

Manifestations of Antisemitism in the Medieval European Reality

The article addresses the harsh and intolerant policies adopted toward Jews in medieval Europe. Anti-Jewish attitudes were reflected in the economic, social, and political spheres of life. The author emphasizes that as early as 1096, during the First Crusade, participating knights instigated a wave of anti-Jewish violence in France and the Holy Roman Empire, including massacres in Worms, Trier (both now in Germany), and Metz (now in France).

The article also discusses the widespread unfounded accusations related to ritual murders, desecration of the host, and blood libel.

The conclusion notes that the Middle Ages spared no one—not even Christians. The flames and tortures of the Inquisition burned and shattered the souls of not only the Jewish people but also many innocent Christians.

Keywords: anti-Semitism, Jews, medieval Europe, ritual murder, blood libel, ghetto, massacres.

The term anti-Semitism or Judeophobia and the related policies and attitudes towards Jews in Europe and the Middle East.

The term **antisemitism**, despite its ambiguous interpretations, is generally understood as referring to anti-Jewish policies, ideology, and hatred.

The term has come to encompass various interpretations: an ideology and political movement directed against Judaism; a form of racist nationalism; and racial chauvinism directed at Semitic peoples, especially Jews. National intolerance—ranging from everyday hostility to legal discrimination and genocide—has contributed to the term being perceived primarily in the context of Jew-hatred. That is why in this study the terms anti-Semitism and Judeophobia are used as synonyms.

In 1879, the German journalist Wilhelm Marr first used the term “antisemitism” in writing. By that time, it already carried connotations of hatred toward Jews and toward liberal, cosmopolitan, and international political movements of the 18th and 19th centuries—many of which were commonly associated with Jews. These movements and ideas included equal civil rights, constitutional democracy, free trade, socialism, financial capitalism, and pacifism. However, hostility toward Jews existed long before the term “antisemitism” was coined. In general, the word anti-Semitism does not mean hatred of Semites in its direct sense, if we do not confuse it with the etymological definition. Anti-Semitism evolved into hatred of Jews and

not of other Semitic peoples¹. The study of historical material leads ²us to the conclusion that anti-Semitism in the ancient world was expressed in the same ways as it is now. Interactions between Jews and non-Jews in antiquity followed patterns that continue to appear in later historical periods. We are convinced of this by the judgments of authors of different times and documentary evidence (papyrus and inscriptions), which is also recorded in Jewish literature (the Bible, the Apocrypha, the Talmud, the remains of secular literature). In ancient times, Jews were already doomed to alienation, since they could not participate in official state worship rituals ³because of their religious beliefs.

Social anti-Semitism is a phenomenon of the Catholic system. Along with the growth of capitalism, there is also anti-Semitism, particularly in the social sphere. The medieval, as well as later, churches were completely enveloped in intolerance towards people who did not profess the religion that the church considered the only true one, and everything else was considered heretical and usually subject to destruction by fire and sword. The church fought against the still relatively widespread mixed marriages, that is, marriages of Jews with non-Jews.

Anti-Semitism in one form or another manifested itself during the following historical periods as well. If in the Middle Ages anti-Semitism was given a mainly religious character, which was more expressive during the Inquisition, from the 19th century onwards it gradually took on a nationalist character, especially when it began to take the form of the so-called scientific racism, which was laid at the basis of Nazi ideology.

The origins of anti-Semitism in medieval Europe: the influence of the Crusades

As early as 538, the Council of Orleans forbade Jews to appear on the streets during the last days of Holy Week, and the Council of Macon forbade Jews from being appointed judges and holding the office of tax collector, so that Christians would not be subject to those whom God rejects.

Despite the prohibitions issued by the city councils, Jews continued to own Christian serfs in some cities. In 614, the Fifth Council of Paris forbade Jews from holding civil or administrative positions that belonged to Christians. An exception was made for people who had become Christians with their families. This decree was reaffirmed at the Cathedral of Reims in 624-625.

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The question arises as to what was the attitude of the peasant population of medieval Europe towards the Jews. The answer, of course, lies primarily in the field of economic conditions. In this case, religious motives do not matter. There was fierce competition between Christian and Jewish merchants, the Jews were also engaged in profitable usury, and often it was against this background that the relations of the two sides were determined. The Jews were also successfully

¹ Michael Neumann. What is Antisemitism? // <http://www.balandin.net/Neumann.htm>

² **Thina Reinach**, *Texts of Greek and Roman Authors Relating to Judaism*, Paris, 1895.

