

The myth of Jewish male menses

Willis Johnson*

University of Chicago Divinity School, 1025 East 58th Street, Chicago, IL 60637, USA

Abstract

Several scholars have asserted that medieval Christians believed that Jewish men menstruated. Their arguments, made in support of a grander claim that Jews as a collectivity were gendered feminine in Christian thought, rest on numerous misreadings. Though such a belief did appear around 1500, prior references to a Jewish bloody flux derived from textual traditions that were not gendered. The rupturing of Judas's belly (Acts 1:18–19) inspired accounts of heretics and other betrayers of Christ dying with blood and/or guts coming out of their anuses. In the twelfth century this anal bleeding was exegetically linked to Jewish deicidal bloodguilt via the verse 'may His blood be upon us and upon our children' (Matt 27:25). In the thirteenth century this motif was rationalized using terms drawn from humoral medicine. Simultaneously, a new verse was adduced in support of the notion of supernatural anal bleeding: 'He smote His enemies in their posteriors' (Psalms 77:66). Monthly bleeding was first alleged in 1302, but only among the male descendants of the Jews who had accepted responsibility for the crucifixion. The earliest mention of gendered, monthly bleeding appeared in the 1503 account of the ritual murder trials held in Tyrbau in 1494.
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1. The myth of Jewish male menses

It has become a commonplace of recent scholarship on anti-Semitism that medieval and early modern Christians believed that Jewish men menstruated. For example, while explicating a Renaissance German text that implied that Jews were a diseased people, Sander Gilman wrote of a

specific form of sexual pathology that is part of a Christian iconography seeing the Jew as inherently different: Jewish male menstruation. Thomas de Cantimpré, the thirteenth-century anatomist, presented the first 'scientific' statement of this phenomenon (calling upon St. Augustine as his authority). Male Jews menstruated as a mark

WILLIS JOHNSON is John Nuveen Instructor at the University of Chicago Divinity School. His edition and translation of *The Life and Miracles of St William of Norwich* will be published in the Oxford Medieval Texts series in 1998.

*Corresponding author. E-mail: willis@uchicago.edu

of the 'Father's curse', their pathological difference is a result of their original denial of Christ. This image of the Jewish male as female was first introduced to link the Jew with the corrupt nature of the woman, since both are marked as different by the sign that signified Eve's mortal nature after her fall from grace.¹

I begin with this example from Gilman's brilliant study of *Jewish Self-Hatred* both because it has been widely influential and because even as he errs, Gilman comes very close to the truth. He is quite correct in concluding that some modern German and Austrian Christians believed that Jewish men menstruated, with the full implications for a theory of Jewishness as a gender that his work implies. My research suggests, however, that this belief arose in the early modern period, and that it was a reinterpretation of a complex tradition of literary and exegetical motifs dating back to late antiquity. This tradition had nothing to do with menses, though I am sure that it will be of interest to gender theorists for other reasons. Likewise, work that has looked to some medieval *exempla* as early prooftexts of the myth of Jewish male menses has missed the mark.² The truth is even stranger and more interesting.

Although Gilman demonstrated convincingly that the early modern Austro-German authors whose work was the main focus of his study had, indeed, seen Jewish men as feminine, his statement here contains an erroneous assumption about medieval beliefs. Specifically, he misreads Thomas of Cantimpré's statement about the Jewish illness, projecting onto his text a notion that did not arise until later. The image of menstruating Jewish men is eye-catching and invites interpretation by theorists of race and gender. Indeed, historians of race relations in modern Europe have demonstrated that Jewish men were viewed as less than masculine by some nineteenth-century non-Jews, and the phenomenon of imagined gender dis-symmetries between racial and ethnic groups has been documented by historians of non-European cultures as well.³ But the image of the

¹S.L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore, 1986), 74–5. See also by the same author: 'The Struggle of Psychiatry with Psychoanalysis: Who Won?', *Critical Inquiry*, 13 (Winter 1987), 293–313; *Freud, Race, and Gender* (Princeton, 1993), 156; *The Case of Sigmund Freud: Medicine and Identity at the Fin de Siècle* (Baltimore, 1993), 97 and 256 n. 114. In a note in this last study, Gilman qualified his previous statements on the subject of Jewish male menses, suggesting that it might have been a misinterpretation of schistosomiasis, an infection of the urethra that can cause bloody urine. The medieval texts are clear, though, and speak of anal bleeding. I owe this last reference to the generosity of Sander Gilman, who promptly and helpfully responded to my e-mail.

²J. Geller, '(G)nos(e)ology: The Cultural Construction of the Other', in: *People of the Body. Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective*, ed. H. Eilberg-Schwartz (Albany, 1992), 243–82; S.F. Kruger, 'The Bodies of Jews in the late Middle Ages', in: *The Idea of Medieval Literature. New Essays on Chaucer and Medieval Culture in Honor of Donald R. Howard*, ed. J.M. Dean and C.K. Zacher (Newark, London and Toronto, 1992), 301–23, and 'Becoming Christian, Becoming Male?', in: *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. J.J. Cohen and B. Wheeler (New York, 1997), 21–41. Joshua Trachtenberg's *The Devil and the Jews* (New Haven, 1943), 148–49 does not conflate the earlier haemorrhoidal bleeding with fifteenth- and sixteenth-century accounts of male menses, though it is often cited as proof of this misreading.

³G.L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution. A History of European Racism* (Madison, 1978), and *Nationalism and Sexuality. Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York, 1985), 143–7; D. Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct. The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley, 1997); B. Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity* (Oxford, 1986); K. Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 2 vols (Minneapolis, 1987 and 1989); R.J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire* (London, 1995), and *White Mythologies* (London, 1990); T. Luhmann, *The Good Parsi* (Cambridge, Mass. 1996); B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 1983).

menstruating Jewish man, at once so strange and so ripe for interpretation, has become a cliché, and, projected back upon medieval sources, it has led to a serious misunderstanding of medieval attitudes toward Jews. Ironically, the flurry of citations in the secondary literature leads ultimately to just three sources: two medieval, and one early modern.⁴ Moreover, as I hope to show, in a broader context they take on a somewhat different meaning.

2. Bad men's bad ends

A single motif, well grounded in canonical Christian texts, persists from late antiquity through the Middle Ages: the bad man punished by God with a bleeding anus. The nature of this man's crime is variously understood in different periods. First, it is a crime of betrayal of God, heresy; and it is imputed to the paradigmatic enemies of God in each successive age: Judas, Arians/heretics, and Jews. This idea may well have originated when the heresiarch Arius died by prolapse – the herniated extrusion of the intestines – in a public toilet in Alexandria. This death was interpreted by his contemporaries as a divine condemnation of Arius's teachings regarding the physical body of Christ, and exegetically equated with the mysterious bursting of Judas's belly (Acts 1:18) when he hanged himself. As symbolic betrayers of Christ, Jews were exegetically linked with Judas and Arius in many texts through the early middle ages. In the twelfth century, a consolidation of Church power that led to the eventual demonization of Jews coincided with the arrival in the West of the elaborately theorized humoral medicine of the Arabs.⁵ Numerous sources from this period reflect a rationalization and medicalization of the formerly religious symbolism of Jewish bleeding. By the thirteenth century, these traditional associations had evolved into a belief in annual bleeding by Jews at Easter. For more than a century these two ways of understanding the Jewish flux coincided and occasionally reinforced each other. Jews were thought to suffer a disabling bloody flux from their anuses in annual commemoration of the killing of Christ: when Christians were made clean by the shedding of blood on Good Friday, Jews were made unclean.⁶

⁴These are discussed below: Thomas of Cantimpré, Caesarius of Heisterbach, and *Acta Sanctorum*.

⁵A. Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1978), 67–70; J. Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews. The evolution of medieval anti-judaism* (Ithaca, 1982); A. Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (London, 1995); R. I. Moore, 'Anti-semitism and the birth of Europe', in: *Christianity and Judaism*, ed. D. Wood (= *Studies in Church History*, vol. 29(1992)), 33–57; R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society. Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950–1250* (Oxford, 1987); P. Biller, 'Views of Jews from Paris Around 1300: Christian or 'Scientific'?' in: *Christianity and Judaism*, 187–207; J. Cadden, *The Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1993); N. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine. An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago, 1992); C.T. Wood, 'The Doctors' Dilemma: Sin, Salvation and the Menstrual Cycle in Medieval Thought', *Speculum* 56 (1981), 710–27; D. Jacquart and C. Thomasset, *Sexualité et savoir médical au moyen âge* (Paris, 1985).

⁶I am grateful to Monica Green for this formulation.

3. It all started with a kiss...

The story begins with the betrayal of Jesus by Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas had arranged to kiss Jesus as a signal to the Roman soldiers that he was the one to be arrested. After kissing Jesus Judas repented, returned his thirty pieces of silver to the priests in the Temple, and hanged himself. The Vulgate account in Acts 1:18–9 reads:

He bought a certain field with the price of his wickedness. And hanged, his middle burst and all of his guts poured out. [*Et suspensus crepuit medius et diffusa sunt omnia viscera eius.*] This became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and so that field was called in their language ‘Acheldemach’. That is, ‘field of blood’.

