

Article

# The Massacres of the Jews under Richard I (A.D. 1189–1190)

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**Abstract:** This article is a consideration of medieval religious violence during the time of Richard I set within the historiography of such writers as Nirenberg, Cohen, and Moore. This paper specifically examines a series of anti-Jewish massacres which broke out in England in the immediate aftermath of the coronation of the Crusader King Richard I. While modern violence against minorities is often attributed to the irrational actions of persons with extreme prejudice or ideologies, we find something a bit more nuanced in the situation in 12th century England. Certainly, there were long-standing prejudices against the Jews in England. However, this paper will argue that while general European antisemitism did create an undercurrent of tension across Europe and especially in this case England; similar to Nirenberg's thoughts these passions were manipulated by those involved to the point that they became incendiary to suit specific local purposes and passions.

**Keywords:** Richard I; Jews; Crusades; medieval religious violence

## 1. Introduction

On 3 September 1189, crowds from all over Europe gathered to witness the coronation of England's King Richard I (Ralph De Diceto 1876, p. 68). Despite the celebratory nature of this occasion, William of Newburgh, a twelfth-century English monk, recorded that the English had always called September 3rd "the bad" or "the Egyptian". William added that this designation proved to be a divinely-inspired portent of cataclysmic events that would spread throughout England during the early months of Richard's reign—massacres of the English Jews. Initial riots erupted at Richard's coronation, quickly turned deadly, spread throughout the countryside, and ended with the death of 57 Jews at Bury St Edmund's on Palm Sunday, 18 March 1190. This violence towards the religious minority of English Jews ended as abruptly as it had begun leaving behind an enigma of both cause and effect (William of Newburgh 1884, p. 284).

Throughout the medieval period of European history, we find similar incidents of intense and unrestrained violence towards religious minorities. These episodes present quite a challenge to the modern reader who often desires a systematic, rational, and linear explanation of cause and effect. Often, modern readers want to attribute these incidents to long standing prejudices and extreme ideological beliefs. Recent historians such as Nirenberg, Cohen, and Moore have presented solid arguments on the origins of medieval religious violence putting forth very defensible theories of why medieval religious communities acted in the ways they did. The intent of this article is to show how Nirenberg's thesis of medieval violence can be applicable to these localized events of violence towards English Jews during the reign of Richard I. This paper will argue that there was both a palpable and widespread feeling of anti-Semitism in European society during this time. However, this undercurrent only served as fodder to the fire that was conveniently manipulated by local persons to suit the passions and designs of the moment. Consequently, this description draws some similarities to Nirenberg's contention.



**Citation:** Booth, Ted. 2021. The Massacres of the Jews under Richard I (A.D. 1189–1190). *Religions* 12: 821. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12100821>

Academic Editor: Scott E. Hendrix

Received: 18 August 2021

Accepted: 29 September 2021

Published: 30 September 2021

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## 2. Historiography

Cecil Roth is one of the first modern historians to confront these specific episodes of violence. In his work, *A History of the Jews in England*, Roth devotes an entire chapter to the rising persecution of the Jews during the first few months of the reign of Richard I. He attributed this zeal for persecution to the rising sentiment of the English for crusade. Therefore, since the Jews were the nearest “infidels”, the English Christians viewed them as an easy and attractive target for a people mobilizing for war. He further set this rising crusading spirit within the context of the anti-Semitic legislation of the Third Lateran Council of 1179, which condemned usury and had other restrictions against Jews. Roth links these two main factors with what he calls unfortunate circumstances which “proved to be the spark to set the tinder ablaze” (Roth 1964, pp. 18–19). A more recent scholar, R. B. Dobson also linked the growing intolerance and violence towards the Jews to the zealous spirits of the local people wanting to follow their king on crusade. He further connected the escalation of violence at York to the growing anti-Semitism since the time of Richard’s father Henry II, who had favored the Jews.

For the purposes of this article, however, it is also helpful to consider other theories of the causes of the violence towards Jews during the Middle Ages that deal less directly with the reign of Richard I. For example, R. I. Moore’s book *The Formation of a Persecuting Society* presents a hypothesis of conspiracy behind the zeal for the persecution of the Jews in medieval Europe. Moore attributes the increasing desire to persecute and kill Jews during the Middle Ages to the aspirations of the rising class of clerks who saw the more educated Jews as competitors within the royal courts of Europe (Moore 1990). David Nirenberg argues in his book *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* that to understand episodes of violence toward medieval minorities (e.g., lepers, Muslims, and Jews), one must examine the incidents of persecution in light of their specific historical contexts. In this study, Nirenberg specifically focuses on events in Southern France and the lands of the Crown of Aragon. He argues that the anti-Jewish violence during the Shepherd’s crusade in 1320 may have been as much about protesting the French monarchy’s fiscal policies as it was about anti-Semitism. This was because the Jews were the recognized agents of the Crown in financial matters. Consequently, attacking them was an attack against the Crown itself, and a much safer one at that (Nirenberg 1996, p. 50).