S. Lurie, *Antisemitism in the Ancient World*, Z. I. Grzhebin Publishing House, Berlin / Petrograd / Moscow, 1923, p. 19.

³ **Jewish Encyclopedia**, Volume 15, *Trani – Shemini Atzeret*, Moscow, 2019, p. 371.

engaged in agriculture, cultivating large tracts of land on lease and achieving enviable results.

Pope Stephen III, in a letter to the Archbishop of Normandy, reported that Jewish landowners were forcing their subjects to work in their fields and vineyards.

A document from 849 mentions a Jewish estate called Terra Ebreorum in the city of Vienne. Similar estates were mentioned in the following century near the cities of Léon and Mâcon, and in the 11th century agriculture in Burgundy was mentioned under the control of local Jews. There were notable Jewish estates in Narbonne. In a letter to Philip Augustus, Pope Innocent III reported that Jews not only owned ordinary estates, but also took some church lands for agricultural use.¹

Anti-Semitic views were reflected in the economic, social, and political life of medieval Europe. In the Middle Ages, Jews were deprived of citizenship and rights in most of Europe, and were barred from holding public and military positions, as well as from joining guilds. As early as 1096, the knights participating in the First Crusade incited a wave of anti-Jewish violence in France and the Holy Roman Empire. Massacres began in Worms, Trier (both now in Germany), and Metz (now in France). The Peasants' Crusade in Germany was accompanied by massacres, in particular the Jews of Cologne and Mainz were victims of terrible cruelty and violence. And the massacres organized along the Rhine led to the fact that in some cases people committed suicide. Jews saw how their enemies attacked them, sparing no one, regardless of age. Jews even turned their weapons on their friends, children, wives, mothers, and sisters — preferring death to falling into the hands of the Crusaders, if only to escape the atrocities of the crusaders and not die by the weapons of the uncircumcised.

In Regensburg, the Jews were saved from death, but they were driven to the Danube River, where they were forcibly baptized. Although the massacre did not take place until after the warning of Henry IV, none of the violent acts were committed without his permission. The organizer and executor of all this was Godfrey or Godefroy of Boulogne. The hatred of the Jews towards him was indescribable, they prayed, asking God to turn Godfrey's bones into dust while he was still alive. The growth of anti-Semitism caused by the Crusades was not limited to the Rhineland. This was partly due to the large Jewish population in the German lands, where Jews had achieved notable economic success, which was natural and became an occasion for envy, robbery and revenge² on their part.

¹ **A.Z. Sinelnikov**, *The Medieval Jewish Empire*, Moscow: OLMA-PRESS, 2004. (*Alternative History We Do Not Know*), p. 232.

² **Metlitskaya Z.Yu.**, *Review of: Chazan R. Reassessing Jewish Life in the Middle Ages.* – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. – XVIII, 292 p. *Social and Humanitarian Sciences. Domestic and Foreign Literature. Series 5, History: Information and Analytical Journal*, no. 1, 2012, pp. 49–54.

There was also the extermination of huge Jewish communities. Eyewitnesses to these events were horrified. "The German scoundrels, who were the scum of Europe, continued their atrocities," wrote Gwiberd Nozhansky.¹

On the way of the Crusades, the Crusaders behaved like bandits. Passing through the lands of the Hungarians and Bulgarians, they forcibly robbed the population, took away their horses and livestock, raped women, etc. For many Crusaders, plunder had become their primary means of survival. The Crusaders continued their plundering and entered the Byzantine Empire. They did not have enough money to pay for food, although they were provided with certain funds by order of Emperor Alexius Komnenos. In addition, all kinds of criminal elements who viewed the Crusades as a convenient means of plunder took part in the campaign, which had nothing to do with the ideology of the Crusades. All this created a new, negative reputation for the Crusaders.

A significant part of the blame for the plunder of the lands of the Hungarians and Bulgarians falls on the knightly bands that had joined the peasant mob. It was simply carried out at their instigation and with their direct participation in the cities of France, Germany and the Czech Republic (Rouen, Reims, Verdun, Cologne, Speyer, Worms, Trier, Mainz, Magdeburg, Prague, Metz, Regensburg, Neuss, etc.). Count Emikhon Leninsky stood out in particular. The massacres of the Jews were presented as a well-calculated way to fully repay the creditors' debts and even enrich themselves at their expense, without even reaching Jerusalem. The leaders of the Catholic Church also appropriated the property of the Jews, then forced them to be baptized, promising them salvation in return, which, of course, did not happen. In this way, the church simply extorted money from its victims². The identification of the biblical Jews (who crucified Jesus) with the Jews of the Middle Ages was a very "successful" campaign, and as D. notes, Strickland, it "had devastating consequences for the Jewish population, from civil persecution to mass murder and, finally, the physical expulsion of Jews from various countries."

