

# THE BLACK DEATH AND THE PERSECUTIONS OF THE JEWS

UNDERSTANDING THE PAPAL RESPONSE TO THE BLACK DEATH MASSACRES OF THE JEWS  
DURING 1348-1350

**Q**um eo tpe quidam electores imperij. p̄cipue ecclesiastici principes ob b̄ueria b̄scidia in albertū regē  
varias cōturationes ac similtates attēptarunt. dicentes ad op̄bum dñm suū in bello p̄misse. ideo  
eū regia dignitate indignū censebant. Quā ob rem ceteri principes primarij in regno germanie Rudol-  
phum palatinū rheni imperij iudicem statuerunt vt deinceps futuris temporibus sua industria hoc officij  
um pagere deberet. Ex qua consuetudine reges romanorū mouerent ne aliquod malū vitupatione dignū  
in regno molirentur. ac indigni impetio iudicarentur.



**S**eductor ac dolosus quidam  
ostentabat se fore fridericum  
impatorē in diujs varijs. quē oī  
p̄ditū fuisse ac nullū postea inuē-  
tum fuisse dixerūt. Is sua astutia  
cū multos sibi adhaerentes acqui-  
sisset ab impatore p̄bensus de-  
tectis fallacijs igne p̄bustus fuit.

**J**udei q̄s anno primo alberti  
p̄patoris aucti in plerisq; locis  
ob male gesta nurnberge in  
bipoli. rotenburge. ac in plerisq;  
locis sinitimis igni traditi sunt. n  
sexui nō etati parcentes. infelices  
gentem aliq̄t multa perijisse serunt  
seruari infantes baptismi gratia.

**Q**uādo vnde tricesimo 7 mil-  
lesimo iacobus aragonē si-  
culū regē obijisse diē ierebuisse ro-  
bert⁹ calabrie dux caroli genitorū  
iussu in siciliā traductis copijs ca-  
thina vrbe potitus est. Philipp⁹

q̄s tarentinus dux frater suus cū patissima classe illico est subsequut⁹. Siculi interea correptis populariter ar-  
mis sese aduersus exosum gallicū nomē vt tuerent terra mariq; parauerant. 7 fridericu aragonē ea vocauē-  
runt ratione vt regnū trinacie sibi etiā tardiuscule aduēturo p̄seruādū eē. plene cōfusus copias ex hispanis  
traducendas. vel adhibita longiore mora contraberet. Nauigauerat interea salutiorē disciplina classis p̄bi-  
li. n̄ p̄uinciam tarentinā eū q̄ se ferens securitatem quā na eximie a rebus. fratre quā siciliā debuit ostē-  
re.

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## INTRODUCTION

In March 2018, a Jewish woman named Mireille Knoll was murdered because of her Jewish religion in the capital of France.<sup>1</sup> A few days after her death, thousands of Parisians marched through the city to honour her life, and as a protest against the increased violence against Jews.<sup>2</sup> The case of Mireille Knoll is not the first recent hate crime against Jews in Western Europe. In 2012, there was an attack on a Jewish school in Toulouse, in 2014 a Jewish museum in Brussels was struck and in 2015 a Jewish supermarket in Paris was targeted.<sup>3</sup> In the last two decades, hostility against Jews has increased and resulted in several cases of violence against them in Europe. Violence against Jews is not a new phenomenon, it has been present for at least half a millennium and various studies are focussing on the origin of Jewish hatred. Probably one of the most well-known cases of violence against the Jews occurred during the Nazi period, and some historians find roots for these persecutions in the High Middle Ages.<sup>4</sup>

Especially during the High Middle Ages, negative stereotypes of Jews arose in Christian society and Jews were often accused of crimes, such as the ritual murder of children and the desecration of the host. These accusations caused violence against the Jews, which sometimes even resulted in executions.<sup>5</sup> This study will focus on the well-poisoning accusation made against Jews in the fourteenth century. This is a significant period to investigate, because during 1348-1349 Europe had to deal with a catastrophic plague, nowadays known as the Black Death. The plague caused the death of approximately fifty million people, which was up to sixty percent of the whole population of Europe.<sup>6</sup> Shortly after the outbreak of the plague, the rumour arose that Jews were responsible for spreading the disease by poisoning the wells of Christians. As a consequence, the violence against Jews increased and by 1348, resulted in numerous pogroms in French and Spanish regions.<sup>7</sup> Pope Clement VI, whose papal palace was situated in Avignon during this time, disapproved of the accusations and pogroms against the Jews. As a response, he issued a series of papal bulls in 1348 which were intended to protect the Jews. Unfortunately, after these bulls were issued, many pogroms still occurred. Especially in the German-speaking areas, the accusations destroyed entire Jewish communities, even before the

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Nossiter, 'She Survived the Holocaust, to Die in a 2018 Hate Crime', *The New York Times* (26 March 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Elian Peltier and Aurelien Breeden, 'Mireille Knoll, Murdered Holocaust Survivor, Is Honored in Paris', *The New York Times* (28 March 2018).

<sup>3</sup> 'Ethnic purging': French stars and dignitaries condemn antisemitism', *The Guardian* (22 April 2018).

<sup>4</sup> See for example: N. Voigtländer and H.J Voth, 'Persecution perpetuated: The Medieval origins of anti-Semitic violence in Nazi Germany', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 127:3 (2012) 1139-1392; M Perry and F. M. Schweitzer, *Antisemitism and Hate from Antiquity to the Present* (New York 2002) 2-3.

<sup>5</sup> R. Chazan, *Medieval Stereotypes and Modern Anti-Semitism* (Los Angeles 1997) 74.

<sup>6</sup> O.B. Benedictow, *The Black Death 1346-1353. The Complete History* (Woodbridge 2004) 382.

<sup>7</sup> S.K. Cohn, 'The Black Death and the Burning of Jews', *Past & Present* 196 (2007) 3-36, particularly 4.

plague itself arrived. Therefore, this research focusses on how we can understand papal responses to the accusation of well-poisoning and their consequences during the Black Death period.

The complicated relationship between popes and the Jews has been the subject for numerous studies. These have mainly concentrated on the period between the eleventh and the thirteenth century, probably because historians were trying to find a starting point for anti-Judaism in the High Middle Ages. This creates a problem, because the famous well-poisoning case occurred during the fourteenth century, a period that is less well-studied. However, within the current historiography the opinions about anti-Judaism are divided, so too are ideas about the relationship between the pope and Jews. This historiographic overview will discuss the most influential studies within this field of research. Much attention has been paid to the methodology of the key scholars and their views on Christian-Jewish relations and the role of the papacy within these during the High Middle Ages.

Solomon Grayzel was an American Jewish historian who wrote several books about the relationship between the Vatican and the European Jews. In his publication *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth century*, he studied the relationship between the Church and Jews during the years 1198-1314. He provided editions and translations, with limited analysis. During his research he mainly focussed on primary sources such as papal Bulls and papal correspondence. According to Grayzel, canon law was too limited in scope, while papal correspondence showed a broader picture because it contained more subjects.<sup>8</sup> Grayzel's approach was therefore innovative, and his work formed the basis for future studies in the research field of Christian-Jewish relations.

In 1980 the book *Church, State, and Jew in the Middle Ages* was published by Robert Chazan. In his study on the relationships between Church, State and Jews he used a different approach from Grayzel, because he focussed on Jewish perspective and experience. He did not describe the relationship, but instead he organized a series of primary documents which he presented in his book with commentary. These documents illustrate the influence the papacy had on medieval Jewish life from the tenth until the thirteenth century.<sup>9</sup>

Grayzel and Chazan both characterize the pope and the Church institution as the protector of Jews in their studies. Grayzel explained that the Bull of Protection, the *Sicut Judaeis*, issued by all the thirteenth century popes, protected the Jews.<sup>10</sup> Chazan analysed Christian-Jewish relations from the early Church during the Roman Empire and states that the Church announced a position of tolerance towards the Jews. With this, Chazan meant that the Church proclaimed the right of Jews to live safely in a Christian society.<sup>11</sup> During the Middle Ages, he concluded that the Church pursued the same policy

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<sup>8</sup> S. Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth century. A study of their relations during the years 1198-1254, based on the Papal Letters and the Conciliar Decrees of the period* (New York 1966) 4.

<sup>9</sup> R. Chazan, *Church, State, and Jew in the Middle Ages* (New York 1980) ix - x.

<sup>10</sup> Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Chazan, *Church, State, and Jew* 4.

by guaranteeing safety for the Jewish population. He thereby concluded that over time, the Church supported the Jews with their policy.<sup>12</sup> However, the way both of these studies use the term 'papal policy' suggest that the popes had a well-planned program towards the Jews, which was uniform and consistent.

Jeremy Cohen, author of the book *The Friars and the Jews*, explains the change of attitudes he sees take place from the thirteenth century onward. Anti-Jewish violence increased in Europe during this period, which was the consequence of a changing view of Christians towards the Jews. This view changed because of the blood libel and host desecration charges that appeared for the first time in this century. The change was visible in the representation of Jews in art, where they were no longer depicted as the predecessors of Christians, but instead as enemies. As a consequence, Christians no longer saw the Jews as their predecessors, but instead they were seen as enemies of the Church.<sup>13</sup>

The view of Grayzel and Chazan, where the pope is the protector of Jews, is just one opinion in the debate on the papal-Jewish relations. Kenneth Stow summarized this debate in his collection of essays, *Popes, Church, and Jews in the Middle Ages. Confrontation and Reponse*. This volume was released in 2007 and contains different essays on Christian-Jewish relations. Especially the essay on the '1007 anonymous' is of great interest for this historiographic overview. This essay distinguishes itself from earlier studies by choosing a different approach, namely focusing on Jewish attitudes towards the popes. In his essay Stow states that there are three basic approaches to the subject of papal-Jewish relations.<sup>14</sup> The first opinion, shared by Grayzel and Chazan, views the pope as the protector of Jews.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, another view in this debate interpreted the attitude of the popes as a way to expel the Jews from Western Europe.<sup>16</sup> A midway position would be to argue that the popes were genuine about the protection, but due to outside pressure the protection failed.<sup>17</sup> According to Stow, modern scholars have misinterpreted the term 'protection' in papal letters as justifications for Jewish life in Christian lands. However, in reality the goal of papal policy was to define the place and role of Jews within a society that was purely Christian.<sup>18</sup>

The most recent title in this historiographic overview is *Popes and Jews 1095-1291*, written by Rebecca Rist in 2016. In this study, Rist reviews the relationship between 'the pope' and the Jews from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. She aims to correct the idea of a static 'papal policy' towards

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<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, 11-12.

<sup>13</sup> J. Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews. The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (New York 1982) 244.

<sup>14</sup> K. Stow, 'The "1007 anonymous" and papal sovereignty: Jewish perceptions of the papacy and papal policy in the High Middle Ages' in: Idem, *Popes, Church, and Jews in the Middle Ages. Confrontation and Response* (Cornwall 2007) 1-81, particularly 1.

<sup>15</sup> Chazan, *Church, State*, 12; Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 9.

<sup>16</sup> This theory is explained in: R.I Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society. Authority and Deviance in Western Europe 950-1250* (Oxford 2007).

<sup>17</sup> Stow, 'The "1007 anonymous", 1.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, 1-2.

the Jews in the High Middle Ages.<sup>19</sup> Her method is similar to Stow's, namely studying Jewish opinions of the papacy. Rist distinguishes her approach from previous works by studying Jewish ideas about individual popes as well as the papacy as an institution. In her study she took Hebrew sources, as well as individual papal pronouncements and canon law into account.<sup>20</sup> Rist makes it very clear that she disagrees with scholars that use the term 'papal policy', as if it was static. Therefore, she criticises the way the term was used by Grayzel and Chazan, because they refer to papal policy as if it was uniform and consistent.<sup>21</sup> I agree with Rist and her criticism on the concept of 'papal policy'. However, there is no other term that covers the subject of papal 'rule'. Therefore, I will use the term policy, even though I am very much aware of the criticism on this concept.

The overarching concept of papal policy resulted in three different opinions about 'papal policy' towards the Jews from the eleventh century onwards. The first interpretation considers that until the first crusade in 1096, the popes protected Jews and that Christians and Jews peacefully coexisted. This crusade marked the end of a generally non-violent era with the massacre of Jewish communities.<sup>22</sup> In the twelfth and thirteenth century this so-called 'papal policy' changed into a program of decline in the protection of popes, and by the second half of the thirteenth century the popes even assumed a suspicious and aggressive attitude.<sup>23</sup> Scholars such as Grayzel and Chazan, have even argued there was a shift towards containment and segregation in the thirteenth century.<sup>24</sup> Yet Stow disagrees with the viewpoint that the 'papal policy' greatly changed in the thirteenth century. He does not disagree with the fact that in thirteenth century Jews were being more segregated from Christians, but he states that these papal pronouncements were based on much earlier times. This segregation had been anticipated for hundreds of years already, it was not declared in the thirteenth century alone but it was part of a process.<sup>25</sup>

This historiographical overview has shown that many studies that explore papal-Jewish relations focus on the period between the eleventh and thirteenth century.<sup>26</sup> However, less attention has been

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<sup>19</sup> R. Rist, *Popes and the Jews 1095-1291* (Oxford 2016) VII.