A great deal of exegetical energy was expended explaining what happened when Judas’s ‘middle burst and all of his guts poured out’. Most interpretations had at their core an assumption about the metaphysical nature of death itself. They assumed that Judas’s impure soul, which in some early readings was actually Satan (cf. John 6:71), had to leave his body when he died. The normal route of exit would have been via the mouth. In the case of Judas, though, his impure or diabolical soul was unable to pass though the mouth that had been sanctified by kissing Jesus. His soul sought another exit.

How did Judas’s soul leave his body? Late antiquity favoured the anus. It could not go up so it went down. One of the miracles of Saint Martin of Tours may echo the devil’s difficulty in leaving Judas’s body. Sulpicius Severus (before 400) wrote of a man whom Martin cured of demonic possession. The saint thrust his fingers into the man’s mouth and addressed the demon, ‘if you have any power, eat these!’ Repelled by the sanctity of the saint’s fingers the demon was ‘unable to escape via the mouth and leaving behind its stinking traces it withdrew as a flux from his bowels’.⁷

The image of Judas hanging from a tree with his bloody innards rushing out of his anus was favoured by early Christian writers such as Juvencus (before 350) and Arator (544).⁸ Here was the beginning, in Christian literature at least, of a tradition of moralizing writing about men who died with blood and guts running out of their bottoms.

Quite early the notion of the Judas-like betrayer was broadened to include heretics. Eusebius’s report of the death of Arius, in the Latin version of Rufinus (before 395), describes such an end with relish. The scene is the streets of Constantinople.

...Arius, proceeding [*pergens*] to the church, surrounded [*constipatus*] by a crowd of bishops and the people, turned aside to a public toilet because of human necessity. While he was sitting there his intestines and all of his guts flowed down the drain of

⁷...nec tamen exire ei per os liceret, foeda relinquens vestigia fluxu ventris egestus est. Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Sancti Martini*, in *Libri qui supersunt*, ed. C. Halm (Vienna, 1866) (= Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, vol. 1), 127. The text here is identical to that in Sulpice Sévère, *Vie de Martin*, ed. J. Fontaine (Paris, 1967) (= Sources Chrétiennes vol. 133, and Série des Textes Monastiques D’Occident vol. 22), 290.

⁸For an extended discussion of the theme in Arator, see P.-A. DeProost, ‘La mort de Judas dans l’Historia apostolica d’Arator (I, 83–102)’, *Revue des Études Augustiniennes*, 35 (1989), 135–50.

the toilet. In this fitting place he paid [*exsolvit*] for his blasphemies and stinking mind with a suitable death.⁹

Rufinus revelled in the details of Arius's death, reinforcing his narrative with scatological wordplay. He began with a subtle pun, *pergens/purgans*, going/excreting. This was strengthened by the choice of the word for surrounded, *constipatus*, which also meant constipated.¹⁰ Finally, he underscored the nature of Arius's atonement by using a verb for repayment, *exsoluo*, which also meant to loose a flood of diarrhoea.¹¹ This story was repeated and elaborated for centuries and became proverbial as the fitting end for heretics. Sedulius wrote the following verses explicitly equating the punishment with heresy circa A.D. 450.

Haec est uera fides; hanc spreuit habere salutem
Arius infelix, qui curua per auia rectum
Flectere nisus iter, foueam dilapsus in atram
Conruit et tetri mersus petit ima profundum:
Tam uacuum sensu, iustae quam tempore poenae
Uisceribus fuis uacuum quoque uentre remansit.¹²

This is the true faith. Unlucky Arius spurned to have this salvation, trying to bend a straight path amidst crooked byways [NB the pun on *rectum iter* of Prov 2:13]. He slipped into a dark pit and fell; submerged, he sank to the bottom of the foul depths – as emptied of sense as at the time of his just punishment his stomach was empty of the guts which had flowed out of it.

These lines were echoed about 80 years later in Arator's *De Actibus Apostolorum*, where Arius was explicitly compared to Judas:

Qui criminis auctor
Errorisque tui est, fusa ruit Arius aluo
Infelix, plus mente cadens, letumque peremptus
Cum Iuda commune tulit, qui gutture pendens,
Visceribus vacuatus obit, nec poena sequestrat
Quos par culpa ligat, qui maiestatis honori
Vulnus ab ore parant; hic prodidit, ille diremit,
Sacrilega de voce rei.¹³

⁹...Arius ad ecclesiam pergens episcoporum et populorum frequentia constipatus, humanae necessitatis causa ad publicum locum declinat. ubi cum sederet, intestina eius atque omnia viscera in secessus cuniculum defluxere; ita tali in loco dignam mortem blasphemiae et foetidae mentis exsoluit. Rufinus, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, in: *Eusebius Werke*, ed. E. Schwartz and T. Mommsen. (Leipzig, 1908) (= *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte... Eusebius; Reihenfolge des Erscheinens* 9.2), vol. 2, part 2, 979.

¹⁰*Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (Leipzig, 1900 -), *sub verbo* constipatio.

¹¹*Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, *sub verbo* exsoluo.

¹²Sedulius, *Carmen Paschale*, in: *Opera Omnia*, ed. I. Huemer (Vienna, 1885) (= *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, vol. 10), 38.

¹³Arator, *De Actibus Apostolorum*, ed. A. P. McKinlay (Vienna, 1951) (= *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, vol. 72), 38–9.

Unlucky Arius, who is the author of your crime and of your error, tumbled down with his bowels poured out, [though] falling more in his mind, and in dying bore a common death with Judas, who, hanging by his neck, died emptied of his entrails, nor does the punishment separate those [two] whom an equal fault bound together, who fashioned a wound on the honour of the majesty [of the Holy Trinity] by their mouth; the one betrayed the other divided, [each] guilty by a sacrilegious voice.¹⁴

Gregory of Tours (before 594) told the story of an Arian who appropriately died this special, symbolic death.

Having entered into his private toilet, when he tried to purge [*purgare*] his bowels he breathed out his spirit. A slave was waiting outside with a candle for the exit of his lord. When it grew light, his follower (that is, another priest) sent a messenger saying 'Come, don't delay...' And when he was slow answering because he was dead, the slave, raising the curtain of the cubicle, found his lord dead on the seat of the toilet. There is no doubt that this man was guilty of no lesser crimes than the well-known Arius, whose inner parts were similarly deposited in the toilet.¹⁵

Like Judas, Arius betrayed Jesus with his mouth and died a symbolic, scatological death. This narrative of oral transgression and anal retribution initiated a motif in Christian writing that evolved centuries later into the myth of Jewish male menses.

4. Other versions in the twelfth century

Alternative readings appeared later on, and in much of later medieval writing the most frequent interpretation of *crepuit medius* was that Judas popped like a balloon. This was a favourite scene in the medieval Passion plays in which the actor playing Judas was supplied with entrails and strings of sausages to spill onto the stage.¹⁶ Rabanus Maurus

¹⁴ *Arator's On the Acts of the Apostles (De Actibus Apostolorum)* ed. and trans. R. J. Schrader, J. L. Roberts III and co-trans. J. F. Makowski (Atlanta, 1987) (= American Academy of Religion Classics in Religious Studies, number 6), 38.

¹⁵ *Ingressus autem in secessum suum, dum ventrem purgare nititur, spiritum exalavit. Expectat enim eum puer a foris cum cereo dominum egressurum. Iamque advenerat lux, et satelles eius, id est alius presbiter, mittit nuntium, dicens: 'Veni, ne tarderis...' Sed cum responsa dare differret exanimis, elevato puer velo ostii repperit dominum super sellula secessi defunctum. Unde indubitatum est, non minoris criminis hunc reum esse quam Arrium illum, cui similiter in secessum fuerunt interna deposita per partis inferioris egestum.* Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum X*, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison (Hannover, 1951) (= Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum, vol. 1, part 1), 68.

¹⁶ For example, the *suspensio Jude* is described in a reference to the now lost 'York Play of the Sauce-makers' (i.e. sausage makers) in a memorandum book printed in *Publications of the Surtees Society*, vol. 120 (1911), 155. I am indebted to Ruth Nissé for this reference. The scene is also represented in the middle English poem *Cursor Mundi* (c. 1300): '[Judas] heng him self riȝtþo / He brast in two his bowles alle: / Fellen adoun him fro / þe sory soule þat wey he sent: / Wiþ weylȝing al in wo / Out at his wombe þe soule brast: / At mouþ had hit no way / For he cust cristis mouþ: / As ȝe herde me say / Whenne he coom as traitour fals: / His lord to bitray...' *Cursor Mundi, A Northumbrian Poem of the XIVth Century*, ed. R. Morris (London, 1876) (= Early English Text Society, Original Series 62) vol. 3, 943, cf. 1083. A German version of the fifteenth-century 'Passion' of Jean Michel specifies that the actor playing Judas should be equipped with animal entrails which spill out when the Devil opens his robe to carry away his soul. C. Fabre-Vassas, *La bête singulière. Les juifs, les chrétiens et le cochon* (Paris, 1994), 128, citing G. Cohen, *Histoire de la mise en scène dans le théâtre religieux français du Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1951), 146.