However, hatred of Jews was not unique to the Catholic Church. Later, the wave of hatred that had developed against Jews continued during the Reformation. Although Martin Luther initially had a positive attitude towards Jews, relying on Jewish scholars to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into German, Luther later began to accuse and threaten the Jews: "We are to blame for not killing them," Martin Luther said, or rather, "We allow them to live freely among us, despite their murders, blasphemies, lies, and slander."

The Rise of Anti-Semitism in Europe in the Late Middle Ages

In the 12th century, unfounded accusations of ritual murder, desecration of the host, and blood libel became widespread, in particular, allegations that Jews sacrificed Christian children at Easter in order to obtain blood for unleavened bread. Jews were accused of consuming blood, although their religion absolutely

¹ **Peter Frankopan**, *The First Crusade: The Call from the East*, translated from English, Moscow, 2018, p. 174.

² **M.A. Zaborov**, *The Crusaders in the East*, Moscow: Nauka, 1980, p. 50.

forbade the consumption of blood, since it was believed that the human soul was in the blood. And already during the Second Crusade, the crusaders in England began to spread rumors that Jews were treating Christian children in the same way as they had treated Jesus. Thus, in 1144, the Jews of Norwich were accused of crucifying a little boy named William on Easter. The boy quickly appeared among the holy martyrs, all his relatives received clerical positions, but the city authorities, led by the Sheriff of Norwich, stopped the campaign against the Jews and put an end to the anti-Semitic movement. The Sheriff declared that William was a victim of religious fanaticism on the part of his relatives, who, fearing punishment, blamed the Jews¹ for the boy's crucifixion.

Another wave of anti-Semitism in England was manifested on May 2, 1287, when all English Jews were arrested, then released for 12,000 pounds sterling, so their arrest, apart from blackmail, meant nothing in fact. King Edward I, apparently, hesitated and only on July 18, 1290, issued an order that all Jews in England should leave the borders of his country forever, and that no Jew should be in England on All Saints' Day, November 1. However, no one was to offend the Jews. They were allowed to take only what property they could carry with them. In addition, all things that had been pledged to Jews by Christians were subject to return.

Late medieval France was also notable for its anti-Semitic sentiments: in particular, in 1320-1321, more than 100 Jewish communities were destroyed in southern France. The murders of Jews had so intoxicated criminals and made them a means of satisfying their thirst for plunder that the latter also spread their violence against Christians. The plunderers crossed the borders of France and began to attack the Jews of Spain². Unlike in England and France, the position of the Jews in Spain was much more stable during this era. The reason for this was that during the long struggle to reconquer the Iberian Peninsula from the Arabs, the Christian kings of Spain did not feel strong and confident enough to arouse additional Jewish resentment against themselves while fighting the Arabs. Accusations of subjugation of the Jews were widespread. The earliest record of Jews being accused of witchcraft is that of Daniel of Salamis of Nika in 637, who was burned alive for practicing witchcraft. Unfortunately, no information has survived about what exactly he was accused of. then for almost five centuries no case of Jewish witchcraft was recorded. The next case dates back to 1131, when the Jews of London were forced to pay a fine of 2000 pounds for killing the disabled. 2000 pounds was a huge sum, clearly not commensurate with the fine that was usually required for this type of crime. For comparison, the murder of Jews was charged with only 20 shillings. 1393 Jacob Fasan Murviedro appeared before the Inquisition, accused of having supported baptized Jews by encouraging them to secretly convert to Judaism. In addition, he allegedly tried to find out the cause of his daughter's illness with the help of Jewish witches, which played an aggravating role in his case.

¹ S.G. Lozinsky, *The Social Roots of Antisemitism in the Middle Ages and Modern Times*, M.-L., "Atheist", 1929, p. 25.

² S.G. Lozinsky, *The Social Roots of Antisemitism in the Middle Ages and Modern Times*, M.-L., "Atheist", 1929, p. 41.