<sup>20</sup> Rist, *Popes and the Jews*, VIII-VIII.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, 3.

<sup>22</sup> Chazan, *Church, State, and Jew*, 4; Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 9; Rist, *Popes and Jews*, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Rist, *Popes and the Jews*, 2.

<sup>24</sup> R. Rusconi, 'The church and the Jews: St Paul to Pius IX' in: K. Stow, *Popes, Church, and Jews in the Middle Ages. Confrontation and Response* (Cornwall 2007) 1-70, particularly 21.

<sup>25</sup> Rusconi, 'The church and the Jews', 22.

<sup>26</sup> See more works that are not discussed here: A.S. Abulafia, *Christian-Jewish Relations 1000-1300. Jews in the Service of Medieval Christendom* (New York 2011); K. Stow, *Alienated Minority. The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe* (Cambridge 1996); K. Stow, *Jewish Dogs. An image and Its Interpreters. Continuity in the Catholic-Jewish Encounter* (Redwood City 2006); Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*; R.I. Moore, *The War on Heresy. Faith and Power in Medieval Europe* (London 2012); S.K. Cohn Jr., *Lust for Liberty. The Politics of Social Revolt in Medieval Europe, 1200-1425. Italy, France and Flanders*. (London 2006).

devoted to the fourteenth century, which is curious given the fact that whole Jewish communities were massacred during that age. Paradoxically, the wider studies on the Black Death appeared to be a popular research subject, but when you look specifically at the well-poisoning accusations and at the pogroms in the German-speaking countries, it starts to look less significant. According to Samuel Cohn Jr. there are some studies that address the pogroms as a reference point for the beginning of a study, but these studies do not examine the actual massacres.<sup>27</sup> Besides, as discussed in the historiographical overview, there seems to be this tradition of papal protection, but if the popes protect the Jews then what is happening in the fourteenth century when entire Jewish communities are massacred? How do we reconcile these events? Thus, this obvious gap in the research on papal-Jewish relations during the Black Death period will therefore be the subject of this study.

The main question of this study is *how can we understand papal responses to the accusation of well-poisoning against Jews and their consequences during the Black Death period?* To be able to answer this question, it is necessary to look at the papal responses to earlier scapegoating and accusations made against the Jews in the High Middle Ages. Therefore, the first chapter will examine the papal responses to the accusations against Jews prior to the Black Death period. The chapter that follows will analyse the well-poisoning accusations and their consequences. This chapter starts with a discussion on the first well-poisoning accusation of 1321 and the reaction of the Pope John XXII. Additionally, the well-poisoning accusations of 1348-1349, which blamed the Jews for the outbreak of the Black Death, will be investigated. As a consequence of these accusations in several French and Spanish cities, Jews were persecuted. The response of Pope Clement VI to these pogroms will be the central topic of the third chapter. In order to place his papal bulls in the right context, this chapter also involves research on Clement's papacy in Avignon. Finally, the last chapter will address the pogroms in the German-speaking countries, that occurred even after Clement had issued several bulls to protect the Jews. In order to understand what led to the persecution of almost every Jewish community in the Rhineland, this chapter will end with an in-depth analysis of the pogrom in Cologne.

The first chapter that addresses the accusations against Jews and the responses of the popes in the High Middle Ages, will be mainly based on the literature discussed in the historiographical overview. Especially the work of Grazyel will be useful here, because he translated many primary papal sources. The second chapter which focusses on the fourteenth century is more complex, because this period is less well-studied. Therefore, it requires the analysis of primary sources, such as *Chronicles* dating from the fourteenth century, to fill in these gaps. The same goes for the third chapter, where the papal bulls of Clement VI are the key sources. These papal bulls are published by Shlomo

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<sup>27</sup> Cohn, 'The Burning of Jews', 4: As an example, Cohn referred to the symposium on Medieval Jewry that focused on Western Europe which addressed almost nothing about the Pogroms against the Jews.



Simonsohn.<sup>28</sup> The fourth chapter presents the most significant challenge, especially the case study on Cologne, which is almost entirely based on *Chronicles*.

As seen above, this research requires the use of numerous primary sources, which can be dangerous. Luckily historians such as Rosemary Horrox and John Albert translated several parts of various *Chronicles* and other primary sources, that address the persecution of Jews during the Black Death period.<sup>29</sup> These *Chronicles* should be read very carefully, because the authors might have had different motives or intentions with their writings, which makes the reliability of the sources questionable. That these *Chronicles* might not be telling the truth, is something I am very much aware of. However, I want to try to get some sense about what might have been the issues, or what might have happened, out of these sources. In order to find out what might have happened during the pogrom of Cologne, the case-study will consist an analysis of all the players who might have been involved in the pogrom. It can be useful to find out who was involved, and what might have been their benefits or motives for protecting or persecuting the Jews. Finally, a discourse analysis on the papal bulls issued by Pope Clement VI is necessary to find out what his reaction was to the accusations and their consequences. Thus, this study has a political-institutional approach, because it is focussing on power relationships between the pope, Christians, Jews, and other players based on the careful analysis of primary and secondary sources.

Before starting with the first chapter, it is necessary to discuss a definition that is key in this study. There have been many debates around the definitions of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism. The concept anti-Semitism is nowadays generally linked to the recent history of the twentieth century. Especially during the Second World War the term was shaped by the Nazi assault on European Jewry.<sup>30</sup> It is important to make a distinction between the anti-Jewish attitude that is visible in medieval discourse and the modern anti-Semitism fostered by the Nazi's. The term anti-Semitism would be anachronistic to use for the anti-Jewish attitude during the Medieval period.

How do we define the anti-Jewish attitude of the Medieval period? Many historians have debated the differences between the two concepts. However, a key distinction between anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism is conversion. It raises the question whether Jews remain Jews once they have been converted to Christianity. This is often taken as a major distinction between racial anti-Semitism - once a Jew always a Jew - and anti-Judaism, which would only hold for Jews in a religious sense and which can be reversed if the person converts. An important note by Rist is whether the medieval people themselves were aware of a distinction between the two concepts, which is very difficult for us to

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<sup>28</sup> S. Simonsohn, *The Apostolic see and the Jews. Documents: 492-1404* (Toronto 1988).

<sup>29</sup> J. Albert, *The Great Mortality of 1348-1350. A brief history with documents* (New York 2005;); R. Horrox, *The Black Death* (Manchester 1994).

<sup>30</sup> Chazan, *Medieval Stereotypes*, x.

assess.<sup>31</sup> The complex discussion on these concepts is too big of scale to discuss here. Nevertheless, most scholars refer to anti-Judaism in their studies so I will do the same here. Besides, the term anti-Judaism is a better fit for this study because most of the accusations that will be discussed are linked with religion or, in some cases conversion was a way for Jews to escape certain accusations. We will now turn to the first chapter, where the accusations against Jews in the High Middle Ages will be discussed.

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<sup>31</sup> Rist, *Popes and the Jews*, XIII.

## CHAPTER 1

### HOW CAN WE UNDERSTAND PAPAL RESPONSES TO THE ACCUSATIONS AGAINST JEWS PRIOR TO THE BLACK DEATH PERIOD?

In this chapter the papal reaction to the accusations and cases of violence against the Jews will be discussed. First it is important to look at 'papal policy' towards the Jews, which includes an examination of the protection bull *Sicut Judaeis*, also called the 'Constitutio pro Judaeis.' This bull was issued by six popes in the twelfth century and by ten in the thirteenth.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, it is an important source of papal attitudes towards the Jews. Especially in times of crisis, when the Jews were accused of crimes, this bull was re-issued.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, after discussing the bull itself the different accusations and the reaction of the popes will be examined.

The foundations of 'papal policy' towards the Jews were laid by Gregory the Great in the late sixth century. Gregory addressed the Jewish communities in many of his letters, in which he responded to some complaints about them. In several cases Gregory was able to prevent violence against the Jews.<sup>34</sup> The pope specified in these letters that only the Jews who agreed to live by the (church)-law would be guaranteed to live a safe life in the Christian society and the practise of Judaism.<sup>35</sup> This church-law was based on the classical Augustinian conception of the bearers of the Old Testament, which meant that the Jews had not only the right to live in a Christian society, but they were also necessary. Jews were needed in a Christian society, because they were the reminder of the suffering of Christ and their punishment to live in exile vindicates Christianity.<sup>36</sup>

However, by the twelfth century the Gregorian provision became the core of the bull *Sicut Judaeis*, which no pope during that century changed.<sup>37</sup> The bull begins with the statement that the Jews should not be killed. It continues with the Jewish right to practise Judaism in their own synagogues. After this a summary is given of what Christians are forbidden to do to the Jews: "We decree that no Christian shall use violence to force them to be baptized [...] no Christian shall presume to wound their persons, or kill them or rob them of their money, or change the good customs which they have thus far enjoyed in the place where they live."<sup>38</sup> If a Christian would commit one of these crimes, he would be punished for it by excommunication, unless: "he shall have made proper amends

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<sup>32</sup> Rist, *Popes and the Jews*, 12.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, X: the 'Constitutio pro Judaeis' was re-issued to refute popular charges against Jews, in particular after the accusations of ritual murder, host desecration and the blood libel.

<sup>34</sup> J. Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law. Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Los Angeles 1999) 74-75.

<sup>35</sup> Stow, 'The "1007 anonymous', 9.

<sup>36</sup> Cohen, *Living letters of the Law*, 29.

<sup>37</sup> Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 243; Stow, 'The "1007 anonymous', 9.

<sup>38</sup> Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 93.

for his presumption.”<sup>39</sup> The bull ended with a clause that only the Jews who agreed to live by the law were guaranteed of protection.

The first Pope to issue this bull was Calixtus II (1119-1124), possibly as a reaction to the crusading armies. His successor Eugene III (1145-1153) re-issued the bull after the second crusade, which had caused anti-Jewish upheavals.<sup>40</sup> The bull was re-issued again by the next popes, Alexander III, Clement III and Coelestine III. Significant is that the Jews asked for the re-issue of the bull when there was a new pope. Therefore, the initiative was taken by the Jews themselves, and not the popes. This resulted in the re-issuing of the bull at least five times during the period from 1199 to 1250.<sup>41</sup>

The twelfth century popes did not change the content of the bull, but the version that was issued on 15 September, 1199 by Innocent III did. The Pope added to the traditional bull: “We wish, however, to place under the protection of this decree only those who have not presumed to plot against the Christian faith.”<sup>42</sup> According to Cohen, this clause might have excluded a significant percentage of the European Jews.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, it is understandable that the Jews were not pleased with this addition to the bull, and in times of crisis they had to request a more specific and stronger form of protection.<sup>44</sup>

Times of crisis were not very uncommon for the Jews, but what can be seen as a starting point for anti-Judaism in the High Middle Ages? James Parkes, Josua Trachtenberg, Solo Baron, Cecil Roth and Leon Poliakov, all agreed that the First Crusade was a breaking point in the growing anti-Judaism, which is also discussed in the introduction.<sup>45</sup> However Chazan, Garvin Langmuir and Robert Ian Moore do not agree with this, instead they see a starting point for anti-Judaism already in the tenth or eleventh century.<sup>46</sup> Important primary sources about anti-Judaism during the millennial years, are the (apocalyptic) works of monk Ademar of Chabannes and the *Histories* of Rodulfus Glaber.

The work of Chabannes provide us with information about the increased anti-Judaism during the pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1030, which he joined. This pilgrimage is reported by Glaber, who stated that the Jews conspired with the caliph of Egypt, Al-Hākim, to destroy the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. This Church was seen as the most sacred structure of Christianity.<sup>47</sup> This conspiracy theory was followed by violence against the Jews, on which Glaber wrote: “Throughout the world Christians were unanimous in deciding that they would drive all the Jews from their lands and their

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<sup>39</sup> Ibidem, 95.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, 76.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>42</sup> Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 243.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>44</sup> Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 78.

<sup>45</sup> D. F. Callahan, ‘Ademar of Chabannas, Millennial Fears and the Development of Western Anti-Judaism’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 46:1 (1995) 19-35, particularly 19-20.

<sup>46</sup> Callahan, ‘Ademar of Chabannas’, 20.

<sup>47</sup> Callahan, ‘Ademar of Chabannas’, 23; Rist, *Popes and Jews*, 11.

cities.”<sup>48</sup> Parker and Poliakov noted that as a consequence of the conspiracy, forced conversions were attempted in Rouen, Orleans, Mains and other towns in the Rhineland.<sup>49</sup> The connection between Jews and Muslims, as the case of Al-Hākim showed, resulted in growing anti-Judaism in the mind of Christians.<sup>50</sup> Thus, the attitude of Christians towards the Jews did change before the crusades.