Kenneth R. Stow’s book *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe* takes issue with the historical belief that the Jews initially fared well during the Middle Ages and then experienced a gradual decline fueled by mounting pressure from the Church. Stow contends that “the Jew’s ultimate fall was a product of medieval society in its entirety, the unique nature of its secular institutions, and of the mythical Jewish image that society’s members fostered”. The position of the medieval Jews was one that monarchs guaranteed by legislation. As long as the rulers enforced the laws, Jews enjoyed legal protection. He does, however, attribute the Church’s influence on the worsening situation of the Jews, but states that it played only a minor role. Consequently, the demise of the Jew in Stow’s thought has less to do with a religious causality and more to do with a civil procedure based upon the Jews’ status as an “alienated minority” of medieval Europe (Stow 1992, pp. 4–5). Mark Cohen’s work *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* takes a comparative approach to how the Jews fared under their Christian rulers and Muslim rulers. He, like Nirenberg, contests the *lachrymose* school of thought<sup>1</sup> dealing with Jewish persecution. However, he does admit that for the most part Jews experienced far less suffering at the hands of their Muslim rulers in contrast to their Christian ones. He also links the decline of good relations with Christians to the corresponding rise in zeal for crusade that enveloped much of Western Europe in the later Middle Ages (Cohen 1994).

Robert Chazan, in his book *In the Year 1096: The First Crusade and the Jews*, argues that the majority of the crusaders who took part in the First Crusade actually had no interest in attacking the Jews of France or the Rhineland. Instead, Chazan insists that it was primarily disorganized bands of “would-be” crusaders, inflamed by the passion for crusade, attacked and killed the Jews. He denies that the organized armies led by such personalities as Peter

the Hermit played any major role in these attacks. He states that when Peter and his band of crusaders passed through the area, their presence stirred up affectations in the local populace, who then as disorganized bands unable to travel the long distance to the Holy Land attacked the local Jews instead. He also cites examples of Christian neighbors helping the Jews and even mentions the intervention of Bishop John of Speier, who battled against the attackers of the Jews with a force of his own (Chazan 1996, p. 48).

Hans Mayer in his book *The Crusades* suggests another possible motive for the violence towards the Jews during the First Crusade. He writes: "Frequently, the argument that the Jews, as the enemies of Christ, deserved to be punished was merely a feeble attempt to conceal the real motive—greed". He cites the wealth of the Jews as an attractive means for the poverty-stricken mobs to finance their journeys to the Holy Land to participate in the crusades. Despite their stated desire to go on crusade, however, most of the attackers of Jews on the First Crusade did not even make it out of Germany (Mayer 1988, p. 41). Jonathan Riley-Smith disagrees with Mayer's conclusions about the violence towards Jews during the First Crusade. While Riley-Smith does admit that greed played a part in the violence, he attributes as much greed to the Catholic bishops as to the crusaders. Instead, he asserts that "vengeance" for the crime of the crucifixion of Christ was primarily the motivation for the pogroms. This desire for vengeance blurred their distinction between Jew and Muslim (Riley-Smith 1987, p. 17). Mayer disagrees with Riley-Smith's assessment that these were well-organized armies fueled by passion for revenge of Christ's death. He continues to argue that disorganized mobs unconnected with but inspired by personalities such as Peter the Hermit did most of the violence. To support his argument, he cites the evidence of a letter from Bernard of Clairvaux describing the attacking mobs as disorganized and not under the control of experienced leaders (Mayer 1988, pp. 40–41).

In his multi-volume work *A History of the Crusades* Steven Runciman links the violence of the crusaders towards the Jews to a growing resentment of their prominence and privilege within the royal courts of medieval society. He also asserts that as the Jews became more associated with borrowing and usury, the common people began to view them with more contempt. He also states that during the First Crusade a certain Count Emich was responsible for the anti-Jewish massacres on the European continent and not Peter the Hermit, the real leader of the recognized crusaders. Count Emich led a less organized and more violent band who took out their passions upon the Jews. While Count Emich always endeavored to join with Peter, he and his army never made it out of Germany. Instead, they waged a fruitless campaign against the Hungarian army who routed them completely (Runciman 1990, p. 135).