(d. 856) read the verse this way in his commentary, which formed the basis of the *Glossa Ordinaria* on Acts (c. 1120).¹⁷ But the redactor of the *Glossa Ordinaria* favoured the reading of antiquity and edited Rabanus's reading so as to change the route of exit from burst stomach to anus: *Viscera... que sunt sedes fraudis, tanto scelere dirupta se cohibere non valuerunt. Merito autem per sedem doli viscera funduntur, non per locum osculi, id est os quo osculatus est Iesum quamvis falsa superficie, sed per alium cui virus occulte malicie inerat [the bowels... which were the seat of deceit, were burst by so great a crime that they were unable to contain themselves. Fittingly, then, through the seat of fraud the bowels were poured out, not through the place of the kiss – the mouth with which Jesus was kissed, though with foul intent – but through another place, by which the poison of hidden malice had entered]*.¹⁸ The Gloss is euphemistic and oblique but unambiguous. It is possible that this represents a cultural preoccupation of the twelfth century. Orderic Vitalis's description of the burial of William the Conqueror includes an incident reminiscent of the death of Judas: '...when the corpse was placed in the sarcophagus... the swollen bowels burst [*pinguissimus uenter crepuit*] and an intolerable stench assailed the nostrils of the bystanders and the whole crowd.'¹⁹ Certainly the chronicles of this period include several accounts of kings who came to similar ends. There is a tradition of such writing in medieval chronicles, in which the unpleasant and often scatological ends of kings are read as indicative of the qualities of their kingship.²⁰ In any case it is certain that inclusion in the Gloss made this reading ubiquitous, if not canonical.

The earliest joining of this motif to the theme of Jewish bloodguilt is especially noteworthy since the symbolism of the punishment is highlighted by the fact that it is inflicted on a Christian for acting Jewlike. Writing in the early 1170s, Thomas of Monmouth described the divine punishment of a Christian man who had intervened on behalf of the Jews accused of the first known ritual murder. Sheriff John of Chesney had acted to protect the Jews of Norwich from mob violence after they were accused of crucifying a twelve-year-old boy in mockery of the Passion:

I cannot, further, pass over the death of the Sheriff John, which I must believe to have been wrought by the worthy vengeance of God. ... from the very day of the synod, when... he withdrew the Jews from the arm of Christian justice, because he had been heavily bribed, [he] began to labour under an incurable disorder. For, as he himself afterwards testified to certain of his servants (from whom I learned the fact after his death), at the very moment when, by protecting the Jews, he began openly to oppose

¹⁷ Like much of Rabanus's work, his commentary on Acts has never been edited. I am relying here on the only manuscript available to me, a fourteenth-century English one: Cambridge, University Library, Ee.3.51, *Commentarium actuum apostolorum*, fol. 200v–201r.

¹⁸ *Biblia Sacra cum Glossa Ordinaria et Expositionibus* (Lyon, 1545) vol. 6, 165v. This return to an earlier, more scatological reading is typical of the redactional politics of the Gloss.

¹⁹ Orderic Vitalis, *Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. and trans. M. Chibnall (Oxford, 1973), vol. 4, 106–7.

²⁰ See R.W. Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain. From Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth* (New York, 1966), 132–6, for a discussion of this theme. Hanning discusses similar cases that appear in the writings of Henry of Huntingdon (d. c.1154), who wrote about the death of Henry I in 1135, and Geoffrey of Monmouth (d. c.1125), who wrote about the death of William Rufus in 1100.

the Christian law... blood began to flow from his bottom drop by drop [*per posteriora eius sanguis guttatim profluere inchoavit*; Jessopp and James: he began to suffer from internal haemorrhage]. And so clearly was the vengeance of God shown in his case that he might in very truth say with the Jews, 'Let the innocent blood be upon us and upon our children' (Matt 27:25). For two years, then, the blood continued to flow from his bottom [*per ima*; Jessopp and James: omitted] at frequent intervals, and the loss of it weakened his bodily powers, and made him grow pale.... [I]n the third year... exhausted by the incessant flow of blood, his strength and his blood alike failing him, he breathed his last... Hence let the careful attention of the reader perpend how heavily the vengeance of God strikes the man who is not afraid to pit himself against the Holy Church and Christian laws, as this man did.²¹

Here in a brief narrative are all the elements of one of the stranger stories told in the middle ages about the Jews. To my knowledge, this is the earliest example of the theme and has not previously been noticed by historians. The elements that come together here, perhaps for the first time, are 1) a Judas-like betrayer ('he had been heavily bribed') who 2) sells a Christ-like victim (the twelve-year-old William of Norwich) and is punished with 3) a flux of blood from his anus 4) in fulfilment of the verse 'his blood be on us and on our children' (Matt 27:25). This is clearly an antecedent of Gilman's early modern menstruating Jewish men, but the Sheriff was not a Jew and his flux was a disease – not menses and not gendered. The symbolism of the Sheriff's death would only have made sense to Thomas's audience if they had known the prior traditions of moralizing readings of the deaths of Judas and Arius.

A younger contemporary of Thomas of Monmouth repeated the stories of Judas and Arius. Gerald of Wales, in his *De principis instructione liber*, repeated the themes outlined above.

Arius, the treacherous author of such evil acts, did not escape punishment in this world. While walking in the forum of Constantinople he felt his bowels growling and hurried to a toilet. Not only did he emit his excrement by the lower orifice, indeed he poured out all of his intestines by his upper mouth. Fittingly struck with the sufferings he deserved [*digna pro meritis passione percussus*], his life ended before he could complete his perfidies [i.e. his heretical activities]. This most just vengeance of God should be noted, that that unclean mouth by which he had vomited sacrilegious books and pernicious doctrines against the faith of Christ spilled out as a fitting damnation all of his intestines. Just as Judas, Christ's betrayer, when hanged by his own noose *his middle burst and all of his guts poured out*. In that case though, it was not by the mouth but by the anus [*per ventris*] that the guts were spilled. The

²¹Thomas of Monmouth. *The Life and Miracles of St William of Norwich*, ed. and trans. A. Jessopp and M. Rhodes James (Cambridge, 1896), 111–2. The translation here is essentially that of Jessopp and James. Here as in many other places they bowdlerized the translation. Where I have amended it I give their version, together with the Latin, in square brackets.

mouth with which he had only a little while earlier kissed the Lord (though with foul intent) was spared.²²

Gerald embellished the tradition, adding the moralized detail that Arius's guts erupted also from his mouth, and like Rufinus, he clearly enjoyed his subject. Gerald may have had in mind Peter Lombard's brief quotation from Ambrose on the punishment suffered by Arius for teaching that the son who died by crucifixion must logically have been less divine than his undying father.²³ Gerald's work (begun in 1192) is especially noteworthy because he and Thomas of Monmouth were contemporaries, and Thomas's name suggests that he, too, may have been of Welsh origin.²⁴ It seems indisputable that Thomas must have known the traditions outlined here at some length as well.

Gerald's phrase *digna pro meritis passione percussus* is worth noting, as it may echo the late medieval exegetical connection between bleeding Jewish anuses and the phrase *percussit eos in posteriora dorsi...*²⁵ This phrase represents a fusion of Psalms 67:14 and 77:66 and is widely repeated. Psalms 77:66 – *Et percussit inimicos suos in posteriora, opprobrium sempiternum dedit illis* [He smote His enemies in their posteriors, He set them in everlasting shame] – is one of the exegetical prooftexts for the belief in the Jewish flux. The verse in Psalms was often read against a similar phrase in 1 Samuel, 5:6, *percussit in secretiori parte natium Azotum*. The mid-thirteenth century commentary of Hugh of St. Cher is typical:

He smote his enemies in their posteriors... Thus it is read (I Sam 5) that mice bubbled up from the earth, and the Lord smote the Gazan nation in their anus [lit. 'secret place']; and the mice gnawed the tumours which protruded from their colons. It was to their *everlasting shame* because such an infirmity was most vile. And some say that the Jews bear this shame, that in vengeance for the Passion of the Lord they suffer a flux of blood. And that is why they are so pale.²⁶

²² Porro perfidus ille tantorum auctor malorum Arius non evasis etiam in terris impunitus. Ambulans enim in foro Constantinopolitano et ventre rugiente commotus, ad secessum properans, non solum egestionem per inferius orificium turpiter emisit, verum etiam intestina cuncta per os superius, digna pro meritis passione percussus, effudit, vitam priusquam perfidiam terminando. Notanda est igitur iustissima Dei vindicta, quod eodem ore polluto, quo contra Christi fidem libros sacrilegos et doctrinam perniciosam evomuit, intestina cuncta plectibilibiter et damnabiliter effudit, sicut et Judas Christi proditor laqueo proprio suspensus crepuit medius et effusa sunt omnia viscera ejus. In hoc autem quod non per os sed per ventris crepitem effusa sunt, parvum est ori quo Dominum, quanquam intentione prava, paulo ante fuerat osculatus. Gerald of Wales, *De principis instructione liber*, ed. G.F. Warner (London, 1891) (= Rolls Series num. 30, Giraldus Cambrensis, vol. 8), 68.