When in 1095 Pope Urban II proclaimed the First Crusade, he referred to the earlier anti-Jewish sentiments of the eleventh century.<sup>51</sup> In his speech Urban added the apocalyptic feeling when he stated that Antichrist is near, “For it is clear that it is neither against the Jews nor the Gentiles that Antichrist will wage war, but that, in accordance with the etymology of his name, he will attack Christians.”<sup>52</sup> By referring to the Antichrist, who has been associated with the Jews, Urban contributed to the anti-Jewish sentiment of that time.<sup>53</sup> The crusade that followed in 1096 did effect the Jews.<sup>54</sup> On their way to the Holy Land certain groups of crusaders killed thousands of Jews in the Rhineland and in Normandy.<sup>55</sup> In France the Jewish communities paid a certain amount of money in exchange for protection, which was successful. Less fortunate was the fate of German Jews, where whole communities in cities as Cologne, Worms and Mainz were massacred by the crusaders’ or by their own hands, as they tried to avoid forced baptism. There were some citizens and local bishops who tried to protect the Jews, sometimes with a forced conversion to Christianity, but this was not very effective.<sup>56</sup>

Chronicler Shelomo bar Shimshon wrote about the First Crusade and the papal protection, where he referred to the pope as “Satan, the pope of evil Rome.”<sup>57</sup> It is uncertain whether Shimshon was referring to Urban II or to Wilbert of Ravenna, the anti-Pope, however we can derive from his *Chronicle* that he had little good to say about the papal intervention.<sup>58</sup> Whoever Shimshon is referring to, fact is that Pope Urban II did not re-issue the *Sicut Judaeis*. According to Rist, when Urban called the first crusade he imagined that knightly classes would respond, instead of a chaotic mob. Because it was the first crusade, Urban had no experience with previous crusades and therefore could have failed to react to the mob violence against Jews.<sup>59</sup> For this reason, it could have been possible that Urban did not think about issuing the *Sicut Judaeis*. Therefore, as stated before, the first Pope to re-issue the *Sicut Judaeis* was probably Calixtus II.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>49</sup> Callahan, ‘Ademar of Chabannas’, 24; Rist, *Popes and Jews*, 67.

<sup>50</sup> Callahan, ‘Ademar of Chabannas’, 28.

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem, 35.

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem: translation from the primary source of Guibert of Nogent who wrote down the speech of Urban II.

<sup>53</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>54</sup> R. Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom 1000-1500* (New York 2006) 47.

<sup>55</sup> Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom*, 135; Abulafia, *Christian-Jewish Relations*, 137-138.

<sup>56</sup> Rusconi, ‘The church and the Jews’, 17.

<sup>57</sup> Rist, *Popes and Jews*, 42.

<sup>58</sup> Ibidem, 42-43.

<sup>59</sup> Ibidem, 43.

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem.

Especially by the twelfth and thirteenth century new negative stereotypes arose, which increased the negative perception of the Jews and demanded new papal responses.<sup>61</sup> Trachtenberg's *The Devil and the Jews* discusses many of the accusations against Jews. However, a careful examination of this work demonstrates that Trachtenberg did not have an eye for the agency of the Jews. The community is described purely as victims, who did not do anything about the situation they were in. However, as discussed before the Jews themselves initiated the re-issuing of the *Sicut Judaeis* whenever there was a new pope, which refutes Trachtenberg's theory. Besides, Trachtenberg assumed that Christianity universally and unhesitatingly accused Jews of all kinds of things. Therefore, we have to look at individual cases in order to really understand them. Any references to his publication in this thesis are made after a careful consideration of the information that is being provided by Trachtenberg.

By the twelfth century medieval chronicles and annals recorded for the first time accusations made against the Jews concerning the ritual murder of Christian children. According to this allegation the Jews kidnapped, tortured and murdered Christian children in a ceremonial fashion. In some versions of the myth this ceremony replicated a mockery of Christ's crucifixion.<sup>62</sup> Closely linked to the ritual murders is the charge of the Blood Libel, which accuses the Jews of consuming the blood of these murdered children. This ritual would occur especially during the Jewish ritual at Passover, because according to the myth the Jews needed to shed the Christian blood for their salvation.<sup>63</sup>

The first and perhaps most famous ritual murder charges was recorded in England when the boy William of Norwich went missing. After the discovery of his body in 1144, a number of Jews from the town were held responsible for the crime and were executed. The story of this murdered boy was written down in 1173 by the monk Thomas of Monmouth in *The Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich*, who never not in Norwich during the event.<sup>64</sup> It was confirmed by allegedly a monk named Theobald, who was supposedly a former Jew, leading Jews would each year select a child that would be killed around the Easter celebration.<sup>65</sup> There was no evidence to support this accusation, nevertheless William became a famous martyr. The Norwich case seems to have sparked many more cases, such as that of Hugh of Lincoln, that was reported in 1255. The body of this boy was found in a cesspool next to the house of a Jew, who was held responsible for the crime. They tortured him until he confessed the crime, and as a consequence hundred other Jews of the community were arrested

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<sup>61</sup> Chazan, *Medieval Stereotypes*, 74.

<sup>62</sup> Rist, *Popes and Jews*, 81-82; B.D. Schildgen, *Pagans, Tartars, Moslems, and Jews in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* (Florida 2001) 99; A. Bale, *Feeling persecuted: Christians, Jews and images of violence in the Middle Ages* (London 2010) 52.

<sup>63</sup> Rist, *Popes and Jews*, 82; W. Laqueur, *The changing face of antisemitism: from ancient times to the present day* (Oxford 2006) 55.

<sup>64</sup> Rist, *Popes and Jews*, 82: This account is not believed to be true.

<sup>65</sup> Laqueur, *The changing face*, 55; Rist, *Popes and Jews*, 82.

and killed.<sup>66</sup> There were more blood libel accusations reported against the Jews, mainly in medieval England, France and Germany. In almost all of these cases it did not end well for the Jewish community, as they were killed.<sup>67</sup>

The papacy responded to the charges of ritual murder and blood libels. Pope Innocent IV rejected the blood libel and ritual murder accusations, and as a response he re-issued the *Sicut Judaeis* in 1247. Innocent added a paragraph in which he denounced the charges against Jews and threatened with excommunication if anyone violated Jewish rights.<sup>68</sup> The immediate cause of re-issuing the *Sicut Judaeis* in 1247 were the charges of a ritual murder and blood libel in Valréas. The Jews were accused of murdering Christians and use their blood for the Passover ritual.<sup>69</sup> Innocent's predecessors Gregory IX and Honorius III also re-issued the *Sicut Judaeis*, which indicates that these accusations against the Jews were common. In the years that followed we see the same attitude of the popes, because in the second half of the thirteenth century the *Sicut Judaeis* was issued eight more times.<sup>70</sup>

The papal attitude towards the Jews nevertheless slowly changed during the second half of the thirteenth century, when the Augustinian idea of Jewish servitude was infiltrated by the idea of Jews as enemies.<sup>71</sup> The change is visible in the reaction to the story of host desecration, which became a powerful narrative in the thirteenth century. During the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 the doctrine of transubstantiation was officially adopted which meant that the bread, which was the host, and the wine were really the body and blood of Christ.<sup>72</sup> The host became therefore the most precious symbol of Christianity, believed to be Christ himself.<sup>73</sup> In various areas, such as Germany, France and Belgium, the story began to be told that the Jews stabbed the host and put a nail through it. However, at this point there was not an official charge yet.<sup>74</sup>

The popes reacted to these stories with several councils and laws to limit any chance of host desecration by Jews, which at this point was only a rumour. At the Council of Avignon in 1243, it was decided that all Jews older than the age of nine were not allowed near a consecrated host, and if they did they had to pay a fine.<sup>75</sup> In 1267 the Council took this a step further by demanding Jews to stay inside their houses when a host was nearby, with their doors and windows closed. A bell would be rung when a consecrated host was close, which served as a sign that the Jews had to go inside. It went so far that Jews actually became accused of torturing the host, because several years later the first

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<sup>66</sup> Laqueur, *The changing face*, 56.

<sup>67</sup> Laqueur, *The changing face*, 56.

<sup>68</sup> Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 260; Rist, *Popes and Jews*, 23.

<sup>69</sup> Rist, *Popes and Jews*, 81.

<sup>70</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>71</sup> Ibidem, 81, 221.

<sup>72</sup> Laqueur, *The changing face*, 57.

<sup>73</sup> M. Rubin, *Gentile Tales. The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (London 1999) 1.

<sup>74</sup> Laqueur, *The changing face*, 57; Rist, *Popes and Jews*, 82.

<sup>75</sup> Rist, *Popes and Jews*, 87; Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, 30.

accusation occurred at Paris in 1290. According to the story a Christian widow allegedly helped a Jew to torture a host.<sup>76</sup> It appeared that Pope Boniface VIII believed the accusation, because as a reaction he ordered the confiscation of the charged Jew his house. The petitioner even got the approval to build a chapel on the site where the host was supposedly tortured.<sup>77</sup> Thus, what was at first only a rumour, turned into an actual charge.

According to many scholars such as Chazan, Grayzel, and Cohen, in the thirteenth century there was a major shift in the attitudes towards Jews, which influenced ecclesiastical policy towards Jews.<sup>78</sup> In this chapter we have seen that the reaction of Pope Boniface on the host desecration was indeed very different than the reaction of his predecessor Innocent IV on the ritual murder charges. As discussed in the introduction, Stow does not agree with this conclusion and he argues that the 'policy' of the thirteenth century had been anticipated for hundreds of years.<sup>79</sup> However, the label on the thirteenth century as a period of segregation does not seem unfitting given the decisions made at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. One of the decisions was that Jews and Muslims should wear special clothes which made them easy to recognize. In some places Jews had to wear yellow badges or special hats, and in other places Jews were forbidden to appear in public during the Holy week or to work on Sundays and Church holidays.<sup>80</sup>

However, the majority of popes tried to reject the accusations by re-issuing the *Sicut Judaeis*.<sup>81</sup> According to Rist, popes could have pursued a more active 'policy' but it was not their main priority because they had to deal with other issues.<sup>82</sup> This is visible by the rejection of the accusations against Jews by the thirteenth century popes. They re-issued the *Sicut Judaeis*, however it seemed that the bull was not very successful because the Jews kept on being accused of crimes. Therefore, we can conclude that there was some kind of evolution in papal responses during the thirteenth century. The underlying policy went from protection to a somewhat more hostile attitude, which was visible in the 'policy' of Boniface VIII. In order to figure out if this evolution continued in the fourteenth century, we will now turn to the well-poisoning accusation and the responses of John XXII and Clement VI.

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<sup>76</sup> Rist, *Popes and Jews*, 88-89.

<sup>77</sup> Ibidem, 89.

<sup>78</sup> Stow, 'The "1007 anonymous', 21.

<sup>79</sup> Ibidem, 22.

<sup>80</sup> Laqueur, *The changing face*, 54; Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 34.

<sup>81</sup> Rist, *Popes and Jews*, 90.

<sup>82</sup> Ibidem.



## CHAPTER 2

### WHAT WAS THE WELL-POISONING ACCUSATION AGAINST JEWS AND WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES?

During the fourteenth century the suspicion of well-poisoning spread its way through Europe. The belief that minority groups such as Jews and lepers poisoned water supplies to cause diseases led to outbreaks of violence in different regions.<sup>83</sup> The most well-known case of this accusation occurred during the outbreak of the Black Death in the years 1348-1350 which killed 50-60% of Europe's population.<sup>84</sup> The consequence of these accusations were various attacks against the Jews, which eliminated whole Jewish communities in Europe. However, this was not the first time that a minority was accused of poisoning wells, because in 1321 the same accusation was made against Jews in France. In this chapter the well-poisoning accusations and the pogroms that followed will be closely examined.

There are many historians who have written about well-poisoning, but they do not agree on the origin of the accusation. Some historians state that there were cases of well-poisoning before 1321, which according to Tzafrir Barzilay is incorrect.<sup>85</sup> According to him, historians who think that there were early well-poisoning cases, were misled by the sources.<sup>86</sup> This was also the case with Trachtenberg, who was the first English historian to discuss the early well-poisoning accusations. In his book *The Devil and the Jews*, the first charge of well-poisoning would have taken place in 1161 in Bohemia, where eighty-six Jews were burned as a consequence of the accusation.<sup>87</sup>

According to the Bohemia story, an unknown disease killed many inhabitants of the region in 1161. Several Jewish doctors appeared in Prague to take care of the sick people. But when the disease disappeared, the Christians kept dying while the Jews stayed alive. Two Bohemian doctors, who returned after being abroad during the epidemic, cured the sick Christians. They claimed that the disease was caused by poison for which they accused the Jews. Therefore, the doctors requested King Vladislav II to forbid the Jews to work as doctors in Bohemia, on which the King agreed. Vladislav II ordered an investigation of Jewish physicians, and under torture they confessed to having poisoned food, medicine and the air. As a consequence of the confessions the King ordered to have many Jews killed.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> T. Barzilay, 'Early Accusations of Well Poisoning against Jews: Medieval Reality or Historiographical Fiction?' *Medieval Encounters* 22 (2016) 517 – 539, particularly 517.

<sup>84</sup> Benedictow, *The Black Death*, 381-383.

<sup>85</sup> Barzilay, 'Early Accusations of Well Poisoning', 517 - 539: This article is a summary of his thesis, which will be available in November 2018.

<sup>86</sup> Barzilay, 'Early Accusations of Well Poisoning', 517.

<sup>87</sup> Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 97.