However, there is still the issue of the reliability of the sources of this study. To the medieval historian, who most often was a churchman of some type, the writing of history served the greater purpose of instructing the reader in morality or constructing a grand narrative in which the Divine directly influenced world events. In this way the events chronicled often could serve as an allegory for a moral lesson more so than as actual history. Nancy Partner in her work, *Serious Entertainments: The Writing of History in Twelfth-century England*, has argued that these factors must be considered when evaluating these sources as history. Partner does argue that medieval histories are, useful as primary sources as despite any biases they do contain "factual information" as well as "inaccurate information that reveals contemporary attitudes". Therefore, despite any possible motives to connect these events to divine judgment, the chroniclers would have more incentive to tell them correctly as they viewed the Jews as infidels and viewed this violence as divinely sanctioned. Furthermore, their very wording sometimes details the depth of the prejudice that these Christian writers had towards the English Jews. Additionally, their agreement on details along with Jewish accounts helps to demonstrate their reliability for the purposes of this study.

These works of historiography provide a necessary foundation for the continuation of this article. Many of these scholars have looked at possible general motives for the violence

towards medieval religious minorities. In the next part of this article, I will attempt to forge a narrative of these events based upon the historical accounts of these tragedies.

### 3. The Massacres during Richard's Early Reign

On 3 September 1189, after an elaborate and ornate ceremony; Richard I was crowned king of both England and the Angevin Empire (William of Newburgh 1884, p. 295). However, rioters just outside the king's palace soon interrupted the celebratory nature of the occasion. Ralph De Diceto, the Dean of St. Paul's, attributed the origin of the disturbance to unnamed "foreigners" who he claimed instigated violence against the English Jews in attendance at the coronation (Ralph De Diceto 1876, p. 69)<sup>2</sup>.

William of Newburgh provided some commentary that although Henry II, Richard's father, had been favorably disposed towards the Jews, Richard did not continue this trend. In fact, he claimed that Richard had gone so far as to bar by the presence of any Jew at the coronation or the following celebrations. In typical medieval fashion, William attributed this edict to a supernatural or divinely inspired "premonition" of Richard's. Despite this edict barring their presence, William wrote that many Jews still came to the ceremony in order to pay respects to the new king. He wrote that some of these Jews got very close to the palace doors and began to mix among the crowds during the celebrations. William penned the blame for the start of the violence on an unnamed Christian subject whom he stated became upset that a Jew was so close to the palace door. The Christian then attacked the Jew claiming the king's edict as his justification. William wrote that that many in the crowd also joined in on the violence "driving the Jews away by insulting language" (William of Newburgh, 1884, pp. 294–95)<sup>3</sup> Certainly, this violence appears to have started spontaneously possibly due to simple prejudice. William justified the violence by adding that he believed the Jews to be a "traitorous and blasphemous race" and that the violence was therefore "a clear heavenly judgment" against them. (William of Newburgh 1884, pp. 294–95)<sup>4</sup>

William of Newburgh recorded that during the initial attack a rumor arose that Richard had actually sanctioned this violence and had now ordered the very extermination of all of his Jewish citizens of London. Because of this rumor, he writes that the mob quickly moved to seize any available weapons to complete the massacre (William of Newburgh 1884, p. 294). Ralph De Diceto recorded that the violence then spread throughout the city of London. He added that the mobs not only killed many of London's Jews, but also robbed them of valuable possessions setting their homes and synagogues on fire (Ralph De Diceto 1876, p. 69). Even though the Jews of London lived in what was described as very well-built houses, he writes that these mobs did not relent in their desire to destroy them. He recorded that the attacks lasted all day from nine o'clock in the morning until dark. After the mob became frustrated with the attempt to break into the fortified Jewish homes; they set their thatched roofs on fire. This caused the Jews to die either in the fire or by the swords of the crowd as they fled their homes for safety. He stated the crowds in their haste to burn the homes of the Jews also inadvertently set fire to the homes of some neighboring Christians (William of Newburgh 1884, p. 295).

What is relevant to this article's thesis is that each of the chroniclers listed various different individuals or groups that were able to capitalize on the underlying antisemitism to direct and increase violence toward the Jewish citizens. Diceto stated that foreigners [*alienigenis*] were the instigators of the violence. Certainly, there were foreign visitors in London to see the coronation and celebrations, or this could also be a way to shift blame for the cause of all the violence on to someone other than the English (Ralph De Diceto 1876, p. 69). Benedict of Peterborough set the blame on the citizens of London stirred up by rumors that the King had sanctioned the violence (Benedict of Peterborough 1867, p. 84). This is intriguing as his account suggested that members of the king's own court [*curiales*] stirred up the emotions of the common people in order to do harm against the Jews. This contention supports Moore's thesis on the escalation of violence towards the Jews at the hands of royal clerks but also parallels some of Nirenberg's thoughts on the

direct manipulation of preexisting prejudice by those with influence. Roger of Hoveden, attributed the violence to the citizens of London without comment (Roger De Hoveden 1868, p. 12). Ephraim of Bonn, the only Jewish chronicler of the event, blamed the violence on unspecified “bad men” at the coronation (Ephraim of Bonn 1893, p. 107). Richard of Devizes, an English monk, was the most negative chronicler in his description of Jews labeling them as “worms” [*vermibus*] and “morally lost” [*perditos*] souls who deserved their fate at the hands of the English crowds (Richard of Devizes 1886, p. 383). His word choice alone details the depths of the underlying prejudice towards the Jews that was ripe for exacerbation. Richard of Wendover, a canon of St. Paul’s in London, included the obvious understatement that the Jews “endured many bad events”. (Roger of Wendover 1864, p. 142).