²³ Arii haec fuisse perfidia legitur, ut Christum creaturam fateretur. Ideo effusa sunt Arii viscera atque crepuit medius, prostratus in faciem, ea quibus Christum negaverat foeda ora pollutus. Peter Lombard, *Sententiae in IV Libris Distinctae*, third edition in three volumes (Grottaferrata, 1971 and 1981) (= Spicilegium Bonaventurianum, nums. 4 and 5) vol.3, 78 (III.XI.II (33)). Lombard is citing Ambrose, *de Fide* ed. O. Faller (Vienna, 1962) (= Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, vol. 78), 17.

²⁴ A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c. 550–c.1307* (London, 1974), 242–5.

²⁵ Cited by P. Biller, 'Views of Jews', 198, note 35, citing Bernard of Gordon *Lilium medicinae* (between A.D. 1303 and 1305).

²⁶ *Et percussit inimicos suos in posteriora...* Ita legitur (I Reg 5) quod ebullierunt mures de terra, et percussit Dominus azotum in secretiori parte natium; et mures corrodabant prominentes extales eorum. Opprobrium sempiternum fuit, quia villissima fuit huiusmodi infirmitas. Et dicunt quidam quod hoc opprobrium sustinent Iudaei, quia in vindictam Dominicae Passionis patiuntur fluxum sanguinis, et ideo sunt ita pallidi. *Hugonis de Sancto Charo Opera Omnia*, 8 vols (Venice, 1754), vol. 2, 207v.

Table 1

Date	Source	Nature of flux	Periodicity	Prooftext
100	Acts	Blood and guts spill out	Once only	
395	Eusebius, <i>Ecclesiastical History</i>	Arius dies by prolapse	Once only	
549	Gregory of Tours, <i>Historia Francorum</i>	Arian dies by prolapse/ explicitly compared to Judas	Once only	
1170	Thos of Monmouth, <i>Miracles of St William</i>	Sheriff who protects Jews accused of ritual murder bleeds, becomes pale and dies	Once only	Sanguis eius super nos et super filios nostros
1240	Caesarius of Heisterbach, <i>Dialogus Miraculorum</i>	Jews bleed on Good Friday	Annually	(implied) sanguis eius super nos...
1241	Hugh of St Cher, <i>Comm. In Psalmos</i>	Jews suffer a flux/ that's why they're pale	Annually	percussit eos...
1263	Thomas of Cantimpré, <i>De Bonum Universale</i>	Jews bleed on Good Friday, treat this illness with Christian blood	Annually	sanguis eius super nos...
1298	Joannes Balbus, <i>Catholicon</i>	Jews bleed on Good Friday	Annually	percussit eos...; (implied) sanguis eius...
1300	Henry of Germany, quodlibet	Jews suffer a flux/ that's why they're pale		
1302	Rudolph of Schlettstadt, <i>Historiae memorabiles</i>	Jews descended from those who accepted responsibility for crucifixion bleed monthly and frequently die of constant diarrhoea	Monthly bleeding, perpetual diarrhoea	sanguis eius super nos...
1494	Tymau confessions	All Jews (Male and female) menstruate and replace their loss with Christian blood	Monthly	
1500	Albert Kranz, chronicle	All Jews bleed perpetually	Perpetually	sanguis eius super nos...
1650	Gottfried Henschen, <i>Acta Sanctorum</i>	All Jews (Male and female) menstruate and replace their loss with Christian blood	Monthly	

5. Figs

Several further discursive traditions that contributed to the image of the Jewish anal flux were bound up in late antique and medieval thinking about figs. The image of pouring blood was reinforced by discussions of the name given the field in which Judas hanged himself. It was called *Acheldemach*, *hoc est ager sanguinis* (Acts 1:19) i.e. the field of blood. From a broader perspective on ancient Jewish religious values it is clear that the field into which Judas's viscera erupted was called 'field of blood' because it was bought with the price of a murder, and the Aramaic name cited in Acts, *Acheldemach*/חֵקֶל דְּמָא, means both 'field of blood' and 'field of money'. The version of this story in the Gospel of Matthew 27:6–7 says as much. But that reading is in the background here. On its surface, the version in Acts is a very traditional biblical etiology according to which a field literally filled with blood is named *Acheldemach* – 'the field of blood' – to commemorate the bloodshed. This literal blood – spilled when Judas's guts erupted – is in the immediate foreground of the narrative. This presumptively normative meaning becomes clear when the story in Acts is read against the version in Matthew. There the senior priests discuss what to do with the money Judas has returned to them:

Then Judas, who had betrayed Him, seeing himself to be damned, repented. He returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, 'I have sinned, betraying innocent blood.' But they said, 'What is that to us? See to it yourself!' And casting the silver into the temple he departed. He left and hanged himself with a noose. But the chief priests, taking the silver, said, 'It is not lawful to put them into a sacrifice because they are blood money.' Having taken council, they bought with them a potter's field for the burial of foreigners. For this reason, even to the present day that field is called 'Haceldamach'. that is 'field of blood'.

Matthew's rational, theological account complements the mysterious parataxis of Acts, and the two texts were read as glosses on each other throughout the Middle Ages.²⁷ The exegetical imagination thrived on such ambiguity, and often preferred the richer implications of word play and allegory to obscure points of Jewish theology.

A separate and characteristic strand of lore that appeared in antiquity associated with the death of Judas is that he hanged himself from a fig tree. This may originate in the homonymy of *figus* with *agrum figuli*, the potter's field said in Matthew to have been bought with the price of Jesus's blood. Again, the earliest witness is Juvencus (before 350) who wrote of the death of Judas in the *Evangelia*, 'He snatched a horrid death from the peak of a fig tree' [*informem rapuit ficus de vertice mortem*].²⁸ This line also alludes

²⁷The classic exposition of the use of parataxis in biblical narrative is in E. Auerbach, 'Odysseus's Scar', in: *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, 1953), 3–23. Analyzing the story of the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22), Auerbach shows that by omitting all but the most essential syntactic links the narrator emphasized the hermetic inner lives of Abraham and Isaac in a tale 'fraught with background' (12). He identifies this as a quintessentially Jewish form of narration, in contrast to the uniform externalization of motives characteristic of what he terms 'Homer's realism' (23).

²⁸Juvencus, *Evangeliorum Libri Quattuor*, ed. J. Huemer (Vienna, 1891) (= *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, vol. 24), 138. For a detailed discussion of Juvencus's anti-Judaism, see J.-M. Poinssotte, *Juvencus et Israël: La représentation des Juifs dans le premier poème latin chrétien* (Paris, 1979), especially 129–84.

to the death of Absalom, who in the traditional reading of II Samuel 18 was hanged by his own hair from an oak tree. By the process of metonymic substitution so characteristic of medieval exegesis this oak tree in some readings became a fig tree.²⁹

The association of Judas with the fig tree gets repeated and extended in the tradition of travel narratives. One guide from A.D. 570 puts the fig tree in an olive grove.³⁰ Many of the later travel guides draw on early Irish and English sources. This tradition was known in England at least as early as the late seventh century, when it appeared in Adamnan of Iona's *De locis sanctis*.

Half-way along [the stone bridge which runs south from David's gate], hard by on the west, is the place where Judas Scariothis perished when, driven by despair, he hanged himself with a halter. In that spot even today a huge fig tree is pointed out, from the top of which, according to the story, he hung in a noose. As the poet-priest Juvenus sang concerning the same Judas: 'He snatched a monstrous death from the top of a fig tree.'³¹

Adamnan was Bede's (d. 735) principal source in his own travel narrative, *Libellus de locis sanctis*, which was widely read in the middle ages.³² Although these were framed as travel narratives, the exegetical content of both works is always in the foreground of the reader's attention. That they were intended primarily for moral edification is confirmed by the fact that Bede, a meticulous historian when working in that genre, wrote his own *Little Book about the Holy Places* even though he had never visited the Holy Land. There is also an early insular association of Arius with Judas. The pair appear crouching together inside the mouth of hell in an Irish manuscript of the eleventh century.³³

There are other connections between Jews and the fig tree. The Jewish people are compared to a fruitless fig tree in the *Glossa Ordinaria*'s reading of the parable of the fruitless fig tree (Luke 13:6). This is a curious reading of the parable, as it requires an abrupt change of direction when the Gloss reaches the part of the parable in which manure is spread around the base of the tree to stimulate its growth. Following the logic of the first part of the Gloss the manure *should be read* as the doctrine of the Church! The glossator is willing to accept this jarring shift because of the tremendous exegetical momentum of equating figs with Jews wherever they appear. The same pressure seems to influence Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153) in his sermon LX on Song of Songs. Taking

²⁹ Absalom is said to hang *between heaven and earth*. This phrase later became part of the standard repertoire of descriptions of the Jews, endlessly allegorized. Rupert of Deutz extended this allegory to an explanation of the political situation of contemporary Jews. *Patrologia Latina* (Paris, 1854), vol. 168, 1568.

³⁰ In dextra parte portae est olivetum; ibi est ficulnea, in qua Iudas se suspendit. Ed. P. Geyer, *Itera Hierosolymitana Saeculi IIII–VIII* (= Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, vol. 39), 170.