<sup>88</sup> Barzilay, 'Early Accusations of Well Poisoning', 522: This is a translation on the poisoning plot of 1161 by Barzilay, his source was the German edition of Ják z Libocan, *Böhmische Chronica Wenceslai Hagecij*, 257r-v.

The earliest account that addressed this alleged case of Jewish poisoning was the *Chronicle* of Wenceslaus Hájek of Libocan, which dates from the sixteenth century. In this work Libocan described the well-poisoning accusations in Bohemia in 1161. However, Libocan does not explicitly mention well-poisoning so this *Chronicle* does not prove that the incident of 1161 was indeed the first well-poisoning case. The cause of the disease could also be another form of poisoning, for example that of beer caskets. Besides this, the source seems to contain similar medical information as the descriptions of the Black Death and other information that was common in the Late Middle Ages. Therefore, it does not represent the reality of the twelfth century.<sup>89</sup> Thus, the reliability of this source is questionable and because it does not explicitly mention well-poisoning we cannot assume that this was indeed the first well-poisoning case.

However, the *Chronicle* of Libocan has been referred to as a primary source that supposedly proves the existence of early well-poisoning by many scholars in the early historiography. For example, by German scholars from the eighteenth and nineteenth-century who wrote about early well-poisoning. The secondary sources on which the Bohemian story is based are not conclusive about the year and actual place of the event. Some sources say that the event occurred in 1161, others in 1163. In addition, some sources state that it happened in Prague, others in the County of Kladsko. As a consequence, some sources conclude that these were two separate events.<sup>90</sup> Barzilay states that there must have been multiple versions of the story because the dates are very close to each other and the sources indicate that somethings occurred in the area of Bohemia. The chronicle of Libocan contained many details, which makes it plausible that this work indeed served as the source for later versions.<sup>91</sup>

Nevertheless, in the early twentieth century these secondary sources were referred to by Hanns Bächtold-Stäubli, who wrote about German folklore, and by a monograph about the Jewish history of Bohemia.<sup>92</sup> Trachtenberg misread these two sources, which created an incorrect historiographical tradition. He referred to the work of Bächtold-Stäubli and the monograph as sources that proved the existence of early well-poisoning, while these sources were entirely based on secondary sources. Thus, the sources that supposedly prove early well-poisoning cases are entirely based on secondary literature, written many centuries later.

The second early case of well-poisoning allegedly occurred in Wroclaw in 1226. The history of this city was recorded by Nikolaus Pol in the seventeenth century and he mentioned the persecution of Jews in 1226. In 1219 there was a great fire in the city. The Jews were held responsible for this and

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<sup>89</sup> Ibidem, 523.

<sup>90</sup> Ibidem, 521.

<sup>91</sup> Ibidem, 521-522: Barzilay wrote in his reference that he based this upon the research of Zvi Avneri who reviewed the early modern historiography on this subject. He came to the conclusion that the work of Hájek of Libocan was the original source for this story.

<sup>92</sup> Ibidem, 519-520.

as a consequence they were expelled. Poll himself does not mention well-poisoning, but Bächtold-Stäubli stated that poison might be one of the reasons for the exclusion of Jews in Wrocław. He put a question mark next to this assumption, which was not taken over by Trachtenberg.<sup>93</sup> Many historians followed his lead, for example Salo Baron cited Trachtenberg without checking the primary sources which supposedly proved the early poisoning. It created a historiographical tradition in which scholars placed the well-poisoning accusations against the Jews already in the twelfth century.<sup>94</sup> Thus, there is no conclusive evidence of early well-poisoning in Wrocław in 1226 or in Bohemia in 1161. The same counts for similar cases, such as Worms (1096), Vaud (1308) and Franconia (1319).<sup>95</sup>

There is however more evidence of the well-poisoning accusation made in 1321, which is addressed in several eye-witness chronicles. The Dominican inquisitor at Toulouse, Bernard Gui, wrote about lepers who supposedly poisoned fountains, wells and rivers with powder in order to infect healthy people with leprosy.<sup>96</sup> The King of France, Philip V, issued an edict on 21 June, 1321, stating that the lepers had committed *lèse-majesté*, which meant treason against the state. Therefore, the property of lepers was confiscated, they were imprisoned and all those who confessed to the crime were burnt. If lepers refused to confess, they were tortured on the order of the King.<sup>97</sup> According to the chronicle of an anonymous monk, many lepers in Aquitaine confessed to the well-poisoning charge and admitted that the reason for the poisoning was to kill all the Christians of France and Germany.<sup>98</sup> As punishment they were arrested and burned, which was again ordered by King Philip.

The *Chronicle* of Jean de Saint-Victor, probably written around 1326, and the *Chronicle* of Nangis, written in the period 1317-1340, contain more details about this plot and the involvement of Jews.<sup>99</sup> According to these sources it was rumoured that lepers were bribed by Jews. The rumour told the story of a rich Jew who gave a leper the poison with some money, promising more if he would corrupt the other lepers.<sup>100</sup> The involvement of Jews in the poisoning accusation was, according to the written sources, believed by a great majority of the population and in some cities, pogroms and mass

<sup>93</sup> Barzilay, 'Early Accusations of Well Poisoning', 521; H. Bächtold-Stäubli, *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* vol. 4 (Berlin 1927-1942) 825; N. Pol, *Jahrbücher der Stadt Breslau* (Breslau 1813) 50-51; Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 238.

<sup>94</sup> Barzilay, 'Early Accusations of Well Poisoning', 521.

<sup>95</sup> Ibidem, 524-530.

<sup>96</sup> C. Grinzberg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath* (London 1990) 33; M. Barber, 'Lepers, Jews and Moslems: The plot to overthrow Christendom in 1321', *History* 66 (1981) 1-17, particularly 1.

<sup>97</sup> Grinzberg, *Ecstasies*, 34.

<sup>98</sup> Barber, 'Lepers, Jews and Moslems', 1: His source was the *Cronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis de 1113 à 1300 avec les Continuations de cette chronique de 1300 à 1368*. Barber states that this chronicle of Guillaume de Nangis is the most detailed source, which was continued by the anonymous monk.

<sup>99</sup> Barber, 'Lepers, Jews and Moslems', 1-2: The Chronicle of Guillaume de Nangis was written in the period 1317 to 1340, the continuator of the Chronicle is believed to be an eyewitness of some of the events of leper conspiracy. Nothing further is known about the author, but it is assumed that he was from Paris.

<sup>100</sup> D. Nirenberg, *Communities of violence. Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton 1996) 64; Barber, 'Lepers, Jews and Moslems', 2.

murders occurred.<sup>101</sup> The *Chronicle* of Nangis reported that 160 Jews were burnt in a large pit near Tours, and women who were widowed by the executions would have thrown their sons into the fires to prevent them from being baptised.<sup>102</sup> This event occurred several days before the protection edict issued by King Philip, who did not address the Jews in this document. Some of the sources state that the reason for this absence was because of the direct financial benefit the King had, if the Jews were killed. According to the *Chronicle* of Saint-Victor some of the richest Jews were kept alive until their incomes were transferred into the royal treasury. It is said that the King received 150.000 *livres* from these Jews.<sup>103</sup>

The *Chronicle* of Nangis reported another dramatic story of the Jews after the 1321 accusations. In Vitry, a town near Paris, the forty Jews that were kept in the royal prison decided to commit suicide. The oldest member of the community and a younger assistant were chosen to cut all of their throats. After they completed their task, the two Jews were the only ones alive. The older men wished to die first, so his younger assistant killed him. Instead of killing himself too, the assistant tried to escape the prison tower. First, he stole all the gold and silver of the victims and then he made a rope off their clothes in order to climb out the tower. Due to the weight of the stolen goods he was too heavy, fell down and broke his legs. Therefore, he was easily recaptured and killed.<sup>104</sup>

By 1346 another rumour started to spread about a strange disease that had arrived in China and was spreading its way through Asia. According to the story the mortality rates were so high that it depopulated India.<sup>105</sup> The disease was most likely to have originated from Central Asia and because of the trading routes with the Crimean seaport of Kaffa on the Black Sea, contact was made with Italian merchants. By the end of 1347 and January 1348, the disease was carried by trading ships from this region back to the shores of Sicily and southern France. From 1348 onwards, the disease spread further through the European continent. First Italy, France, Spain, Switzerland and the Balkans were hit and by 1349 the population of Germany, the Low Countries, eastern Europe and Scandinavia were infected.<sup>106</sup>

Different views exist regarding the mortality rates of the disease, but generally scholars in the twentieth century assumed that approximately fifty percent of the population of Europe died. In the last four decades new studies and sources have made it possible to make a more precise estimation of the mortality rates in different regions of the continent. According to the study of Ole Benedictow, the

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<sup>101</sup> Ginzberg, *Ecstasies*, 50.

<sup>102</sup> Barber, 'Lepers, Jews and Moslems', 5; Barber refers to the chronicle of Nangis, page 35; Ginzberg, *Ecstasies*, 44; R.S. Gottfried, *The Black Death. Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe* (New York 1983) 207: Gottfried quotes the primary source of Jean de Venette.

<sup>103</sup> Barber, 'Lepers, Jews and Moslems', 5; Ginzberg, *Ecstasies*, 44.

<sup>104</sup> Barber, 'Lepers, Jews and Moslems', 5.

<sup>105</sup> B.W. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror. The Calamitous 14<sup>th</sup> Century* (New York 1978) 93.

<sup>106</sup> Albert, *The Great Mortality*, VII.

mortality rate in most countries was around sixty percent. With a population of 80 million during the fourteenth century this would indicate that around the 50 million people died.<sup>107</sup> A plague this devastating had an immense impact on medieval society. Some historians even consider it as the 'defining event' of the Late Middle Ages or the 'turning point in history', which is a much-debated topic.<sup>108</sup> Without going into detail about these debates, the Black Death had many political, economic and social consequences, especially for Jews.

Many throughout Europe understood the plague as a punishment from God. But some were still looking for a human scapegoat to blame for the plague and, not for the first time, pointed their fingers at the Jews. In April and May, 1348, the rumour arose in the Northern regions of Spain and Southern France that the Jews were involved in an international conspiracy against the Christians. According to the story, the mortality of the plague was caused by Jews who poisoned the wells and other water supplies of Christians.<sup>109</sup> Cohn Jr. discussed the motivations behind these accusations which resulted in the persecution of the Jews. In contrast to many historians, he argued that the persecution of Jews was not financially, but religiously motivated. He found proof for his theory in the 'Strasbourg' letters, which do not point to any economic benefit for the persecutors.<sup>110</sup> Instead the timing of some of the pogroms, on Sundays and religious feastdays, might indicate a religious motive. According to Alfred Haverkamp, religious preaching followed these attacks, which suggest that the persecutors had a religious motive.<sup>111</sup> There are several chronicles and confession reports dating from the mid-fourteenth century that describe this scapegoating of Jews which most of the time resulted in persecutions.

The *Chronicle* of Alphonso of Cordova describes the situation of 1348 in the city of Montpellier. According to Alphonso this long-lasting plague was indeed a plot against Christianity. He does not explicitly mention that the Jews were responsible for the plague, but instead he warns the people not to drink water out of wells because they could be poisoned. This might be a reference to the early well-poisoning accusations of 1321 against the Jews.<sup>112</sup> The Franciscan friar Herman Gigas described in his *Chronicle* that many people in France believed that well-poisoning was the cause for the plague and that the Jews were responsible for it. As a consequence, many Jews were arrested, questioned and tortured and because of this, they confessed to the crime.<sup>113</sup> On 13 April, 1348, the first pogrom

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<sup>107</sup> Benedictow, *The Black Death*, 381-383.

<sup>108</sup> Albert, *The Great Mortality*, 2; Benedictow, *The Black Death*, 387-394; D. Herlihy, *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West* (Cambridge 1997) 10.

<sup>109</sup> Herlihy, *The Black Death*, 65; J.R. Marcus and M. Saperstein, *The Jew in the Medieval World: A source book 315-1791* (Cincinnati 1991) 153.

<sup>110</sup> Cohn, 'Burning of Jews', 25-26.

<sup>111</sup> Ibidem, 25.

<sup>112</sup> S.L. Thrupp, *Change in Medieval Society* (New York 1964) 216.

<sup>113</sup> Horrox, *The Black Death*, 207: Horrox states that the *Chronicle* of Herman Gigas ends in 1349.

occurred in Toulon and later that month several other French cities followed. This continued in May, when the pogroms also struck Spanish cities as Barcelona and Gerona. In the months after, pogroms occurred in various French and Spanish cities.<sup>114</sup>

The rumour that Jews poisoned wells spread to the county of Savoy, in the Holy Roman Empire. On the 10 August, 1348, the order was given to investigate Jewish involvement in well-poisoning.<sup>115</sup> Various of these interrogation reports survive, which contain much information about the questioning and trials against the Jews of this region. The first reports were from a castle in Chillon where the Jews of Villeneuve were imprisoned. On September 1348, all these Jews were put to question, which means effectively that they were tortured.<sup>116</sup> The means of torture used in these cases consisted of tying the Jews to a horizontal wheel and beating them, which sometimes resulted in internal bleeding and death.<sup>117</sup> The ten Jews of Savoy all confessed to the crime of well-poisoning, some even without being tortured, probably for fear of it. The reports state that all these Jews were approached by Rabbi Jacob, who gave them little bags of poison to put in wells and fountains. After the confession these Jews were put on trial and sentenced to be burned.<sup>118</sup> These accounts from the castle of Chillon were probably the first recorded cases of Jews being officially executed for spreading the Black Death.<sup>119</sup> This could indicate a difference between the executions in Savoy, and the 'popular' pogroms in France and Spain, where there were no formal trials before the executions.