All of these authors record that such an event occurred and do attribute it to the manipulations of possible English or foreigners who were present in order to make trouble for the Jews. Adding to the believability of these accounts of the attacks on the Jews is that fact that the chroniclers also included that not all the citizens of London joined in the violence against the Jews. In fact, Roger of Hoveden related that some of the Jews of London were able to escape “by the kindness of their Christian friends”.<sup>5</sup> This is very significant as Roger described the helpers as being both Christian as well as friends of the Jews. Consequently, this account suggests the possibility of a Christian majority with vastly differing opinions and attitudes towards their Jewish neighbors (Roger De Hoveden 1868, p. 12). Benedict of Peterborough also wrote that friends of the Jews helped out during these initial riots. He stated that a small group of them were able to seek refuge under the Tower of London and in the homes of their Christian friends. This source also claims that at least a percentage of the Christian populace of London looked kindly towards their Jewish neighbors. Certainly, this is also believable as many appeared to live in the same neighborhoods (Benedict of Peterborough 1867, p. 84).

The only Jewish chronicler of the event, Ephraim of Bonn, claimed that the king was oblivious to the riots due to his participation in the celebrations. He claimed that when Richard asked a doorkeeper at his palace about the reason for all the commotion in the streets, the attendant lied stating that it was just the noise of the happy crowds. (Ephraim of Bonn 1893, p. 108). However, one chronicler, William of Newburgh, did record the notification of the King. He claimed that after learning of the ongoing riots, the king immediately dispatched Ranulf of Glanville, the Chief Justiciar of England under both Henry II and Richard I, to investigate and take charge of the situation. However, William noted that the crowd was so unruly that they did not pay any attention to Glanville’s attempts to quell the violence. In fact, the violence and commotion continued unabated until the next day (William of Newburgh 1884, p. 297).

William of Newburgh described the reaction of Richard as “indignant and grieved” (*indignatus, et dolens*) when he heard about the riots. William added that Richard realized that with the exception of the nobility, who were with him at his banquet, the fervor had overtaken nearly every citizen of London and the surrounding areas. This fact alone made punishment of the crime both impossible and impractical. Therefore, Richard decided the only prudent action was to cover up the event and not punish the conspirators. Nevertheless, he claimed that Richard did seize at least some of those whom he thought to be the conspirators and executed three of them by hanging. Benedict recorded that the authorities executed “one man because he made a theft on the certain business of a Christian”.<sup>6</sup> He wrote that the authorities hanged the other two men “because they had made fire in the city, from whence the homes of Christians were reduced to ash” (William of Newburgh 1893, p. 298)<sup>7</sup>. Similarly, Roger of Hoveden summed up the reasons behind Richard’s punishment:

Not because of the (injury to the) Jews, but on account of the homes and property of the Christians which they (the rioters) had burned and pillaged, he ordered some of them to be hanged (Roger De Hoveden 1868, p. 12)<sup>8</sup>.

This appears to have been an honest revelation that the King did not punish anyone because of violence towards Jews but because the unrestrained violence escalated to the point it damaged the property of Richard's Christian subjects. Finally, Benedict of Peterborough wrote that the king outwardly "sent messengers and his own letters by all the Earls of England . . . that the Jews might have their own peace" (Benedict of Peterborough 1867, p. 84)<sup>9</sup>.

During this initial riot in London, the mob of citizens seized two of the Jewish nobles, Benedict and Josce, who were from the city of York. Josce managed to escape the violence of the crowd, but the mob severely injured Benedict (William of Newburgh 1884, p. 295). Roger of Hoveden tells that apparently Benedict's wounds were so great that he "despaired of his life" (Roger De Hoveden 1868, p. 12)<sup>10</sup>. However, despite his wounds, the crowd forced him to "confess Christ" and subsequently be baptized into the Christian faith (William of Newburgh 1884, p. 295)<sup>11</sup>. After his baptism, he took the name William. On the very next day, King Richard called for him. When William did appear, the king asked him his name, and he replied: "I am Benedict your Jew from York". The king asked Archbishop Baldwin how they should proceed against him. Baldwin responded: "If he does not wish to be a Christian, let him be the man of the Devil". Roger of Hoveden recorded that a short time later, Benedict of York died at Northampton, perhaps of his initial wounds. However, because he had at separate times renounced both Judaism and Christianity, he was refused burial at either a Jewish or Christian cemetery (Roger De Hoveden 1868, pp. 12–13)<sup>12</sup>.

