well poisoning. Written in Chambéry, on 5 JuneS 1348.

Consilium illustris principis domini nostri Amedei Comitis Sabaudie Chamberiaci Residens. Dilecto meo Castellano Coste [Saint Andre] Quam nunc [?] est / et pro tempore fuerit aut eius locum tenenti salutem et dilectem. Ad nostram audientiam pervenit quod laborante fama que a pretibus inficioribus / emersit, super venenis tossicis et aliis poysionibus. aliqui ex vestris subditis Judeos dicti domini nostri comitis et alios Judeos per loca / vestra transeuntes, necnon et aliquos christianos dum per loca vestra incedunt super ipsis venenis et poysionibus, molestias et opprobaria / inferunt et de ipsis eosdem accusant, dicentes ipsus poysiones et venena per aquas posuisse. Et quos ut predicitur inceden- / tes reperiunt tam Christianos qui videos dum tamen fuit extranei perscrutantur et perquirunt sub colore dicti veneni, et inde / videre volunt ea que supra se portant. Super quibus sic temere factis proinde volentes et faciendis posse tenus [?] obui- / are. Vobis de expresso mandato per d[icti domini] nostri comitis et per domini nostri domini Ludovicum de Sabaudia, domini Nundi [?] noviter nobilis / facto, qui premissa sicut nobis scripxerunt impossibilia dicunt nec credunt et nos cum eis ea facere et posse, expresse precipimus / et mandamus quatenus nostros iudeos infra comitatum commorantes et alios extraneos per ipsum comitatum transitum facientur necnon ceteros / advenas christianos ab omnibus oppresionibus violentiis et iniuriis quibuscumque defenditis tueamini [?] ac etiam proregatis nec / sustineantis quoius titulo sive causa per aliquem contra fieri aut aliter attentare. Et quos contra facientes reperieritis / taliter castigens [?] que cedat ceteris in exemplum et per loca vestra precourari [?] publice faciatis sub pena corpus et heris [?] et sub / his formidabilibus penis, ne quis ipsis videis

tam morantibus in comitatum quasi transentibus per ipsam quasi ceteris advenis / christianos occasione dictorum veneni poysionis et tossici nullas iniurias opprobria et violentias faciant vel inferant / modo periorus [?], neque in personis aut bonis ipsorum manus apponant nec contra ipsos quit quasi perquirant permissa occasione seu alia / quamvis tam. Et adversus illos quos inde culpabiles reperieritis contra mandata nostra et preconis actionem vestram facientes / taliter proceditis qui debeatis merito de bona diligentia comendum. In hiis aut exequendis cum quanta diligentia prioritatis [?] / laboretis inquantum domini nostri comitis et nostram indigratorem perpetuam enictare [enicare?] cupitis, et sub tanta pena quam posserit / incurrere et vobis posset imputare de iure. Scientur qui si quid sinistri [?] quod absit evenire contingeret qui vobis imputabatur /et non altri, et secundum delicti exigentiam contra vos procedetur. Et ad maiorem cautelam omnium premissorum de praesentia in rationibus vestris penarum importionibus fieri faciatis publica instratum, Et praesentes litteras in proprius [?] ad memoriam / registrarus restituentes originalia portitus [?]. datum Chamberis sub sigillo causarum appellationum in absencia sigilli / nostri, die V^ra^ mensis Juni, anno domini millio CCCXXLVIII.

Expetitura in consilio.

Presentes dominis: P. de Montegelen
Hugo Bernardi
Andrus Trouati
Guillemo Bom et
Petro Bonnoardi