³¹ [31] Adamnan of Iona, *De Locis Sanctis*, ed. L. Bieler (1965), Corpus Christianorum Series Latina vol. 175 p. 197. Translation from Adamnan's *De Locis Sanctis*, ed. and trans. D. Meehan (Dublin, 1958) (= Scriptores Latini Hiberniae, 3), 61.

³² ...de acheldemach et loco, quo suspensus est Iudas Portam David egredientibus pons occurrit in austrum per uallem directus, ad cuius medietatem ab occasu Iudas se suspendisse narratur. Nam et ficus magna ibi ac uetustissima stat, iuxta quod Iuuenus ait: 'Informem rapuit ficus de uertice mortem.' Bede, *Libellus de locis sanctis*, ed. I. Fraipont (Turnhout, 1965) (= Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, vol. 175), 259.

³³ London, British Library, Cotton Titus D 27 (Irish, xi), f 76v.

as his text *figus protulit grossos suos* [the fig tree has put forth its fruits] (Song of Songs 2:13), Bernard equates the fig tree with the Jewish people. His reading rests on a point of Latin grammar: *protulit* is perfect. The Jews have put forth their fruit, Jesus, and will henceforth be sterile. Their putting-forth has ended.³⁴ The very variety of mutually contradictory ways in which Jews were equated with figs argues for a deep connection in medieval exegetical traditions; a rich semantic field of mutually reinforcing meanings lent this reading a certain inevitability.

Yet another bit of lore concerning figs lies in the background of the story about the sheriff. The exegetical association of figs with Jews acquires quite a different meaning when figs are understood in a medical sense. In both classical and medieval Latin *figus* also means haemorrhoid, a fact frequently exploited in satirical writing.³⁵ Consider the following epigram by the first-century poet Martial:

Ficosa est uxor, ficosus et ipse maritus,
 filia ficosa est et gener atque nepos,
 nec dispensator nec vilicus ulcere turpi
 nec rigidus fossor sed nec arator eget.
 cum sint ficosi pariter iuvenesque senesque,
 res mira est, ficos non habet unus ager.

The wife has figs, so does the husband. The daughter has figs and the son-in-law and the grandson. Neither the steward nor the bailiff nor the rugged ditcher is without the horrid growth, nor yet the ploughman. Since young and old alike have figs, it is remarkable that only the land is without them.³⁶

The fig as haemorrhoid was certainly in the lexicon of medieval exegesis. There is also evidence that 'fig' meant haemorrhoid in the medieval French spoken by both Bernard and the redactors of the Gloss. Rashi (d. 1105) glossed the rabbinic Hebrew *תחתוניות* (haemorrhoids), as *figues*.³⁷ This linkage constituted yet another step in the well-trodden path of symbolic substitutions that led to the image of the bleeding Jew (which the case of the Sheriff suggests could be extended to all those in the subject position of Jews). Such substitutions of meaning, whether by direct equivalence or metonymic association, were much loved by medieval Christian exegetes.³⁸ Indeed in a case such as this, in which the reading generated by the substitution was reinforced by another reading, one might argue that it was inevitable.

It is clear that by late antiquity a number of themes had coalesced in Christian writing

³⁴ Bernard, *Sermones Super Cantica Canticorum* (Rome, 1957) vol. 1, 142–8. I owe this reference to Lisa Lampert.

³⁵ Arnold of Villanova explains that some haemorrhoids sweat like figs, 'quia resudant humiditate sanguinolenta, ideo quidam ficos nominaverunt'. *Regimen sanitatis ad regem Aragonum*, ed. L. García-Ballester and M.R. McVaugh (Barcelona, 1996) (= Arnoldi de Villanova Opera Medica Omnia, X.1), 468.

³⁶ Text and translation from Martial, *Epigrams*, ed. D.R. Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1993), vol. 2 (= Loeb Classical Library) 7.71. I have regularized the punctuation in the translation.

³⁷ Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat*, 81a.

³⁸ Henri De Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale, les quatre sens de l'Écriture*, 4 vols (Paris, 1959–64); G. R. Evans, *The Language and Logic of the Bible* (Cambridge, 1984), 105–22.

into a set type: a Jew-like/Judas-like traitor who denies/sells Christ/the Church and dies as blood/guts exit his anus. This figure was in the background when Thomas wrote about the Sheriff, whose end was not only highly symbolic but traditional. Thomas's text is, however, the first to link the Judas-like betrayal to the interests of the Jews.

The condition suffered by the Sheriff was described as a medical problem. Although its onset was described in strikingly supernatural terms and the problem itself was interpreted morally, this *fluxus sanguinis* had the symptoms of a real illness. The Sheriff bled for years, became pale, weakened, and eventually died. Thomas's text is especially interesting as it is the earliest expression of what became a progressively more important and more fully-articulated stereotype about Jewish men. This stereotype, after developing along the exegetical trajectory outlined above, subsequently became a rationale for the Jewish need for Christian blood.

Thomas, at least, must have been aware of these traditions, as the story about the Sheriff depends on them for its basic narrative coherence. And the full implications of the story in which the Sheriff is punished when he becomes Jew-like are only evident to one who has a specific notion of what it means to be a Jew. This is a vivid example of the discursive construction of the Jewish body, a body whose true Jewishness is irrespective of parentage.³⁹ Following the tradition into the thirteenth century draws it into sharper focus, but it was already well developed when Thomas was writing. When Rupert of Deutz (writing between 1112 and 1116) linked *Synagoga* with the same verse, explaining that she suffered a flux of blood, he may have been drawing on the same traditions.⁴⁰ In Thomas we see the first evidence of the literalization of what had been an exegetical motif. It is precisely when such notions escape the bounds of theological speculation and witty wordplay and get applied to living people that they become dangerous.

The same idea about bleeding Jewish men, made literal and fully medicalized, appeared somewhat later in Paris. Peter Biller has written of a quodlibetal session, held at the University of Paris around 1300, in which the respondent explained why Jewish men suffer a flux of blood from their anuses. The reason, based as Biller argued on an antecedent German tradition, was that they bled because they suffered a superfluity of gross blood. The respondent – either Master Henry of Germany or Henry of Brussels – rationalized an already-prevalent belief that Jewish men bled from their anuses by situating the old belief within Aristotelian and Salernitan medical traditions. Jews, he explained, have a melancholic complexion. They are sad, antisocial, pallid. These were a few of the symptoms caused by having an excess of cold wet humours (melancholy) which naturally settle to the lower parts of the body and form gross blood. Because of their superfluity of gross blood, possibly exacerbated by their diet, Jews have haemorrhoids.⁴¹ Biller pointed to some thirteenth-century texts as evidence of earlier

³⁹The case of the Sheriff is strikingly parallel to accounts of stigmata that appear on the bodies of Christ-like saints.

⁴⁰Rupert of Deutz, *De Sancta Trinitate et Operibus Eius*, ed. R. Haacke (Turnholt, 1971–2) (= Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis, vols 21–4), 1415. Cf. *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 168, 1567–9, where Rupert equates Judas and all Jews, with specific reference to the appropriateness of his punishment.

⁴¹Biller, 'Views of Jews', 192; also discussed in G. Dahan, *Les intellectuels chrétiens et les juifs au moyen âge* (Paris, 1990), 528–30.

circulation of the same story, and suggested it might have originated in Germany. One of the exempla of the thirteenth century Caesarius of Heisterbach (d. 1240) had repeated such a traditional story, in which a Jewish flux had functioned as an element of the plot. Caesarius had written that 'Jews suffer from a certain infirmity which is called *fluxus sanguinis*'.⁴² Contrary to some recent interpretations, however, there is no evidence in Caesarius that this infirmity was thought to indicate that Jewish men were feminine. They were merely sick. The story by Caesarius begins:

In civitate quadam Angliae puella quaedam habitavit, Judaei cuiusdam filia, et secundum genus suum satis speciosa. Hanc iuvenis quidam clericus, Episcopi eiusdem civitatis cognatus, et ecclesiae maioris canonicus, ut vidit, concupivit, et verbis amatoriis ad consensum suae libidinis cum multo labore inclinavit. Ad cuius amplexus dum aspiraret, et nimiis incendiis aestuans, eam quotidie ad commixtionem sollicitaret, respondit illa: Patri meo multum sum dilecta, qui in tantum custodit me, ut neque ego ad te, neque tu possis venire ad me, nisi in nocte sextae feriae, quae Pascha vestrum praecedat. **Tunc enim Judaei laborare dicuntur quadam infirmitate, quae fluxus sanguinis dicitur, circa quam occupati, aliis tunc minus intendere possunt.** Juvenis haec audiens, et ob amoris nimietatem pene ratione carens, oblitus Christianae religionis, immemor Dominicae Passionis, nocte eadem ad virginem venit, et usque ad matutinum cum illa dormivit.⁴³

In a certain English city there lived a girl, the daughter of a certain Jew; and after her kind she was very beautiful. A certain youth – who was a clerk, a member of the household of the Bishop of that city and a canon of its larger church – when he saw her he desired her. And with great effort he sought, by loving words, to convince her to agree to his desires. And while he yearned for her embraces, burning with great fires, he daily pleaded with her to meet with him. But she responded to him: 'I am greatly loved by my father who watches over me so carefully that I can not come to you, nor you come to me, except on the Friday night which precedes your Easter.' **Then the Jews are said to suffer from a certain illness, which is called a flux of blood; when they are attending to it, then they are less able to pay attention to other matters.** The youth hearing these things, almost losing his reason because of his immeasurable love, forgetting the Christian religion and unmindful of the Passion of the Lord, came to the virgin that night and slept with her until morning.