To accurately depict the devastation of this initial riot is difficult due to the sources available. Ephraim of Bonn listed the number killed at this incident at about "thirty men" and wrote that some of the Jews actually committed suicide when threatened by the crowds. He also recorded that the "Chief Rabbi, Jacob of Orleans" was one of the many Jews the mobs had seized and killed (Ephraim of Bonn 1893).

Demonstrating his zeal for crusade, Richard only spent a few months in England before leaving for the continent. With the king out of the country, reports of episodes of violence against the Jews began to erupt once again. William of Newburgh wrote that the renewed violence began first at the city of Lynn in February of 1190. Newburgh placed the blame for violence with the Jews on this occasion. While this suggests a definite bias, his story is so original that it does have an air of credibility. He wrote that the Jews had attacked a fellow Jew who had recently converted to Christianity. When the convert sought refuge in a local church, the Jews continued the attack even asking for help from their Christian neighbors. William mentioned that the people of the town were afraid of the orders of the king, so they ignored the request. However, some in the city, whom he states were foreigners there on business, turned on the Jews driving them away from the church. Then, he claimed the Christians of the town joined them in their attack against these Jews, even killing a Jewish physician, who was known and respected by the Christians (William of Newburgh 1884, pp. 308–9).

William also added that he believed the instigators to be young foreigners who departed quickly to their ships once they had their fill of the Jewish loot. (William of Newburgh 1884, p. 310). Once again, the account mentioned that foreigners were involved in these persecutions. This anecdote is significant as it continues to build the case that it was distinct individuals or groups that hand in fomenting the antisemitism of the community to induce violence for their own purposes. It also lends credibility to Diceto's account of foreigners as at least part of the cause of the coronation massacre as well (Ralph De Diceto 1876, p. 69). While this might seem to suggest that these chroniclers wished to blame foreigners for the crimes of the English, this does not fit with their descriptions of the deeds. Whenever the chroniclers mentioned the violence, they did so in an unashamed manner justifying the attacks as the very judgments of God. William recorded that despite the violence, no one would deny that what happened was a good event that had full Divine sanction (William of Newburgh 1884, p. 298). Therefore, the idea that they were trying to shift blame does not fit the context—the English took their share of the blame and gladly so. Consequently, whether the foreign youths were the direct cause of the initial riots or the

escalating violence that followed, the evidence supports their involvement in some way in both cases thereby adding to the evidence individuals manipulating the existing feelings of the English against the Jews.

Diceto is one of the first to mention that many of the English, like their king, had a desire for pilgrimage and for crusade. However, thus he attributed some of the violence to the fact that: the English Christians “decided rather to rise up against the Jews than to attack the Saracens”. In support of this statement, he noted the new anti-Jewish massacre in Norwich on 6 February 1190, around the same time as the events at Lynn. In this massacre, Diceto recorded that the English: “slaughtered . . . however many Jews that were found in their own homes” (Ralph De Diceto 1876, p. 75)<sup>13</sup>. He further wrote that this violence spread to the nearby town of Stamford.

William of Newburgh also attributed this violence to the crusading spirit of some English youths. He wrote:

A great number of youths arrived from different provinces who had taken the sign of the Lord to depart for Jerusalem. They were indignant because the enemies of the cross of Christ living in that same place possessed so much, while they having taken up so great a journey had little, from them they considered they ought to extort from the unjust possessors, that which they might apply to the urgent uses of the pilgrimage which they had undertaken (William of Newburgh 1884, p. 310)<sup>14</sup>.

William continued:

No one either from the inhabitants of the place or from those who had come to the day of the market were opposing such daring ones, in truth some were even helping them (the youths). Some of the Jews were cut to pieces, in truth, the remaining escaped with difficulty having been taken back inside the castle. Their homes were robbed and a great abundance of money captured (William of Newburgh 1884, p. 311)<sup>15</sup>.

William also included a story concerning one of the youthful attackers named John. John escaped to Northampton with a large amount of money taken from the Jews. However, someone soon took both his money and his life. William wrote that after his death “a story arose among the foolish common people” near Northampton that the body of John was now able to perform miracles, and the locals began to regard his tomb as a shrine of a martyr “honoring it by a sacred vigil”. He added that this practice was “ridiculed by prudent men”, but that it took the intervention of St. Hugh of Lincoln, the bishop at that time, to put a stop to this observance (William of Newburgh 1884, p. 311)<sup>16</sup>. Once again, these accounts mention how individuals used localized motives of both greed, and anger over tax collection to incite violence against the Jews, whom they are already despised.