There are also five confession reports from Châtel, a town in present-day Switzerland. The first report is of a Jew named Agiment, who was captured at Châtel on 10 October, 1348. After being tortured multiple times he confessed to having poisoned several wells in Venice and the public fountain in Toulouse. According to the report of Agiment, he received this assignment from the Rabbi at Chambery named Rubi Peyret.<sup>120</sup> Shortly after this confession the Jew Jocentus, who lived in Châtel, was arrested and put to questioning as well. He also confessed that Rabbi Peyret gave him bags of poison and the assignment to put their contents in the wells of Christians.<sup>121</sup> Many of the reports from Châtel name Rabbi Peyret as the person who gave them the assignment and who provided them with the bags of poison.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> A. Haverkamp, *Zur Geschichte der Juden im Deutschland des späten mittelalters und der frühen neuzeit* (Stuttgart 1981) 35-38: an overview of the chronology of the German Pogroms; F. Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde* (Göttingen 1987) 160, 166: At page 160 Graus gives an overview of the different pogroms in France.

<sup>115</sup> Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde*, 160.

<sup>116</sup> Horrox, *The Black Death*, 217.

<sup>117</sup> Albert, *The Great Mortality*, 146.

<sup>118</sup> Albert, *The Great Mortality*, 146; Horrox, *The Black Death*, 210-215.

<sup>119</sup> Albert, *The Great Mortality*, 145-146.

<sup>120</sup> Horrox, *The Black Death*, 216-217.

<sup>121</sup> Ibidem, 218-219.

<sup>122</sup> Ibidem, 216-219.

The accusations against the Jews spread through the continent, and even though the actual poison was never found many people believed that the Jews were responsible for the Black Death.<sup>123</sup> Why would these accusations be believed? First of all, after the rumours spread to Savoy, the Jews were tortured after which they confessed to the crime. These confession reports were widely spread to the city councils that asked for advice, where they served as 'evidence' of an international conspiracy of the Jews against the Christians.<sup>124</sup> Secondly, as stated in several chronicles, there is the tendency to look for a scapegoat when society is faced with such uncertainty. Others believed the plague was caused by divine punishment, and they looked for religious reasons such as sin, corruption of the clergy, but they also pointed at the Jews. Thus, if the accusations against Jews were religiously motivated, as Cohn also concluded, what was the pope doing all this time? In order to find an answer to that question, the next chapter will analyse the reaction of Pope Clement VI to the persecutions of the Jews.

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<sup>123</sup> Albert, *The Great Mortality*, 148.

<sup>124</sup> Horrox, *The Black Death*, 211.

## CHAPTER 3

### HOW DID POPE CLEMENT VI RESPOND TO THE WELL-POISONING ACCUSATION AGAINST THE JEWS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES?

Many scholars have written full of praise about Pope Clement VI, who was the fourth Avignon pope from 1342 to his death in 1352. Historians called him the forerunner of the Renaissance popes and underlined his 'humanism'. According to them, Clement VI was the first modern Pope.<sup>125</sup> Diana Wood nevertheless sees Clement VI as a controversial figure. His contemporaries criticized him as the symbol of Avignon popes, who were considered decadent and not afraid of nepotism.<sup>126</sup> On the other hand, modern historians such as Joëlle Rollo-Koster and Heater Para praised Clement for his benevolence in 1348 after the outbreak of the Black Death.<sup>127</sup> This chapter is interested in the role of Clement in fourteenth century Europe, and especially his attitude and actions towards the Jewish population.

As seen in the previous chapter, Jews were accused of poisoning wells in 1321. Several years later, when the Black Death arrived in Europe, Jews were again accused of spreading the disease by poisoning wells. In France these accusations were followed by pogroms in 1348. Shortly after these French pogroms, Clement issued several bulls which addressed the protection of Jews. In order to find out how Pope Clement VI reacted to the well-poisoning accusations and their consequences, this chapter will analyse these papal bulls and place them in their context. First, the pontificate of Clement VI will be briefly explained. Secondly, the papal bulls of Clement VI seeking to protect Jews will be analysed.

The pontificate of Clement VI was challenging and he had to deal with various problems. One of the main goals of Clement and his predecessors was to protect Christian unity and papal power in Europe. However, Europe was changing during the fourteenth century and became a fragmented area with national churches, who were not always loyal to the papacy, and powerful nation states.<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, during Clement's papacy one of greatest catastrophic plagues hit the European continent, which killed approximately 50 million people.<sup>129</sup> The plague effected the stability of the papacy, particularly because the clergy suffered a high mortality rate of roughly sixty percent. Especially in closed-off places such as monasteries and cathedrals the risk of infection was very high, which occurred for example in the Franciscan monasteries of Carcassonne and Marseille.<sup>130</sup> Besides,

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<sup>125</sup> D. Wood, *Clement VI. The Pontificate and Ideas of an Avignon Pope* (Cambridge 1989) 1.

<sup>126</sup> J. Rollo-Koster, *Avignon and its Papacy, 1309-1417* (London 2015) 70; Wood, *Clement VI*, XI.

<sup>127</sup> Rollo-Koster, *Avignon and its Papacy*, 213; P. Heather, "Plague, Papacy and Power: The effects on the Black Plague on the Avignon Papacy", *Saber and Scroll* 5:1 (2016) 12.

<sup>128</sup> Wood, *Clement VI*, 3.

<sup>129</sup> Benedictow, *The Black Death*, 381-383.

<sup>130</sup> Tuchman, *A distant Mirror*, 95.



clerics prayed over the infected people, which made it easy for the fleas to transfer to the cleric.<sup>131</sup> This high mortality rate resulted in a shortage of clerical personnel and especially during this critical time it risked the stability of the papacy.

During the thirteenth century the papacy became a strong and effective institution, with a growing bureaucracy and a greater role for the pope in diplomacy between European leaders. This was visible in the pontificate of powerful Popes such as Innocent III and IV. Even though European monarchies were growing in power and status, the papacy maintained a strong position. The pope had an increasingly important authority over all Christians following the reforms of the fourth Lateran council (1215).<sup>132</sup> However, during the fourteenth century papal authority changed and the rising nation-states provided a greater counter-balance to the power of the pope. The war between France and England, that started in 1294, complicated the papal authority even more. Especially the Pope at that time, Boniface VIII, had a difficult job and became involved in a conflict with the French king Philip IV over taxes.<sup>133</sup>

After the death of Pope Boniface, the cardinals chose a French pope in order to reduce the tension between the French crown and the papacy, which shows that papal elections were responding to the unstable political situation in the rest of Europe. In the year 1305 Pope Clement V, indeed a Frenchman, was chosen to be the next pope. He never went to Rome but instead arrived in Avignon, which at this time was already acquired by the papacy in 1274. This territory was a fief of the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily and did not belong to the French territories but was influenced by it.<sup>134</sup> Eventually, in 1309 Avignon became the permanent residence for the papacy until the beginning of the fifteenth century. The pontificate of Clement V showed that popes in Avignon were better at raising funds than their predecessors. As a consequence, the treasury of the papacy increased significantly.<sup>135</sup> The new papal city of Avignon was mainly shaped by Clement's successor Pope John XXII and during his pontificate the city grew five times from it was in 1309.<sup>136</sup>

After the death of Pope Benedict XII, Pierre Roger was unanimously chosen by the seventeen cardinals on the seventh of May, 1342. With their choice of Roger, the conclave selected an intelligent diplomat and statesman with very important connections. For example, the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire Charles IV was one of his friends, as were some important players at the French court.<sup>137</sup> The new Pope chose the name Clement VI because he wanted to emphasize what were the best

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<sup>131</sup> Heather, 'Plague, Papacy and Power', 14.

<sup>132</sup> Ibidem, 7.

<sup>133</sup> Ibidem, 8.

<sup>134</sup> M. Patterson, 'Papal Echoes in Avignon,' *National Catholic Reporter* 40:24 (2004) 8.

<sup>135</sup> E. Mullins, *The Popes of Avignon: A century in Exile* (New York 2008) 37.

<sup>136</sup> Mullins, *The Popes of Avignon*, 47.

<sup>137</sup> Rollo-Koster, *Avignon and its Papacy*, 71.

qualities of a pope: kindness and leniency.<sup>138</sup> He distinguished himself from the other Avignon popes by constructing the identity of the Avignon's papacy, instead of referring to it as an 'exile' as his predecessors did. He finished his papal palace and used it for ritual functions that were the same as in Rome.<sup>139</sup>

As already mentioned before, Clement VI became pope in a difficult time. In order to deal with the situation, he needed to have a solid group of Cardinals to advise him. This was for a great extent created through nepotism, for which Clement was considerably criticised. The Pope himself appointed the Cardinals such that the college consisted of twenty-five Cardinals, all promoted by Clement. The French Royal house also played a part in these appointments.<sup>140</sup> Twenty-one of them were French and ten or eleven were relatives of the Pope.<sup>141</sup> Especially these relatives were selected by Clement because he could count on their support in his decisions. Clement liked to remind his Cardinals on what they had accomplished because of him, and that he relied on his support in turn.<sup>142</sup> Developing the right relationship with the cardinals was a difficult task for Clement. According to Wood, Clement did not find the right balance in this relationship which caused problems during the crisis of the mid-fourteenth century.<sup>143</sup>

As Clement was struggling with the relationships he had with different players in the Church hierarchy, the plague arrived in the papal city of Avignon in January 1348. An important witness to the plague in Avignon was Clement's surgeon, Gui de Chauliac. He suggested that Clement should withdraw into his papal chambers and, in order to keep the plague away, sit in between fires.<sup>144</sup> According to the chronicler Mathias von Neuenburg, Clement spent the entire epidemic inside his chambers, being protected by large flames.<sup>145</sup> Chauliac's treatment was a success and prevented the infection of the Pope, however Neuenburg wrote that his withdrawal from the people did not make him very popular.<sup>146</sup>

In order to reduce the mortality rates of the epidemic, the origin needed to be found. Clement, as an educated Pope interested in science, ordered his physician and surgeon Gui de Chauliac to do research on the infected corpses.<sup>147</sup> Chauliac was convinced that the disease was spreading through the air. The majority of the people understood that the plague was caused as a punishment from God, it did not really matter in which form, for the corrupted world they lived in. This belief made the

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<sup>138</sup> Ibidem, 69.

<sup>139</sup> Ibidem, 72.

<sup>140</sup> Wood, *Clement VI*, 105.

<sup>141</sup> Ibidem, 111.

<sup>142</sup> Ibidem, 112.

<sup>143</sup> Ibidem, 114.

<sup>144</sup> Benedictow, *The Black Death*, 97; Heather, 'Plague, Papacy and Power', 12; Tuchman, *A distant Mirror*, 105.

<sup>145</sup> Rollo-Koster, *Avignon and its Papacy*, 83-83.

<sup>146</sup> Albert, *The Great Mortality*, 158.

<sup>147</sup> Tuchman, *A distant Mirror*, 105.

luxurious and extravagant papal court in Avignon controversial.<sup>148</sup> Besides that, people were still looking for a human scapegoat to blame for the plague and, not for the first time, pointed their fingers at the Jews.

However, not everyone believed the rumours of Jewish involvement in well-poisoning. The German chronicler Konrad of Megenberg described that the common people had two main causes for the outbreak of the plague, which he both criticised. He objected to the explanation that the black death was God's punishment because the disease did not only kill sinners, it stroke everyone.<sup>149</sup> He also disagreed with the accusation against the Jews, because he knew many Jews who were also killed by the plague. He stated that it would have been stupid to have brought this on themselves as well.<sup>150</sup> Besides this, he noted that the disease strikes places where no Jews are living anymore, because they were already driven out prior to the arrival of the plague.<sup>151</sup> The physician Chauliac agreed with Megenberg and stated that the accusations against the Jews were false and made out of ignorance of science. He wrote, "they killed Jews, believing them to have poisoned the world [...]. And if they found anyone carrying medicinal powders or ointments they would force him to swallow them, to prove that they were not poisonous potions."<sup>152</sup>

Even though not everyone believed that the Jews had caused the outbreak of the Black Death, many Jews were punished for it. As discussed in the previous chapter, during 1348 several Jewish communities in France and Spain were massacred. A few months after the first pogroms, Clement issued several bulls. Different historians note that Clement did everything he could in order to protect the Jews.<sup>153</sup> Here I will examine what precisely his actions were.