It is possible that Caesarius did not write about a Jewish flux at all. The sentence in bold sounds to me like a marginal gloss that has been incorporated into the text. This detail is always cited from the nineteenth-century edition of Joseph Strange. His edition of this important and widely distributed collection was based on just four late manuscripts – one from the fourteenth century and three from the fifteenth century.⁴⁴ It is worth noting

⁴²Billier, 'Views of Jews', 187, citing Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, ed. J. Strange (Cologne, Bonn, and Brussels, 1851), vol. 1, 92.

⁴³Caesarius, vol. 1, 92.

⁴⁴The manuscripts appear to be closely related. This text should be re-edited.

that Johannes Gobius's *Scala Coeli* (produced in Southern France in the late thirteenth century) retells this story, citing Caesarius as its source, but without mentioning the Jewish flux.⁴⁵ Indeed, this detail digresses from the main narrative, the point of which is that the young cleric pursues an extramarital sexual liaison on Good Friday, when even married couples are enjoined to chastity. Finally, the bleeding reported in the only edition of this text by Caesarius happens only once a year. Annual bleeding on Good Friday is surely more easily explained by reference to the religious significance of that day than by a theory of Jewish male menses.

Thomas of Cantimpré (d. 1263) wrote of annual bleeding on Good Friday, and in his text the flux of blood was clearly symbolic and not gendered in any way. He explained it by citing a sermon attributed to Augustine:

It is known from the holy Gospels that when Pilate washed his hands and said 'I am clean of the blood of this just man' the impious Jews cried out: 'His blood is on us and on our children' (Matt 27:25). Regarding this the blessed Augustine said – in a sermon which begins 'In cruce...' – it is seen to mean that because of the curse of the ancestors a vein of villainy runs in the children up to the present, by means of a defect of their blood. And by this inconvenient flow the impious progeny are incurably afflicted, until such time as the sinner, repenting, acknowledges the blood of Christ and is healed.⁴⁶

References to bleeding bottoms gradually acquired the additional feature of seasonal bleeding at Easter, but most such references that I have found are from sources in the German empire. I believe Biller and Gilman were correct in locating the origins of this belief in Germany. It must be emphasized that medical theorists, from Galen (130–199) to Arnold of Villanova (1240–1311), described menstrual and haemorrhoidal bleeding as interchangeable. This bleeding was part of a natural process in which the body rid itself of an unhealthy excess of cold, wet humours. Occasional bleeding was normal, profuse bleeding signified a persistent humoral imbalance and should be treated. One of the preeminent medical theorists of the late Middle Ages, Arnold wrote the following in his textbook called *Breviarium*:

There are five haemorrhoidal veins at the opening of the rectum. Some men have these small veins hanging out - some only three, some only one. Others have them

⁴⁵*La scala coeli de Jean Gobi*, ed. M.-A. Polo de Beaulieu (Paris, 1991), 296.

⁴⁶Constat quidem ex sancto Euangelio, quod Pilato lauante manus, and dicente: Mundus ego sum a sanguine iusti huius Iudaei impiissimi clamauerunt: Sanguis [sic] eius super nos, and super filios nostros. Super quo beatissimus Augustinus in sermone quodam, qui incipit: In cruce, innuere videtur, [marginal editorial note: Nullus adhuc extat in operibus Augu. Sermo hoc initio.] quod ex maledictione parentum currat adhuc in filios vena facinoris, per maculam sanguinis: Vt per hanc importune fluidam proles impia inexplabiliter crucietur, quousque se ream sanguinis Christi recognoscat poenitens, & sanetur. Thomas of Cantimpré, *Miraculorum et exemplorum memorabilium sui temporis libri duo* (Douai, 1605), 305. The mystery announced in the editorial note has recently been solved. Christoph Cluse of the University of Trier has discovered Thomas's prooftext in a pseudo-Augustinian sermon. For a full discussion see his dissertation, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden in den mittelalterlichen Niederlanden* (Ph.D. diss., Universität Trier, 1997), chapter IV.3, forthcoming in the series *Forschungen zur Geschichte der Juden* (Hannover, 1998).

inside the rectum. Many men are purged [of bad humours] via these small veins (just as women are by their menses) and preserved from diverse illnesses when they flow in the appropriate amount. But when they flow immoderately, this can give men tubercular fever or dropsy, and cause them to fall ill with many other illnesses. Hence these men who have such immoderate haemorrhage – should they know how to preserve themselves by provoking the haemorrhoids to haemorrhage, or by stanching them, as is appropriate – would live in wondrous health and be healed of their illnesses... Every flow of blood, as Galen said, is unhealthy, except for a moderate flow of blood from haemorrhoids, nosebleeds, and menses. Such moderate bleeding should not be restrained.⁴⁷

Haemorrhoids were thus thought to be a normal condition of adult men. Arnold was a renowned expert on haemorrhoids, and wrote the following in his treatise on the subject (c. 1303), addressed to the King of Aragon:

When haemorrhoids flow moderately, they should not in any way be restrained, because such a flow is healthy for the body and preserves it from many and grave illnesses; but when flowing immoderately, thereby excessively weakening the body, they should be suppressed.⁴⁸

Similarly, Bernard of Gordon wrote (c. 1305) in his *Lilium Medicinae* that excess menstrual blood is sometimes purged via haemorrhoids in women:

It must be understood that even though melancholy blood is purged as menses in women, nonetheless they can still have haemorrhoids: either because [their humoral complexion is] ruled by a great quantity of melancholy blood and so they are purged by a two-fold expulsion [of blood]; or when menses are retained by their constitution, and then this constitution transmits the impure excess to the haemorrhoids...⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Haemorrhoidales venae sunt quinque iuxta caput recti intestini infixae: et quidam homines habent illas venulas extra pendentes, et quidam tantum tres, quidam tantum unam, alias habent intus: per illas venulas plures homines purgantur, quemadmodum mulieres per menstrua, et a diuersis aegritudinibus praeservantur, cum fluunt secundum debitum cursum. Cum vero immoderate fluunt, faciunt hominem in hectica phthisim, hydropisim et in alias plures aegritudines incidere, unde isti homines, qui habent huiusmodi fluxum, si sciant se prae seruare in prouocando ipsas haemorrhoides, et etiam in stringendo ipsas, cum fuerit oportunum, mirabiliter viuunt sani, et ab aegritudinibus illesi.... Omnis enim fluxus sanguinis, vt ait Gale. est prae naturam prae fluxum sanguinis haemorrhoidum, narium et menstruorum moderatus. Huiusmodi enim moderatus fluxus non est sedandus. Arnold of Villanova, *Opera Omnia, cum Nicolai Taurelli Medici et philosophi in quosdam libros annotationibus* (Basil, 1585), 1241–3.

⁴⁸ Quando igitur emorroyde moderate fluunt, non sunt ullo modo restringende, quoniam talis fluxus corpori est salubris et preserat ipsum a pluribus et gravibus morbis; sed immoderate fluentes, quia nimis corpus debilitant, sunt compescende... Arnold of Villanova, *Regimen Sanitatis*, 465.

⁴⁹ ...intelligendum quod licet sanguis melancholicus purgetur per menstrua in mulieribus, nihilominus possunt habere emorroydes, vel quia sanguis melancholicus dominatur in nimia quantitate et ita purgatur duplici emunctuario, vel quando menstrua retinentur propter naturam et tunc natura illud superfluum inpurum ad emorroidas transmittit... Bernard of Gordon, *Lilium Medicinae* (Naples, 1480) unpaginated, *sub verbo* de emorroidibus. I am indebted to Peter Jones for this reference.

Thus, in medieval medical theory, menses and haemorrhoidal bleeding were functionally interchangeable. Both were normal purgings of melancholy blood. To read thirteenth-century accounts of men with bleeding anuses as feminizing slurs (as do Sander Gilman and others) is to read them with modern sensibilities: the discourse of menses was not prior to the discourse of haemorrhoidal bleeding. The accursedness of these Jews (or, in the case of the Sheriff, philo-Semites) was symbolized by their immoderate bleeding; they were not woman-like but sick.

In a collection of historical anecdotes finished in the first years of the fourteenth century, the Dominican writer Rudolph of Schlettstadt (c. 1302) described an ailment that clearly derived from both the medical and theological traditions of the Jewish flux.⁵⁰ 'I heard from a Jew that certain Jews – descended from those who cried out before Pilate at the time of Christ's passion 'his blood be on us and on our children' (Matt 27:25) – flow every month with blood and often suffer dysentery (from which they frequently die).'⁵¹ Rudolph added that Jews treat this illness with Christian blood, but he gave no account of the source of this blood used by Jewish doctors.