William of Newburgh recorded that the escalating violence then spread to the cities of Lincoln and York. He wrote that when the citizens of Lincoln and York heard about the attacks on Jews in London, they decided that they too would attack the Jews in order to rob them of their possessions and wealth. However, the Jews of Lincoln had also heard of the recent incidents so they “withdrew quickly with their money into a fortified residence”. Because of this, the citizens of York were not able to seize any of the Jews or their possessions and this potential massacre quickly dissipated (William of Newburgh 1884, p. 312)<sup>17</sup>. Despite this turn of events, another attack on the Jews began at about the same time at the city of York. This incident at York is, by far, the most well-documented anti-Jewish massacre of medieval England.

Ralph Diceto recorded that the violence at York began on March 16, 1190 (Ralph De Diceto 1876, p. 75). William of Newburgh described the mood of the citizens of the York in very dramatic fashion stating:

neither the fear of the most bold leader (the king), nor the strength of laws, nor reason, nor kindness hindered them (the men of York) from satisfying their own

rage by the common destruction of the treacherous people living with them, and that they might erase that entire race in their city (William of Newburgh 1884, p. 312)<sup>18</sup>.

R.B. Dobson in his article, *The Jews of Medieval York and the Massacre of March 1190*, records a long history of tension between the Christians and Jews of York. This city had a very large and prosperous group of Jewish moneylenders dating back to at least the 1170's. Furthermore, William of Newburgh chronicled in detail the wealth of the two most prominent Jews of York, Benedict and Josce. He records how they built very large homes, at "the most excessive cost" in the middle of the town and how these homes rightly "ought to be called royal palaces" (William of Newburgh 1884, pp. 312–13)<sup>19</sup>.

William noted that after the king had issued the order of protection after the riots at his coronation, Joce and many of the other Jews of York resumed their everyday lives. However, after Richard journeyed into France, many of the people in York once again began to conspire against the Jews. William provided a justification for this resentment by the locals stating that the citizens of York were not "able to bear the wealth of the Jews when they themselves were in need".<sup>20</sup> It is of note that he recorded that the leaders of the violence just happened to be the very same people who were the most indebted to the Jews—suggesting the motive of greed in combination with their intense antisemitism. He added that many of these English Christians had given up their homes as a payment for the money they owed the Jews. He also included would-be crusaders as part of the perpetrators stating that they were easily persuaded to attack the Jews by the leaders of the attacks (the ones indebted to the Jews) as they were the "enemies of the Lord" (*hostium Domini*) nearest to them. (William of Newburgh 1884, pp. 312–13).

William recorded that the massacre at York began during the dead of the night when citizens set part of the city of York on fire. With most of the city occupied with fighting the fires, he reported that "an armed band of conspirators" which tends to suggest premeditation and planning, attacked the home of the widow of Benedict of York, the Jew taken in the initial coronation riots. These men killed everyone inside, including Benedict's widow and children, and set fire to the roof of the house. However, Josce and the other Jews of the town found out about the attack and sought help from the keeper of the castle at York. Consequently, they took their families and as much money as they could carry and shut themselves up in the castle to stay alive. William recorded that the residents of York came back after a few days to besiege Joce's home, which William stated "resembled a noble citadel in the greatness and strength of its construction".<sup>21</sup> The English Christians then burned and looted Josce's home and the homes of other Jews. They also killed any of the Jews who had not made the journey with Josce and his family into the castle. For some of those outside the castle, the Christians offered the Jews a chance to convert or die. A few of the Jews did accept Christian baptism, but in William's thoughts this was only to avoid death. Those Jews outside the castle who refused baptism were killed (William of Newburgh 1884, pp. 314–15).

According to William, the warden of the castle had originally agreed to protect the Jews, but then the crowds bribed him to change his allegiance. He then went to the local sheriff complaining that the Jews had somehow tricked him out of his castle. He protested that to allow them to stay now would be an affront to the King himself. William recorded that upon hearing these words, the sheriff then ordered his soldiers and all present to attack the castle. A large mass of armed soldiers, citizens, and apparently even clergy joined in the assault against the castle. However, William recorded that the sheriff had second thoughts, but the passion of the armed crowd now made stopping this mob impossible. Here, William wrote that the people of York had forgotten of the words of David, *immo Dominicum* [no indeed, of the Lord] who said not to kill the Jews (William of Newburgh 1884, p. 318).