On the fifth of July 1348, Pope Clement VI re-issued the bull *Sicut Judaeis* as a reaction to the accusations against the Jews. Clement did not change the content of the bull, which is discussed in chapter one, however it was still relevant in the fourteenth century.<sup>154</sup> For instance, the bull forbids Christians to force baptism on Jews because the true faith should be entered freely, without external pressure.<sup>155</sup> This was relevant again in the fourteenth century because there were many conversions of Jews during the Black Death persecutions, which seemed to protect them from getting murdered. The bull did not only ensure Jewish religious rights, it also forbade Christians to use violence against Jews or harm them in any way, which was happening already in France and Spain. Assumingly, these

<sup>148</sup> Heather, 'Plague, Papacy and Power', 12.

<sup>149</sup> Thrupp, *Change in Medieval Society*, 212.

<sup>150</sup> Ibidem, 213.

<sup>151</sup> Albert, *The Great Mortality*, 158.

<sup>152</sup> Thrupp, *Change in Medieval Society*, 214.

<sup>153</sup> Heather, 'Plague, Papacy and Power', 13; L. Pastor, F.I. Antrobus (ed), *The history of the Popes. From the close of the Middle Ages. Vol. 1* (St. Louis 1923) 89; Rollo-Koster, *Avignon and its Papacy*, 83.

<sup>154</sup> Albert, *The Great Mortality*, 158; Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 9-12; Heather, 'Plague, Papacy and Power', 13; Horrox, *The Black Death* 221.

<sup>155</sup> Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 13, 93.

were the reasons for Clement to re-issue the bull and to reaffirm Jewish rights and religious freedom.<sup>156</sup> However, Clement did not change the final sentence of the bull, “We wish, however, to place under the protection of this degree only those (Jews) who have not presumed to plot against the Christian Faith.”<sup>157</sup> Therefore, this bull left room for a subjective interpretation of what ‘plotting against the Christian faith’ might be, especially given the fact that the Jews were charged of plotting against the Christians by poisoning wells.

A few months later, on September 26, Clement VI issued a mandate directed to the clergy in which he stated that it had come to his attention that some people mistakenly blamed the Jews for the outbreak of the plague: “However, recently a public outcry (or more accurately, a nasty rumour) came to our attention that some Christians mistakenly blame the plague [...] on poisons from the Jews deceived by the devil.”<sup>158</sup> The Christians who believed that the Jews had caused this were seduced by the Devil, stated Clement.<sup>159</sup> The Pope also reminded Christians that they cannot pretend to be their own authority and break the rules by violating, harming or killing the Jews. The bull shows that Clement was aware of the fact that Jews were killed by Christians, “who in their impious temerity killed some of these Jews.”<sup>160</sup> He instructed the clergy to take action against these practises and protect the Jews, “in your churches for the solemnities of the Mass, while people are gathered for the divine services – warn those who are subject to you, clergy and laity, on pain of excommunication.”<sup>161</sup> People could bring a lawsuit against Jews, but only if they followed the law and were in the presence of a competent judge.<sup>162</sup>

On the first of October 1348, Clement VI reissued the order again with some additional specific comments on the Black Death accusations. It appears that the concluding sentence of the *Sicut Judaeis* is being rectified by the statement of Clement that the Jews could not be the cause of the plague. Therefore, the Jews were not plotting against Christianity: “it cannot be true that the Jews, by such a heinous crime, are the cause of the occasion of the plague, because throughout many parts of the world the same plague, has afflicted and afflicts the Jews themselves and many other races who have

<sup>156</sup> E. A. Synan, *The popes and the Jews in the Middle Ages* (New York 1965) 132-133.

<sup>157</sup> Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 95; Simonsohn, *The Apostolic see*, 396: The re-issue of the *Sicut Judaeis* of Clement VI seems to have the same concluding text as the bull Innocent III issued in 1199.

<sup>158</sup> Messianicjewishhistory - 26 September 1348 Pope Clement VI Exonerates Jews from Causing the Black Death, <https://messianicjewishhistory.wordpress.com/2015/09/26/26-september-1348-pope-clement-vi-exonerates-jews-from-causing-the-black-death-otdimjh/> (retrieved 26-02-2018) French version transl. by Kati Ihnat.

<sup>159</sup> Tuchman, *A distant Mirror*, 113.

<sup>160</sup> Messianicjewishhistory - 26 September 1348 Pope Clement VI Exonerates Jews from Causing the Black Death, <https://messianicjewishhistory.wordpress.com/2015/09/26/26-september-1348-pope-clement-vi-exonerates-jews-from-causing-the-black-death-otdimjh/> (retrieved 26-02-2018) French version transl. by Kati Ihnat.

<sup>161</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>162</sup> Simonsohn, *The Apostolic see*, 397.

never lived alongside them.’’<sup>163</sup> According to Clement the plague was the result of an angry God that was punishing the Christians for their sins.<sup>164</sup> The reason that some Christians were persecuting the Jews was for their own profit, because they owed the Jews a considerable amount of money and not because the Jews were the cause of the plague.<sup>165</sup> The bull concluded with the sentence that if the Christians have ground for complaint against the Jews, they should proceed against them in a proper judicial form with competent judges.<sup>166</sup> The conclusion does not contain the words ‘plotting against Christianity’ anymore, however the final sentence is still multi-interpretable.

With these three papal bulls Clement tried to protect the Jews by pointing out the Jewish rights, directing the clergy to take action and convince Christians that the accusations against Jews are not accurate. The effects of these papal bulls will be discussed in the next chapter. The fact that Clement issued these bulls which addressed the Jews is, as we have seen, not something every pope did. If we compare the response of Clement VI with that of John XXII, who had to deal with a similar accusation, this becomes clear. After the Jews were charged with well-poisoning in 1321, there was no papal bull issued against this or any other evidence of John XXII trying to protect the Jews. Instead he sent special preachers to papal cities in the South of France where many Jews lived, and he hoped for mass conversions. The mission failed because the Jews refused forced baptism, and as a consequence they were exiled and synagogues were destroyed.<sup>167</sup> Some of the synagogues were rebuilt as chapels and, according to Edward Synan, there is evidence that John XXII himself funded these new churches.<sup>168</sup>

Thus, we can conclude that two well-poisoning accusations, the one of 1321 and of 1348-1350, received an almost opposite reaction from the involved popes. Even though the circumstances were dissimilar, it is notable that Clement VI issued three papal bulls trying to stop the violence against the Jews and John XXII did not. In contrast John XXII tried to convert the Jews by sending priests. The attitude of Clement VI might have been one of tolerance towards the Jews, however he was not able to protect them, because there were many massacres that killed whole Jewish communities, especially in the German-speaking areas. In order to find out what happened in this area, we will now turn to an in-depth analysis of the Rhineland, and especially of Cologne.

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<sup>163</sup> Albert, *The Great Mortality* 159; Horrox, *The Black Death*, 222.

<sup>164</sup> Albert, *The Great Mortality* 159; Horrox, *The Black Death*, 221.

<sup>165</sup> Albert, *The Great Mortality*, 159.

<sup>166</sup> Horrox, *The Black Death*, 222.

<sup>167</sup> Synan, *The popes and the Jews*, 130.

<sup>168</sup> Ibidem, 131.

## CHAPTER 4

### WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE WELL-POISONING ACCUSATION FOR JEWS IN THE GERMAN-SPEAKING AREA?

In the previous chapter we have seen that Pope Clement VI reacted to the French pogroms by issuing three papal bulls in 1348. Nevertheless, it seems that these bulls did not have an effect on the German-speaking areas. In order to understand why the papal bulls had no effect, we need to look at this area in more detail. The pogroms in the German-speaking area are very significant, because in many towns they occurred before the plague arrived, thus being preventative in nature.<sup>169</sup> Secondly, the phenomenon of the flagellant movement was most intensive in the areas of present-day Germany. Especially the region of the Rhineland is significant, because many Jewish communities were living there and they were almost entirely destroyed.<sup>170</sup> Based on these unusual features, the German pogroms of 1348-1349 form the central theme in this chapter. First, it will be explained why the German pogroms were exceptional and the second half of this chapter will consist an in-depth analysis of the pogrom of Cologne.

According to Frantisek Graus the fact that the pogroms occurred in German-speaking areas even before the plague arrived, indicates that the pogroms were linked to the trials in Savoy. Due to the spread of the confession reports from Savoy to other regions, Jewish pogroms occurred even before the outbreak of the Black Death. The connection between the confession reports of Savoy and the pogroms can be traced back to the *Chronicle* of Heinrich Truchess von Diessenhoven, who described several persecutions of Jews in Germany. According to his account, the German persecution of Jews began in November in Solothurn because of the rumour that Jews had poisoned wells and rivers. He continues, "[...] as was afterwards confirmed by their [Jewish] own confessions [...]".<sup>171</sup> This could be a reference to the Savoy reports of September and October that same year. The account continues with a summary of the many pogroms in Germany, which in one year led to the burning of all the Jews between Cologne and Austria.<sup>172</sup> Megenberg also described the phenomenon of preventative persecution in his *Chronicle 'Concerning the Mortality in Germany'*.<sup>173</sup>

<sup>169</sup> Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde*, 166; Haverkamp, *Geschichte der Juden im Deutschland*, 40-41.

<sup>170</sup> Cohn, 'Burning of Jews', 3; J.R. Müller, 'Erez Gezrah – Land of Persecution: Pogroms against the Jews in the Regnum Teutonicum from c. 1280 to 1350' in: C. Cluse eds., *The Jews of Europe in the Middle Ages (Tenth to Fifteenth centuries): Proceedings of the International Symposium held at Speyer, 20-25 October 2002* (Turnhout 2002) 245 – 261, particularly 256.

<sup>171</sup> Horrox, *The Black Death*, 208.

<sup>172</sup> Ibidem, 210.

<sup>173</sup> Albert, *The Great Mortality*, 14.

Even though both chroniclers addressed the preventative character of the German pogroms, their approach was quite different. Megenberg did not believe that the Jews were responsible for the Black Death, and he gave several arguments to support this statement. He debated both sides of the well-poisoning accusation and after balancing these arguments, he came to the following conclusion: "[...] it does not seem to me that the pitiful Jewish race is the cause of this general mortality which had spread throughout almost the whole world."<sup>174</sup> Therefore, John Albert sees him as one of the most rational authors to comment on the pogroms.<sup>175</sup> On the contrary, von Diessenhoven was convinced that the Jews were plotting against Christianity, and he stated, "And thus no doubt remained of their [the Jews] deceitfulness which had now been revealed. And blessed be God who confounded the ungodly who were plotting the extinction of his church [...]"<sup>176</sup> The approach of von Diessenhoven is the opposite of Megenberg, since he believed that the plague was part of a plot carried out by the Jews against Christianity.

However, Swiss historian Iris Ritzman has another view on the German pogroms. She is not convinced that there existed a connection between the fear for the arriving plague and the persecution of the Jews. Instead, Ritzman argues that the pogroms should be understood as an extension of violence that started decades earlier.<sup>177</sup> She stated that the German pogroms were well-planned actions by the city councils which had nothing to do with the fear of the approaching plague.<sup>178</sup>

Additionally, there are more reasons which make the situation in Germany between 1348 and 1350 of special interest. One of these is, according to Philip Ziegler, the pilgrimages of the flagellants in Germany. This movement already existed during the tenth century in several regions, but due to the Black Death in the fourteenth century, the movement grew significantly and it was most intensive in the Rhineland.<sup>179</sup> These individuals moved from town to town in groups of 50 and 300 people, men in the front and the woman behind.<sup>180</sup> Most of the inhabitants of the Rhineland welcomed the flagellants in their towns with open arms, and watched their rites in great numbers.<sup>181</sup> French friar and chronicler Jean de Venette described these rites, "For thirty-three days they marched through many towns doing

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<sup>174</sup> Ibidem, 158.

<sup>175</sup> Ibidem, 155.

<sup>176</sup> Horrox, *The Black Death*, 208.

<sup>177</sup> A. Winkler, 'The Clamor of the People: Popular Support for the Persecution of Jews in Switzerland and Germany at the Approach of the Black Death, 1348-1350', *Swiss American Historical Society Review* 53:2 (2017) 31-61, particularly 34; I. Ritzmann, "Judenmord als Folge des 'Schwarzen Todes: Ein medizing-historischer Mythos?" *Medizin, Gesellschaft, und Geschichte: Jahrbuch des Institutes für Geschichte der Medizin der Robert Bosch Stiftung* 17 (1998) 120.

<sup>178</sup> Winkler, 'The Clamor of the People', 34.

<sup>179</sup> Gottfried, *The Black Death*, 199; Horrox, *The Black Death*, 150: translated *Chronicle* of Henrici de Herdovia who wrote about the rites of the flagellants in Germany.

<sup>180</sup> Gottfried, *The Black Death*, 200.