6. Lexical fantasies

The lexical history of the latin word *verpus* is an interesting example of the accretion of the notion of the Jewish flux to an earlier anti-Semitic motif. *Verpa* originally referred to an aroused penis with its foreskin drawn back.⁵² It was used in that sense by Catullus (28:12, 47:4), Martial (7:82:6, 11:46:2, 11:94), and in one of the *Priapiae* (34). The only other classical witness is a reference in Juvenal, which uses the word *verpus* to refer to Jews:

Romanas autem soliti contemnere leges
Iudaicum ediscunt et seruant ac metuunt ius,
tradidit arcano quodcumque uolumine Moyses:
non monstrare uias eadem nisi sacra colenti,
quaesitum ad fontem solos deducere uerpos.⁵³

They spurn Roman laws, but they learn by heart and protect and fear Jewish law;
Moses handed down a certain law in a secret book: not to give direction to those
seeking a fountain except to other pricks who worship similarly.

⁵⁰For a discussion of the extensive involvement of the Dominican order in the shaping of Christian thinking about Jews in this period, see J. Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews* (Ithaca, 1982) and R. Chazan, *Daggers of Faith* (Berkeley, 1989).

⁵¹Audiui a Judeis, quod quidam Iudeorum, scilicet qui in passione Cristi clamauerunt coram Pilato: 'sanguis eius super nos et filios nostros', quod omnes Iudei, qui de eorum genere processerunt, singulis mensibus sanguine fluunt et dissenteriam sepius paciantur et ea ut frequencius moriuntur. Sanantur autem per sanguinem hominis Cristiani, qui nomine Cristi baptisatus est. Rudolf von Schlettstadt, *Historiae Memorabiles*, ed. E. Kleinschmidt (Cologne, 1974), 65. I am indebted to Christoph Cluse for this reference.

⁵²Kroll (on Catull. 47.4) was right to define *uerpus* as 'cuius glans nimia libidine nudata est', J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (Baltimore, 1982), 13.

⁵³*Juvenal and Perseus*, ed. and trans G.G. Ramsey (Cambridge, Mass, 1918), 'Satires' XIV:104.

Juvenal was ridiculing circumcision by describing Jews with a scornful metonym. This is the only classical use of the word medieval lexicographers are likely to have known.⁵⁴ From Juvenal it was clear that *verpus* meant Jew, but the etymology was evidently unknown to the eleventh-century lexicographer Papias when he wrote, *Verpus dicitur impudicus digitus quo iudaei feruntur sabbato anum purgare; unde iudei uerpi dicuntur* [*Verpus*: the lewd finger with which Jews are said to wipe their ass on the Sabbath; hence, Jews are called *verpi*].⁵⁵

It is possible to reconstruct some of the reasoning that led to this strange definition. In the section of his encyclopedia that dealt with human anatomy, Isidore had listed the names of the fingers. The third, or middle, finger he called *impudicus* (lewd): *...tertius [digitus] impudicus [vocatur], quod plerumque per eum probri insectatio exprimitur* [the third finger is called lewd, because lewd derision is commonly expressed by it]⁵⁶. Earlier, Isidore had derived the word *impudicus* (lewd) from *podex* (ass): *Impudicus a podice vocatus*.⁵⁷ Papias combined these, literalizing Isidore's false etymology: the *impudicus digitus* became a finger in the ass. The thirteenth-century Dominican lexicographer Joannes Balbus (d. 1298) extended Papias's definition, adding the new idea that Jews bleed from their anuses:

The third finger is called 'middle' or 'lewd', because lewd derision is commonly expressed by it. It is also called 'verpus' from wiping the ass. God smote the Jews in their posteriors and set them in everlasting shame, for every year on Good Friday they emit blood from their posteriors. With their middle fingers bent back, they wipe their ass with this finger; hence it is called 'verpus' as in, 'verrens' [scouring] the ass. And therefore that finger is still extended to dishonour the Jews.⁵⁸

Balbus bases this new claim about Jewish bleeding on the by now familiar gloss of the verse from Psalms: 'God smote them [the Jews] in their posteriors and set them in everlasting shame, for every year on Good Friday they emit blood from their posteriors.' A fifteenth-century addition to *Vocabularius Optimus*, a lexicon originally compiled in

⁵⁴J.H. Gaisser, 'Catullus, Gaius Valerius', in: *Catalogus Translationum et Commentariorum. Medieval and Renaissance Latin Translations and Commentaries*, ed. V. Brown, P.O. Kristeller, and F.E. Cranz, 7 vols (1960–92), vol. 7, 201; F.-R. Hausmann, 'Martialis, Marcus Valerius', in: *Catalogus Translationum*, vol. 4, 250; L.D. Reynolds *Texts and Transmission: A Survey of Latin Classics* third edition (Oxford, 1983), 322. See O. Weijers, 'Lexicography in the Middle Ages', *Viator*, 20 (1989), 139–53, for a very useful introduction to medieval lexicography.

⁵⁵Papias, *Vocabulista* (Venice, 1496) *sub verbo* verpus. This is the same text cited in the Henschel/Favre edition of C. DuCange, *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis* (Paris, 1883–7) quoting Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS lat. 7613, a fourteenth-century copy of Papius's *Elementarium*. Papias appears not to have known the late antique scholia on Juvenal, which glosses, '*Deducere verpos*: Iudaeos (dicit), qui sine pellicula sunt.' P. Wessner, *Scholia in Iuvenalem Vetusiora* (Leipzig, 1931), 215.

⁵⁶*Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum Sive Originum Libri XX*, ed. W.M. Lindsay (Oxford, 1911), 11.71.

⁵⁷Isidore, 10.148.

⁵⁸*Tercius [digitus] medius vel impudicus [dicitur] quod per eum plerumque probri insectatio exprimitur. Idem et verpus a verendo podicem. Percussit enim deus iudeos in posteriora et obprobrium sempiternum dedit illis, nam singulis annis in crucifixione domini emittunt sanguinem per posteriora quem cum medio digito reponendo verrunt eo digito podicem, et inde dictus est verpus quasi verrens podicem. Unde ad huc ille digitus in obprobrium ostenditur iudeis...* Joannes Balbus, *Catholicon* (Mainz, 1460), *sub verbo* digitus.

fourteenth-century Austria, continued this explanation that *verpus* is the middle finger, adding that the finger is also called 'the Jew':

Jew... *verpus*, properly this is the middle finger. And it is called *verpus*, from *verro*, 'I sweep/scour', because it is used for scouring and wiping from the anus; hence, *verpus*, as in *verrens podicem*, scouring the anus. God smote the Jews in their posteriors, that is, he gave them everlasting dishonour, for every year at the time of the crucifixion of the Lord they emit blood from the posterior for the removal of which they sweep this finger through their anus. And hence that finger is called a *verpus*, as though sweeping the anus. And therefore that finger is still extended to dishonour the Jews. If you extend it toward any Jew, he will never afterward like you. And this is why the word *verpus* is sometimes used to mean Jew.⁵⁹

Here again is a transitional text combining elements of both theological and medical lore from multiple strata of the myth of the Jewish flux. This text, which is most obviously an attack on Jewish religious practices, may derive in part from a misunderstanding of information learned from living Jews. There are special provisions in Jewish law regarding wiping on the Sabbath.⁶⁰

7. Medical rationale

Perhaps the late medieval recovery of the works of Plato and Galen led to the reinterpretation of the idea of salubrious haemorrhoidal bleeding by stressing the accursedness of those who bleed immoderately. Ancient medical theory had understood incontinence to be a physiological failure with moral implications. Citing Plato, Galen explained that containment of food and continence are among the prerequisites of living a human life: '[The intestines were formed] to keep the food from passing quickly through and forcing the body at once to require more food, thus causing insatiable gluttony and making the whole race of mortals the enemy of philosophy and music.'⁶¹ Even among the higher animals excretion is an act of choice accomplished by the exertion of will.⁶² Indeed, the sphincter that contains food residue until one chooses to excrete it 'is an instrument of the psychic soul. If in some individuals these muscles are relaxed or impaired ... ever so slightly, the residues flow out involuntarily and

⁵⁹ *Iudeus...* *verpus* [/ -pi] proprie est medius digitus. Et dicitur [verpus] a verro / -ris, quod [idem] est [quod] purgo uel tergo, et podex / -icis; unde *verpus* quasi *verrens podicem*. Percussit enim deus iudeos in posteriora, id est obprobrium sempiternum dedit eis; nam singulis annis in crucifixione domini emittunt sanguinem per posteriora, quem remouendo verrunt per *podicem* eo digito. Et inde ille digitus dictus est *verpus* quasi *verrens podicem*. Vnde adhuc ille digitus in obprobrium ostenditur iudeis; quem si alicui iudeo ostenderis, numquam postea te diligit. Et hinc est, quod *verpus* quandoque ponitur pro iudeo. *Vocabularius optimus*, ed. Ernst Bremer (Tübingen 1990) (= *Texte und Textgeschichte Würzburger Forschungen*, 28 & 29), vol. 2, 438. I am indebted to Christoph Cluse for this reference.