At this time the mob decided to besiege the castle and brought in siege engines to help with this task. The siege endured several days without progress. There also was a hermit on the scene who wore a white robe and incited the mob to keep attacking. He



cried out with: “a strong shout that the enemies of Christ ought to be crushed”.<sup>22</sup> While all this was going on outside, a William recorded that a doctor of the Jewish law, Yomtob of Joigny, gave advice to his fellow imprisoned Jews in the tower. Benedict of Peterborough recorded his words as: “Men of Israel, hear my advice. It is better for us to die for our law rather than fall into the hands of the enemies of our law” (Benedict of Peterborough 1867, p. 107)<sup>23</sup>. William recorded that many of the Jews in the tower then chose to die by suicide rather than at the hands of the Christians (William of Newburgh 1884). Diceto similarly recorded that the Jews in the tower wanted to die by their own hands instead those of the English Christians. He estimated the death total at around 500 hundred Jews during this massacre at York (Ralph De Diceto 1876, p. 75). Ephraim of Bonn wrote that at one point during the massacre “60 souls” perished and then at the hands of the Jews themselves about “150 souls men and women” (Ephraim of Bonn 1893, p. 131).

William wrote that not all of the Jews accepted Yomtomb’s advice for suicide. Some of the Jews decided to take their chances with Christians outside and begged them for baptism to avoid death. Among the leaders of the Christians was a certain Richard of Malbestia, who William of Newburgh described as “a most reckless man”. William stated that the mob outside:

speaking with them mildly in a trick . . . soon, as they came out, the Jews were seized in the manner of an enemy, and demanding continually the baptism of Christ, those most savage agitators destroyed them (William of Newburgh 1884, p. 321)<sup>24</sup>

The mob then robbed the homes of the Jews of York and set fire to them. William added that the mob also managed to remember to burn the records of their debts. Once again, this demonstrates how individuals can manipulate prejudice for localized reasons for this violence—those zealous for crusade also made their getaway shortly after the events at York. William stated that the city was “at that time clearly dreadful and foul” and for a time many bodies laid unburied around the fortress (William of Newburgh 1884, p. 322)<sup>25</sup>.

The violence continued on to Bury St. Edmund’s in modern day West Suffolk. Ralph Diceto recorded that it occurred on March 18, which added to its spiritual significance as this was Palm Sunday [*Ramis Palmarum*]. He wrote that on that day the mobs cut the throats of 57 Jews. He also added that:

Wherever Jews were found, they were struck by crusaders except those who were spirited away by the aid of the citizens. The murder of the Jews was so calamitous, so deadly, that it was not believed to have pleased prudent men because that Davidic statement came to our ears frequently “Do not kill them”. (Ralph De Diceto 1876, p. 75)<sup>26</sup>.

Once again Diceto noted important details concerning the murders of the Jews. It is significant that he like William of Newburgh quoted Psalm 59 demonstrating knowledge of Augustine’s doctrine of witness concerning the Jews. He also attributed at least some of the origins of the violence to those wanting to go on crusade. He further mentioned that not everyone in England, especially those he called prudent men, saw the slaughter as a good thing. Diceto stated that at Bury St. Edmund’s, as in other cases, there were also Christians who helped the Jews escape from certain death (Ralph De Diceto 1876, p. 75). Consequently, the events surrounding this last massacre continue to demonstrate how the local passions and prejudices of the people served as a ticking time bomb that set off by individuals hungry for crusade.

After this violence had occurred, the news of it once again reached the king, who was in France preparing for crusade. William of Newburgh recorded that Richard was incredibly angry upon hearing of the slaughters of Jews. However, Newburgh admitted quite honestly that the King’s anger was more over his subjects not following his initial order, as well as because of the great loss to his treasury and not necessarily because of the savagery of the attacks on the Jews themselves. One reason that these attacks could have been perceived as an affront to the king was that at this time the Jews were usurers

of the king. So, in fact, then at least some of the Jews involved in usury at York were operating as official agents of the king. William underscored that this fact was “well-known” amongst the citizens of York (William of Newburgh 1884, p. 323). Consequently, this adds credence to the link between the killing of the Jews and protests against the royal taxation—resembling very much at least part of the situation that Nirenberg mentions concerning the Jews of Spain (Nirenberg 1996).

William of Newburgh recorded that Richard ordered the Bishop of Ely, William Longchamp, to take an army and investigate the situation. However, by this time most of the leading conspirators had long since fled making punishment of the crime once again quite impossible. He noted that some of the leaders of the mob had traveled as far as Scotland. The common people of the town begged for mercy from the bishop stating that they were not involved in the massacre and were unable to restrain such a large, unruly, and armed mob of people. The only punishment levied for the loss of Jewish lives was an additional tax. Newburgh wrote that the officials had no hope of bringing the perpetrators of the crime to any measure of justice. He did record that while the Bishop removed the local sheriff from his post, he replaced him with his very own brother Osbert. Richard issued an edict of protection for the Jews and there was peace again. However, Newburgh stated that despite this official investigation “Nor has anyone been assigned with punishment for that ruin of the Jews up to this day” (William of Newburgh 1884, p. 104)<sup>27</sup>.