<sup>181</sup> Ibidem, 202-203.

penance and affording a great spectacle to the wondering people. They flogged their shoulders and arms, scourged with iron points so zealously as to draw blood.”<sup>182</sup>

Significant for the well-poisoning rumour, the flagellant movement preached anti-Semitism. When in 1348 the rumour on well-poisoning spread, their anti-Semitic rhetoric increased and led to the burning of Jewish communities.<sup>183</sup> De Venette commented on the flagellants: “In Germany ... they [Jews] were massacred and slaughtered by Christians, and many thousands were burned everywhere, indiscriminately.”<sup>184</sup> During 1348, the flagellant movement was well-organised, which was mainly tolerated by the clerical and secular authorities. But by the beginning of 1349, such tolerance changed because of accusations of corruption by members of the movement, and the fact that they became harder to control.<sup>185</sup>

From this point onward, authorities in England, France and the Iberian Peninsula simultaneously began to suppress the Flagellant movement. In these areas, the flagellants were easier to eliminate than in Germany, where there was no strong centralized power. According to De Venette, Clement VI asked the teachers of theology of the University of Paris for advice on the matter at the beginning of 1349. After they explained to the Pope that this movement acted against God’s will, Clement VI prohibited the public penance of the flagellants.<sup>186</sup> On 20 October, 1349, Clement issued a bull in which he forbade the movement altogether. The Pope charged the flagellants with various crimes including the persecution of Jews.<sup>187</sup> He sent letters to the civil authorities, such as the King of England, Castile, France and the German lords, in which he asked them to take measures in order to suppress the movement.<sup>188</sup>

As discussed in chapter two, after the first pogroms in France the rumour about well-poisoning also spread to the county of Savoy, which resulted in the torture and confessions of Jews. These confession reports were spread in the Rhineland area as proof of Jewish well-poisoning. Eventually, these reports became the source for preventative pogroms in several towns. The first pogrom in a German-speaking area occurred in November 1348 in the town of Solothurn, nowadays in Switzerland.<sup>189</sup> Other towns such as Bern, Kaufbeuren, Lech, Stuttgart, Zofingen and Augsburg followed

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<sup>182</sup> Ibidem, 199: Venette was a Carmelite friar from Venette and his *Chronicle* was published for the first time as the second ‘continuation’ of the *Chronicle* of William of Nangis.

<sup>183</sup> Cohn, ‘Burning of Jews’, 8: In this article Cohn also discusses the debate around the people involved in this movement. Several historians such as Norman Cohn saw the flagellants as a movement of the poor, on the contrary the German chroniclers describe the flagellants as a movement without class basis.

<sup>184</sup> Gottfried, *The Black Death*, 206 -207: Gottfried translated this part of the *Chronicle* of Jean de Venette.

<sup>185</sup> Ibidem, 204.

<sup>186</sup> Ibidem, 205 – 206.

<sup>187</sup> Simonsohn, *The Apostolic see*, 375.

<sup>188</sup> Gottfried, *The Black Death*, 206.

<sup>189</sup> Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde*, 161; Haverkamp, *Geschichte der Juden im Deutschland*, 35; Horrox, *The Black Death*, 208.



in the same month.<sup>190</sup> The link between the confessions and pogroms can be traced back to several primary sources, for example the earlier mentioned *Chronicle* of von Diessenhoven and letters sent between a number of German cities.<sup>191</sup>

Not all cities knew what to do with the Jews and the city council of Strasbourg sent letters to other town councils in the Rhineland and Savoy to ask for advice.<sup>192</sup> In total Strasbourg received eleven replies, of which ten letters supplied Strasbourg with 'evidence' that proved that the Jews were guilty. One example of such a letter dates from 15 November, 1348, which was sent by the council of Lausanne. The letter explains to Conrad von Winterthur, the mayor of Strasbourg, that the city of Lausanne had a confession made by a Jew called Bona Dies.<sup>193</sup> This confession was one of many others and the confession reports from Savoy are also mentioned here. This letter provides the city council of Strasbourg with 'evidence', in the form of confessions, that the Jews were guilty of well-poisoning.

There was only one reply to Strasbourg that questioned whether the Jews were responsible for well- and food poisoning. A letter dating from 12 January, 1349, which was sent from the council of Cologne, provides information on the city of Cologne and their view of the Jewish activities. In this letter, the sender tries to convince von Winterthur and other councillors of Strasbourg not to persecute the Jews. The town council of Cologne stated that there was not enough conclusive evidence to connect the Jews to the crime of well-poisoning, therefore they believed in the innocence of Jews, "[...] we are still of the opinion that this mortality and its attendant circumstances are caused by divine vengeance and nothing else."<sup>194</sup> In Cologne, the persecution of Jews was forbidden, and according to them, the city of Strasbourg should do the same, "If a massacre of the Jews were to be allowed in the major cities (something which we are determined to prevent in our city) it could lead to the sort of outrages and disturbances which would whip up a popular revolt among the common people."<sup>195</sup> Besides the point that the town council of Cologne wanted to prevent social revolts, the letter also shows that the council believed that the Jews were innocent. Despite the effort of the Council of Cologne, they were not able to prevent a pogrom in Strasbourg. On 14 February, 1349, the Jews were burned in a purpose-built house.<sup>196</sup> The *Chronicle* of Neuenburg described the massacre, "The Jews [...] were conducted to their cemetery to be burnt in a specially-prepared house. And two hundred of

<sup>190</sup> Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde*, 161; Haverkamp, *Geschichte der Juden im Deutschland*, 35 – 36.

<sup>191</sup> Horrox, *The Black Death*, 211: The letter from Lausanne to Strasbourg dates from the 15<sup>th</sup> of November, 1348. The council of Lausanne stated that there were many confessions from Jews in Savoy and as a consequence Jews were punished by burning.

<sup>192</sup> Cohn, 'The Burning of Jews', 19.

<sup>193</sup> Horrox, *The Black Death*, 210 – 211.

<sup>194</sup> Ibidem, 220.

<sup>195</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>196</sup> Albert, *The Great Mortality*, 155-156: Konrad of Megenberg discussed the pogrom of Strasbourg in his *Chronicle* that is translated here; Horrox, *The Black Death*, 209.

them were completely stripped of their clothes by the mob, who found a lot of money in them. Many were killed as they leaped out of the fire.”<sup>197</sup>

Cologne is therefore an exception to the rule, because the letter that was sent to Strasbourg reveals that the council of Cologne was trying to prevent a pogrom from happening. Nevertheless, a pogrom did occur in Cologne during the Sunday night of 23/24 August, 1349, while the plague did not arrive in the city before December 1349.<sup>198</sup> Thus, even though the town council of Cologne and the Pope tried to prevent the violence against the Jews, they could not be saved. In order to find out what might have happened, an in-depth analysis of the pogrom in Cologne and all the players who were involved is necessary.

Because of the letters sent by the city council of Strasbourg, the rumours of Jewish well-poisoning reached Cologne by the end of 1348. The town council also received the information that a Jew from Berne had confessed to the crime of well-poisoning.<sup>199</sup> In order to find out the truth about these rumoured accusations against the Jews, the council of Cologne corresponded with Strasbourg. There is no evidence of a response from Strasbourg, nevertheless the council of Cologne was not convinced that the rumours they heard were true.<sup>200</sup> As already stated, Cologne also tried to convince other towns such as Strasbourg to prevent the pogroms from happening. The written sources indicate that the motivation behind this was to prevent social revolts from happening, which had occurred before and had caused misery.<sup>201</sup>

There are several examples of earlier social revolts in Cologne, which makes it more understandable why Cologne wanted to prevent this. The first occurred in 1288, when there were tensions between the powerful citizens of Cologne and the Archbishop. These tensions led to a violent outbreak at the battle of Worringen, where the Archbishop was defeated.<sup>202</sup> A few decades later, in 1348, it was again restless in Cologne due to a revolt of the Butchers' guild against the city council.<sup>203</sup> Besides these two examples of revolts in the city, the Church of Cologne began to criticize the moneylending of Jews, a practise that was quietly accepted before and in which Christians were involved as well. However, as a consequence, the Jews in Cologne got to deal with a religious mood of hostility against them.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Albert, *The Great Mortality*, 154.

<sup>198</sup> Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde*, 163; Haverkamp, *Geschichte der Juden im Deutschland*, 38; Horrox, *The Black Death*, 210.

<sup>199</sup> Z. Avneri, *Germania Judaica II. Von 1238 bis zur Mitte des 14. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen 1968) 433.

<sup>200</sup> Avneri, *Germania Judaica II*, 433.

<sup>201</sup> Horrox, *The Black Death*, 219 – 220.

<sup>202</sup> M. Schmandt, 'Cologne, Jewish Centre on the Lower Rhine', in: C. Cluse eds., *The Jews of Europe in the Middle Ages (tenth to fifteenth centuries)* (Turnhout 2004), 367-378, particularly 371.

<sup>203</sup> Schmandt, 'Cologne', 373.

<sup>204</sup> Ibidem, 373.

In the summer of 1349, refugees from several towns brought eyewitness reports of the pogroms in the southwest of the German Empire with them to Cologne. The Jews from Cologne took measures and tried to protect themselves by obtaining weapons and heavily secure the Jewish quarter.<sup>205</sup> The city council of Cologne also acted on these eyewitness accounts by threatening to punish the murder of Jews with the death penalty.<sup>206</sup> Unfortunately, this was not enough to prevent the pogrom from taking place, and during the night of 23-24 August, 1349, the Jewish quarter was attacked and plundered by a mob.<sup>207</sup> The inhabitants of the quarter were attacked and houses, including with their occupants, went up in flames. The synagogue was destroyed and even the ground underneath was excavated because people assumed there were treasures underneath it. The rumour went around that several Jews burned themselves in order to prevent baptism.<sup>208</sup>

There were several stories that circulated in the surroundings of Cologne about what might have happened during the night of the pogrom. For example, the chronicler Gilles li Muisis from Tournai reported that the Jews from Cologne armed themselves, but the Christians did not have a hard time slaughtering the community and without much effort the Christians killed more than 25.000 Jews.<sup>209</sup> According to Graus, this story is completely unbelievable since the number of victims is highly exaggerated, but it does show how the information was presented and spread.<sup>210</sup>

Despite the lack of details in the sources of the pogrom in Cologne, we can identify several players who were involved in it. The first were the Jews of Cologne themselves. This group consists of the Jews from Cologne, Jews from the surrounding areas and the refugees who fled to Cologne after pogroms in their hometowns.<sup>211</sup> The Jews were the victims of the pogrom, but according to the sources they did not just surrender without trying to protect themselves. Unfortunately, this was not enough to secure themselves against the mob, whose formation is uncertain, that attacked the Jewish quarter.<sup>212</sup>

Secondly, the Council of Cologne was key player in this case. The letter they sent to the council of Strasbourg provides us with valuable information on the role they might have played. According to this source, the city council wanted to protect the Jews because they believed the Jews were innocent and to prevent a social revolt in town, which had happened before in 1288 and very recent in 1348. According to Cohn, the city council of Cologne was only hypothetically-speaking concerned with preventing these kinds of social revolts among the common people. He states that there is not one

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<sup>205</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>206</sup> Avneri, *Germania Judaica II*, 433.

<sup>207</sup> Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde*, 205 – 206.

<sup>208</sup> Avneri, *Germania Judaica II*, 433.

<sup>209</sup> Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde*, 206.

<sup>210</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>211</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>212</sup> Ibidem, 205.

single letter from a town that indicates that these social revolts among peasants or artisans were likely to happen, or that these individuals had accused the Jews. Instead he notes that the elite and the nobility started to spread the rumours regarding well-poisoning.<sup>213</sup>

Cohn's observation makes the motives of the city council of Cologne open to question. There are more significant reasons to explore these further. In 1321, presumably because of the early well-poisoning accusations against the Jews, the city council issued a formal protection of the Jews for the first time, in which it is stated: "this privilege took the Jews under protection ... and in our care and into our midst as fellow citizens."<sup>214</sup> Around the same time, the Archbishop Henry of Virneburg promised the same protection in a charter. This resulted in a legal arrangement of joint protection between the council and the Archbishop which lasted for the next hundred years.<sup>215</sup> Originally it was the Archbishop who was obligated to protect the Jews, but the city council of Cologne required this duty at the beginning of the fourteenth century. However, the city council could not issue a protection charter without an official request of the Archbishop.<sup>216</sup> The Archbishop could demand the annual sum of seventy Silver marks on the Jews, while the city council received taxes worth 1600 Silver marks a year from the Jews.<sup>217</sup>

Thus, whether the council truly believed the Jews were innocent is not certain, but according to the city law, they were obligated to protect the Jews. Furthermore, the city council benefited financially from the Jews because of the high sum of taxes. The city council must have been concerned with the wealth of Cologne, which would be threatened by a pogrom. The Jewish community of Cologne was in the years prior to the pogrom full of blossom, and around 750 Jews were living in the middle of the city centre. There, the Jewish cultural life and activities took place. It would be a loss for the city if this community disappeared.<sup>218</sup> Moreover, the burning of houses in the middle of the city centre with wealth stored away in them, is not something of which a city council would approve. It is very likely that the city council wanted to prevent a pogrom in their city, because of the law, economic benefits and city wealth. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that the city council planned these pogroms, which makes the theory of Ritzman not applicable to the case of Cologne. Yet while the city council disapproved of the pogrom, they were unable to stop it once underway.<sup>219</sup>

The next important person involved was Walram of Jürich, the Archbishop of Cologne. His role is open to question because there are not many trustworthy sources about him. However, the

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<sup>213</sup> Cohn, 'Burning of Jews', 20.