⁶⁰ Shulkhan 'Arukh, *Orech Chaim*, ch. 312, is a convenient summary of the Talmudic and medieval discussions.

⁶¹ Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, trans. and ed. M.T. May (Ithaca, 1968), vol. 1, 238.

⁶² Galen, vol. 2, 668.

inopportunately, showing clearly how shameful and gross would be our life if from the beginning Nature had not planned something better'.⁶³ Jews, the anti-Philosophers, had already been thought by some twelfth-century theologians to be more animal-like than Christians.⁶⁴ The new claim that Jews suffered an immoderate and disabling flux from their anuses extended these old arguments by implying that they were shameful, gross, and inimical to civilized life.

8. The feminization of the bleeding Jewish man

It is difficult to determine when the Jewish flux was first understood in terms of gender. The *locus classicus* of the menstruating Jewish man is surely the *Acta Sanctorum*. In an article on the ritual murder of Rudolph of Bern (1287), the Bollandist Gottfried Henschen explained why Jews need Christian blood: *...quod cum viri ac mulieres aequae apud eos fluxu menstrui laborarent; sanguinem hominis Christiani epotum, idoneam ad id morbi esse medicinam experti erant* [because both men and women among them suffer from a monthly flow; they discovered the drinking of the blood of a Christian man to be an effective medicine for this illness].⁶⁵ Henschen was quoting verbatim from a fifteenth-century report of the confessions elicited under torture during the blood libel trial in Tyrnau, Hungary (1494).⁶⁶ He also cited the text of Thomas of Cantimpré discussed above. It is clear from his discussion both that he believed the blood libel, and that he did not distinguish between the illness described by Thomas and the monthly flow reported in the Tyrnau confessions. Henschen was writing in the mid-seventeenth century, as were English and German authors cited by Gilman.⁶⁷ It is thus clear that by 1650 the idea of Jewish male menstruation was in wide circulation. On the other hand, as late as c. 1500, Albert Kranz explained that the Jews had been expelled from Thuringia in 1400 because of their need for human blood to heal a wound that flowed in them *perpetually*. *...Christiano sanguine abutantur ad restringendum cruorem qui perpetuo illis fluat, quorum patres clamauere, Sanguis eius super nos, et super filios nostros* [Christian blood was misused for the stanching of a wound that perpetually flows in them, because their ancestors cried 'His blood be upon us, and

⁶³ Galen, vol. 1, 241.

⁶⁴ A. Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (New York, 1995), 116 and passim. For a discussion of images of digestion in twelfth- and thirteenth-century political theology, see P. Buc, *L'Ambiguïté du livre* (Paris, 1994) (= *Théologie Historique*, 95).

⁶⁵ *Acta Sanctorum*, April vol. 2, (1675), 507. The other reasons listed are 1) for use in love potions; 2) for curing the wound of circumcision; 3) for use in anti-Christian rituals. Much of this is reviewed in H.L. Strack, *The Jew and Human Sacrifice* (London, 1909), 201–3.

⁶⁶ Daniel Chwolson located Henschen's source in the contemporary *Decades* of Antonio Bonfinius. D. Chwolson, *Die Blutanklage und sonstige mittelalterliche Beschuldigungen der Juden* (Frankfurt, 1901), 207. I owe this reference to the generosity of Wolfgang Treue. Henschen's account is true to the text of the modern critical edition of Bonfinius: Antonius de Bonfinis, *Rerum Ungaricarum Decades*, ed. I. Fogel, B. Ivanyi, and L. Juhasz, 4 vols. (Leipzig and Budapest, 1936–41) (= *Bibliotheca Scriptorum Medii Recentisque Aevorum*, Saeculum XV, Bonfinis), vol. 4, 254.

⁶⁷ Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred*, 75.

upon our children' (Matt 27:25)].⁶⁸ Kranz was writing *after* the Tynau confessions, but his account (or that of his fifteenth-century source) of the Jewish flux was still primarily religious and certainly ungendered. His 'perpetual' flux, however, is arguably closer to being monthly (menstrual) than the annual Good Friday bleeding of the previous two centuries.

This review of a strange motif in medieval anti-Jewish writing clears away a misreading, but it raises new questions about the ways medieval thinking about gender shaped images of Jews. The broad range of medieval misogynist writings is well known, and I wonder why it did not impel the earlier medieval writers discussed in this article toward a reading of the Jewish flux as feminizing.⁶⁹ If this interpretation was as obvious to them as I believe it to have been, why did they avoid it? If it was not, why were they blind to it? What change led to the interpretation of Jewish male bleeding as feminine, an interpretation that beguiles some modern readers?

Given the repeated allegation that various heretical groups practised anal intercourse, why was the Jewish flux never interpreted as a consequence of such activities? Many factors in the history of this exegetical trend could have supported such a reading. As noted above, Rabanus Maurus wrote that the devil had entered Judas through his anus. The *Glossa Ordinaria*'s comment on why God smote the Gazans in their anuses – *et percussit in secretiori parte natiū Azotum* (1 Sam 5:6) – was simple: *quoniam Sodomitae erant*. This verse was often cited as a proof-text for the Jewish flux, but without reference to Jewish sodomy.⁷⁰ My preliminary hypothesis is that such a reading was unthinkable because of what it might have implied about the founding image in the series: Judas's death upon a kiss. To have read Jews as Sodomites might have forced a re-reading of the relationship between Judas and Jesus himself.

⁶⁸ A. Kranz, *Wandalia. de Wandalorum vera origine, variis gentibus, crebris e patria migrationibus, regnis item, quorum vel autores vel eversores fuerunt* (Hanover, 1619), 235. This reference was kindly supplied by Christoph Cluse from the unpublished master's thesis of W. Treue, *Ritualmord und Hostienschändung. Untersuchungen zur Judenfeindschaft in Deutschland im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 1989), 122.

⁶⁹ For a convenient recent discussion see: R.H. Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago, 1991). A classic source for contemporary discussions is H.R. Lemay, *Women's Secretes. A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus's de Secretis Mulierum with Commentaries* (Albany, 1992). Lemay's excellent translation is sometimes cited as proof of the sweeping claim that in the Middle Ages Christians believed that Jewish men menstruated. The translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus is supplemented by two later commentaries on his text. In one of these, which Lemay calls 'B', there are two references to a Jewish flux. 'Note that according to some, menses [menstruum] is understood in three ways. The first way is natural menses, such as the menstrual periods of women [menstruum naturale sicut menstruum mulierum]. The second is supernatural, as the Jews experience [supernaturale sicut in iudeis]. The third is against nature, for example certain Christians of melancholy disposition bleed through the anus and not through the penis [contra naturam sicut in quibusdam christianis melancolicis per annum (sic) et non per virgam]' (71). Later, in a discussion of the haemorrhoids that melancholic men suffer, commentator 'B' adds: 'This is found in Jews more than in others, for their natures are more melancholic, [ille idem fluxus reperitur in iudeis ad naturam magisque in aliis quia plurimum melancolicam (sic) declinat] although it is said that they have this flow because of a miracle of God, and there is no doubt that this is true' (74). Latin extracts from *de Secretis Mulierum* (Rome, 1499), unpaginated. Lemay does not date commentator 'B', but it may provisionally be assigned to the early fourteenth century.

⁷⁰ Nicolas of Lyra's fourteenth-century gloss on the gloss likewise avoids references to sodomy: *Percussi enim fuerunt dysenteria vehementi, ita quod intestina inferiora per que feces egrediebantur, putrescebant vel scaturiebant vermibus, et exterius prominebant. Biblia Sacra cum Glossa Ordinaria et Expositionibus* (Lyon, 1545), vol. 2, 68v.

Much of the material discussed in this article is distasteful to modern readers. I would emphasize that this was not the case with the original audience. Almost every text quoted in this article was written by a major author. These were central texts. Perhaps what impedes our understanding of why first Judas, then heretics, and finally Jews were smitten with bleeding anuses (and why the Jewish flux was linked to the need for Christian blood) is the freight of associations we modern readers bring to the sources. If we want to understand Jewish history we must follow where the sources lead us. Descriptions of malevolent Jews, bowel movements, and bleeding anuses appear on the pages of the *Patrologia Latina* and were part of learned medieval culture.

Medieval writers tended to be less squeamish about their bodies than we are. This cliché was once repeated with a condescending tone by editors and translators as a justification for bowdlerized editions. More recently, it has authorized critical studies that focus on medieval thinking about our embodiment.⁷¹ To me it suggests a third possibility: that the fixation on certain acts and body parts as the sites of taboo has subtly distorted our understanding of the texts that discuss them by leading us to assume such texts to have been more controversial or socially charged than they may, in fact, have been to their original writers and readers. We will do well to remember that we are as embedded in modern discourses of race and gender as the authors of these texts were embedded in their own (now extinct or radically evolved) discourses of the Jewish body.

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⁷¹ *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. M. Rubin and S. Kay (Manchester, 1994); C.W. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother. Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1982), and *Holy Feast, Holy Fast. The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, 1987).