In 1451, in Messina, Sicily, a Jewish woman named Gemma was sentenced to prison for several crimes related to the use of magic (nonnullis criminibus artis magic), and in 1485 Juan de Talavera, a few years later, Marán Guillerms Raimundus Esplugues from Valencia confessed to the Inquisition that he practiced magic, although, based on the testimony of witnesses, his only crime was that he had obtained a magical amulet from a Jewish doctor to make his wife's childbirth easier, after which he had given the amulet to another woman¹. During the reign of Pope Martin V (1417-1431), the Jews of Avignon were accused of summoning demons, of witchcraft.

An incident in Paris at the beginning of the 13th century could have threatened serious consequences if it had not been for Rabbi Moshe bey Yechiel, who was able to convince the king that the custom of washing hands after visiting a cemetery was absolutely harmless, which also aroused suspicions of witchcraft and could have led to bloodshed. In the end, the burden of these accusations became unbearable, and the medieval rabbis were forced to abolish certain ritual actions or at least impose extreme caution when performing them².

From the second half of the 14th century, the Jews of Germany began to flee in masse to the east. It seemed that the history of Jewish suffering in the West was coming to an end, and as a result, the following two principles prevailed:

1. Jews and Christians were to be completely separated from each other, and even the authorities were not to interfere in their private lives in order to avoid contact with Jews.

2. The work that a Christian could or wanted to do should not be available to a Jew, in order to eliminate competition. In some places, Jews were often accused of ritual murder and desecration of guests in order³ to force the rulers to order their exile.

If the Jews in their Talmud in the Middle Ages identified all goyim (in Hebrew and Yiddish they call non-Jews or non-Jews) with animals, then the Inquisition began to apply its own standard to the Jews and reacted to this in such a way that mating with a Jew was the same as if a man were to mate with a dog. Thus, the Paris tribunal decided to condemn an unfortunate Christian and his Jewish mistress to be burned at the stake. The same thing happened in 13th century England. In 1265, King Alfonso the Wise of Spain issued a law that made sexual intercourse between a Jew and a Christian punishable by death. In 1348, Spanish law sentenced any Jew who had sex with a Christian woman to death, even if she was a prostitute.

Anti-Semitism in Russia on the threshold of modern times

In Russia, Ivan the Terrible showed special hatred for the Jews during the war with Poland. When Polotsk was taken, the tsar ordered all Jews with their families

¹ Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: Medieval Conceptions of Jews and Their Relation to Modern Antisemitism*, Moscow and Jerusalem, 1998, p. 75.

² Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: Medieval Conceptions of Jews and Their Relation to Modern Antisemitism*, Moscow and Jerusalem, 1998, p. 80.

³ S.G. Lozinsky, *The Social Roots of Antisemitism in the Middle Ages and Modern Times*, M.-L., "Atheist", 1929, p. 58.

to be thrown into the river, sparing only those who had converted and adopted¹ Orthodoxy.

The new tsar Mikhail Fedorovich also did not like the Jews. Adam Olearius, who lived in Moscow in 1633-1634, testifies that here he observed an extreme reluctance on the part of the Catholics and towards the Jews. Many of the merchants in the large cities had become impoverished, unable to withstand commercial competition with the Jews. For this reason, they were ordered to settle in the German Sloboda, located far from the cities.

Catherine II's hostile attitude towards the Jews in Russia is evident in the decree of 1794, by which the Jews were forced to pay double taxes. This decree contradicted the city regulations of 1785, according to which the rights of the Jews were equal to those of others. From now on they were obliged to pay a three-year double tax when leaving the empire. These principles, as well as the high taxation and strict treatment of Jews, were borrowed by Catherine from neighboring Prussia. It should be noted that all this in no way coincided with her letter to the Berlin Academy of Sciences, which stated that all people are brothers, and she would spend her whole life faithful² to this principle.

Thus, in parallel with urban social anti-Semitism, without replacing it, but only supplementing it, rural social anti-Semitism began to develop, based on the same economic motives. If in the city the Jews were hated by representatives of the medieval guilds, who saw in them the destroyers of the old feudal system, then in the countryside they were hostile to them as defenders and accomplices of the feudal order, which was so hated by the peasants

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¹ S.G. Lozinsky, *The Social Roots of Antisemitism in the Middle Ages and Modern Times*, M.-L., "Atheist", 1929, p. 65.

² S.G. Lozinsky, *The Social Roots of Antisemitism in the Middle Ages and Modern Times*, M.-L., "Atheist", 1929, p. 88..

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