#### 4. Conclusions

Violence against minorities, especially the Jews, was widespread during the Middle Ages. This was especially true in England during the reign of Richard I. While many people participated in the violence for various reasons, the intent of this article is to demonstrate how a burning undercurrent of antisemitism had swept through England. This allowed those in power to be able to manipulate various localized conditions and capitalize on this sentiment to induce the English citizens to massacre their Jewish neighbors.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

#### Notes

- 1 The “lachrymose” school of thought comes from the Heinrich Graetz who places a strong emphasis on the historical suffering of the Jews as a people.
- 2 Sollmenpnibus expletis . . . pax Judaeorum, quam ab antiquis temporibus semper obtinuerant, ab alienigenis interrumpitur”. All translations in this article are mine.
- 3 “Juadeos cum contumelia repellabant”.
- 4 “sed operae pretium est pleniori relatu transmittere ad posteros tam perspicui circa gentem perfidam et blasphemam superni iudicii monumentum”.
- 5 “pauci tamen evaserunt beneficio amicorum suorum Christianorum”.
- 6 “unus quia furtum fecerat in re cujusdam Christiani”.
- 7 “duo quia incendium fecerant in civitate, unde domus Christianorum combustae sunt”.
- 8 “non propter Judaeos, sed propter domos et facultates Christianorum quas incenderunt et rapuerunt”.
- 9 “Interim misit rex nuncios et litteras suas per omnes comitatus Angliae, prohibens ne aliquis forisfaciat Judaeis, sed pacem suam habeant”.
- 10 “ut de vita desperaret”.
- 11 “Christum coactus est confiteri, ductusque in ecclesiam illico baptizatus est”.
- 12 “Ego sum Benedictus tuus de Eboraco”. “qui postmodum parvo interlapso tempore obit apud Northamptoniam”.
- 13 “prius in Judaeos insurgere decreverunt quam invaderent Sarracenos”; “. . . Judaei quotquot inventi sunt in domibus propriis apud Norwicum trucidati sunt”.
- 14 “juvenum, qui signum Dominicum Ierosolymam profecturi susceperant, ex diversis provinciis multitudo, supervenit, indignans quod inimici crucis Christi ibidem habitantes tamen multa possiderent, cum ipsi ad tanti itineris sumptus minus haberent, et ab eis tanquam injustis possessoribus extorquendum duxerunt, quod susceptae peregrinationis necessaries usibus applicarent”.

- 15 nemine vel ex loci incolis vel ex iis qui ad nundinas venerant tantis se ausibus opponente, nonnullis vero etiam cooperantibus. Caesi sunt aliquot ex Judaeis, ceteri vero intra castellum recepti aegre evaserunt. Expilatae sunt domus eorum, et magna vis pecuniae capta.
- 16 “Fama excitum vulgus insipiens”; “sepulchrum ejus sollemnibus excubiis honorantes”; “Ridebatur quidem hoc a prudentibus”.
- 17 “paucis discrimen expertis, in munitionem regiam cum pecuniis mature secesserunt”.
- 18 “non metus ferocissimi principis, non vigor legum, non ratio, non humanitas obstitit, quominus cohabitantium perfidorum generali exitio furorem proprium saturarent, atque in sua civitatae totum illud genus abraderent”.
- 19 “profusissimus sumptibus domos amplissimas, regalibus conferendas palatiis”.
- 20 “eorum, cum ipsi egerent, opulentiam non ferentes”.
- 21 “constructionis magnitudine et firmitate arces non ignobiles aemulantem”.
- 22 “hostes Christi proterendos saepius cum clamore valido repetens”.
- 23 Viri Israelitae, audite consilium meum. Melius est nobis nobis [sic] mori pro lege nostrae, quam incidere in manus inimicorum legis nostrae”.
- 24 “Mitia tamen cum eis in dolo loquentes . . . mox ut egressi sunt, hostiliter comprehensos, et baptismum Christi constanter postulantes, lanistae crudelissimi peremerunt”.
- 25 “Horrenda plane et foeda tunc”.
- 26 “Ubique reperti sunt Judaei manibus peregrinantium percussi sunt, nisi qui municipalium eruebantur auxilio. Necem Judaeorum tam funestam, tam exitialem, viris prudentibus placuisse credendum non est, cum Daviticum illud auribus nostris frequenter occurrat, “Ne occidas eos”.
- 27 “nec usque ad hunc diem pro illo Judaeorum exitio aliquis supplicio est addictus”.

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