<sup>214</sup> Schmandt, 'Cologne', 371.

<sup>215</sup> Schmandt, 'Cologne', 371; Haverkamp, *Geschichte der Juden im Deutschland*, 68.

<sup>216</sup> Schmandt, 'Cologne', 371.

<sup>217</sup> Schmandt, 'Cologne', 371; Haverkamp, *Geschichte der Juden im Deutschland*, 68: Haverkamp states that the city council received 1800 Silver marks. It is unclear whether it is 1600 or 1800.

<sup>218</sup> Schmandt, 'Cologne', 373.

<sup>219</sup> Haverkamp, *Zur Geschichte der Juden im Deutschland*, 68.

Archbishop died on his way to Paris just a few days before the pogrom. The message of his death might have reached Cologne during the same night as the pogrom.<sup>220</sup> This fact could have made it harder to keep order in Cologne and might have exposed the Jews.<sup>221</sup> In this way, Walram figured as a key figure in the pogrom of Cologne. If his death triggered the pogrom, it is possible to assume that Walram protected the Jews, which he was unable to do after his death. Assuming that he protected the Jews, what could have been the reason? According to the arrangement of 1321 his predecessor Virneburg made with the city council, he could demand an annual sum of seventy Silver marks on the Jews, thus the Archbishop financially benefited from them.

What we also know is that Walram was heavily indebted during these years, which makes it additionally reasonable that he wanted to protect the Jews as a source of income.<sup>222</sup> Norman Cantor also states that the Jews were useful to Walram as moneylenders, from whom he may have received loans, given his difficult financial situation. For this reason, he could not have supported the persecution of the Jews. Unfortunately, Cantor does not refer directly to a source to support his theory making it difficult to draw conclusions.

Thus, Walram might have benefited financially from the Jews in Cologne, but there could be another reason for him to protect the Jews. The title of Archbishop is a very high ranked position within Church hierarchy, which Walram obtained from Pope John XXII in 1332. There are no sources giving information about the relationship between the Archbishop of Cologne and Pope Clement VI, but it is possible Walram protected the Jews because he felt he was obligated to do so after the papal bulls that Clement VI issued in 1348, especially the bull from 26 September which was directed to the clergy. To conclude, Walram position is hard to determine, however the financial crisis of the Archbishop and his high-ranking position within the Catholic Church could be reasons for him to protect the Jews of Cologne. That his death might have triggered the pogrom, makes him a key player in this pogrom.

The role of the next player, the mob, is even harder to determine because their formation is uncertain. The social status of the mobs in general is a much-debated subject among historians. Some scholars have argued that the lower classes were not involved in the persecution of Jews after the Black Death. Examples for this argument are Graus and Haverkamp, who both deny or minimize a lower-class involvement in the persecutions.<sup>223</sup> Cohn further expanded this argument and stated that the idea of lower-class involvement originates from modern historians, and not from the medieval

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<sup>220</sup> Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde*, 205; N. F. Cantor, *In the Wake of the Plague. The Black Death and the World that it made* (New York 2001) 170 – 171.

<sup>221</sup> Schmandt, 'Cologne', 375; Graus, *Pest, Geissler*, 205; Cantor, *In the Wake of the Plague*, 221-222.

<sup>222</sup> Haverkamp, *Zur Geschichte der Juden im Deutschland*, 68.

<sup>223</sup> Winkler, 'The Clamor of the People', 34: In this article the whole discussion is summarized. Other historians who are discussed here are Iris Ritzman and Karl-Heinz Leven.

sources.<sup>224</sup> On the contrary other historians believe the lower-class was involved in the German pogroms. Heinrich Graetz saw, after examining the *Chronicles* of Albrecht von Strasbourg and von Neuenberg, evidence for the involvement of the 'populace' in the pogroms of Strasbourg and Cologne. He also noted that the flagellants convinced the people in the German towns to take action against the Jews.<sup>225</sup>

Because we do not know who the persecutors were in the case of Cologne, it is also hard to determine what their motives might have been. As discussed in chapter two, Cohn stated that the persecution of Jews was not financially but religiously motivated. On the one hand the Jews in Cologne were a flourishing community in the years prior to the plague, so it might be possible that the mob had economic reasons to persecute them. On the other hand, the pogrom occurred on a Sunday, which could indicate a religious motivation, but it is unclear whether preaching preceded the attack.<sup>226</sup>

The flagellants were connected to the pogroms in Germany, because with them the violence against Jews increased, which especially in the Rhineland had extensive effects.<sup>227</sup> However, it is not certain what their role was in the particular case of Cologne, because there are no concrete sources that explain their involvement in this pogrom. The chronicler of Cologne did address the flagellants in as a movement crossing through the area and he insinuated the flagellants as the first to take action against the Jews in that city.<sup>228</sup> According to Cluse, this insinuation is not entirely true and it covers up the involvement of the citizens of Cologne in the pogrom.<sup>229</sup> What we can derive from the sources on Germany in general is that the flagellants were an influential anti-Semitic movement, who led to the murder of many Jews throughout Germany.<sup>230</sup> Thus, even though we cannot make a direct connection between the flagellants and the persecutors of the Jews in Cologne, we can assume that their anti-Semitic preaching was also known in Cologne, and it might have influenced the pogrom as a background mechanism.

Pope Clement VI, who was not actually near Cologne, also indirectly played a role in the pogrom. As we have seen he issued several bulls to protect the Jews as a reaction to the pogroms in France. Unfortunately, he was only able to protect the Jews of Avignon and its surroundings, because

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<sup>224</sup> Cohn, 'Burning of Jews', 18-19; Winkler, 'The Clamor of the People', 36.

<sup>225</sup> H. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart; aus den Quellen bearbeitet* vol. 4 (Leipzig 1890) 338-341, particularly 344-347; Winkler, 'The Clamor of the People', 36.

<sup>226</sup> Cohn, 'Burning of Jews', 25-26: Cohn states that pogroms that occurred on a Sunday had a religious motive because afterwards there would follow religious preaching.

<sup>227</sup> Cohn, 'Burning of Jews', 223; Ziegler, *The Black Death*, 87.

<sup>228</sup> Schmandt, 'Cologne', 265; R. Sprandel, *Die Weltchronik des Mönchs Albert, 1273/77 – 1454/56* (München 1994) 91.

<sup>229</sup> Schmandt, 'Cologne', 365.

<sup>230</sup> Cohn, 'Burning of Jews', 223; Ziegler, *The Black Death*, 87.

there his papal power was strong enough.<sup>231</sup> In the pogrom of Cologne, the Pope was not directly involved, but two months after the pogrom he issued another bull against the flagellants. This bull, dating from 20 October, 1349, is directed to all prelates to take measures against the flagellants who are accused of the persecution of the Jews: "It is to be feared, considering that when many of them [flagellants] and their followers, under the guise of piety, cruelly extend their hands in acts of impiety, they often spill the blood of Jews, which Christian piety embraces and sustains, not being permitted to offend them in any way [...]." <sup>232</sup> In the bull Clement makes clear that he does not tolerate the movement: "Such a presumptuous temerity and temeritous presumption, if not met with a health-giving antidote, should not be seen as a light crime, but rather the deadly illness and contagion of some should receive medicine in many." <sup>233</sup>

The fact that Clement issued this bull indicates that he was aware of the involvement of the flagellants in the persecution of Jews during the Black Death period. As discussed before, the movement was especially active in Germany at the time the bull was issued, in contrast to France and England, where the movement was mostly suppressed. Thus, on the one hand, the Pope was trying to protect the Jews from the flagellants, especially in the German-speaking regions. But on the other hand, he issued the bull after almost every pogrom had already occurred.<sup>234</sup> Thus, by the time Clement VI issued this bull, it was already too late for many Jews.

After analysing which players were involved in the pogrom, we can make some cautious conclusions about it. First of all, the papal bulls did not have much effect for the Jews in the German-speaking regions. The city council of Cologne, who was obligated to protect the Jews by law, was also not able to successfully protect them. But it seems unlikely that the council wanted to persecute the Jews, because it received a large annual tax from the them. Therefore, they would have had financial interests in keeping the Jews alive. Besides that, the council also wanted to protect the social order and wealth of the city. It is likely that the Archbishop of Cologne wanted to protect the Jews as well, possible also with financial motives, especially since he was in debt. But it is also possible that, because he was an Archbishop, he followed the papal bulls of protection issued by the Pope in 1348 and therefore saw it as his duty to protect the Jews. This would connect Clement VI to the Jews in Cologne, but there is no evidence for this theory or about the relationship between the Archbishop and the Pope. However, the results of the analysis on the German-speaking regions showed that the papal bulls issued by Clement did not have much effect, which makes the power of Clement VI questionable. Reasons for this could have been that there were other interests at stake for the persecutors, factors

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<sup>231</sup> Albert, *The Great Mortality*, 152: chronicler Mathias of Neuenburg comments that the Pope protected the Jews in Avignon.

<sup>232</sup> Simonsohn, *The Apostolic see*, 399.

<sup>233</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>234</sup> Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde*, 160-161; Haverkamp, *Geschichte der Juden im Deutschland*, 35-38.

which were beyond the control of the Pope. Yet, what we do know is as soon as Walram died, the pogrom of Cologne started, which suggests that he was a key figure in case of Cologne. Nevertheless, all these discussed players were not able keep the Jews safe, and the whole Jewish community of Cologne was massacred during the night of 23 August. It took several decades before the first Jews returned to the city.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Schmandt, 'Cologne', 375.



## CONCLUSION

This research examined the papal-Jewish relations between the years 1000-1350. Within this period Jews were accused of numerous crimes, such as the ritual murder of children, desecrating the host and poisoning wells, which increased anti-Jewish violence. An important question was how the papacy responded to these accusations and what the consequences were. Did the popes try to protect the Jews or did they have a different policy? The main focus of this study was on the relationship between Pope Clement VI and the Jews during the Black Death period. In this significant period entire Jewish communities were destroyed, as a consequence of the well-poisoning accusation. Therefore, the research question was how can we understand papal responses to the accusation of well-poisoning against Jews and their consequences during the Black Death period?

In order to answer this question, it was important to examine how the popes traditionally reacted to accusations and violence against the Jews. As the first chapter showed, from year 1000 onward, anti-Jewish attitudes increased and often resulted in violence. By the twelfth and thirteenth century new negative stereotypes of Jews arose. In this period Jews were accused of crimes, such as ritual murder, blood libel and host desecration. Traditionally the papacy responded towards these accusations by re-issuing the *Sicut Judaeis* which made protection the underlying policy. Even though the *Sicut Judaeis* was issued eight times during the second half of the thirteenth century, the traditional 'papal policy' regarding the Jews began to change in this period. Due to the charges of blood libel and host desecration, the idea that Jews were the enemies began to infiltrate the papal policy.

By the fourteenth century, the rumour that Jews had poisoned the wells of Christians spread through Europe. Research on the alleged earlier charges of well-poisoning showed an incorrect historiographical tradition. As explained in chapter two, the sources on which these early cases of well-poisoning were based turned out to be unreliable. Therefore, the case of 1321 is seen as the first accusation of well-poisoning. The reaction of Pope John XXII to the well-poisoning charge of 1321 was different than that of his predecessors. For example, John did not re-issue the *Sicut Judaeis*, and there is no evidence that he issued any other bull of protection. Instead, John sent preachers to cities with many Jewish inhabitants, in the hope of mass conversions. What we derive from his response is that John was not particularly protecting the Jews. This suggests Stow may be justified in arguing that the goal of 'papal policy' was to place the Jews within a society that was purely Christian. Instead of protecting the Jews, John might have used the situation to convert Jews to Christianity, and by that creating a pure Christian society.

In contrast to the response of John XXII, Pope Clement VI reacted different to the well-poisoning case in 1348. While Clement was struggling with his role as pope, one of the greatest catastrophic plagues hit the European continent. At the beginning of 1348, some people pointed their fingers at the

Jews for spreading the disease, which resulted in several pogroms in the French and Spanish regions. Three months after the first pogrom in Toulon, Clement re-issued the *Sicut Judaeis*. The Pope probably realised that the bull was not very successful in protection the Jews, because on 26 September and 1 October, 1348, he issued two other bulls, which specifically addressed the innocence of the Jews.

The fact that Clement issued three papal bulls, which all addressed the protection of Jews, could indicate that Clement really intended to protect them. If we compare his reaction to that of John XXII, who dealt with a similar accusation, we can conclude that Clement put in more effort to protect the Jews than his predecessor, who rather tried to convert them. However, the concluding sentences about trials in the last two bulls left room for a subjective interpretation. This may ten have been a cause for several cities to put Jews on trial. Some of the trials in Savoy started already at 15 September, which is before Clement's bull, but the interrogations of the Jews in Châtel started after the bull, namely in October. Therefore, it could be possible that the papal bull issued on 26 September influenced cities to put Jews on trial, interrogate and torture them until they confessed.

Nevertheless, as seen in chapter four, the examination of the German-speaking area showed that the protection bulls of Clement were not very successful, because within one year all Jewish communities between Cologne and Austria were massacred. The case-study on Cologne, with an in-depth analysis of all the players, demonstrated that there were many players involved in the persecution of the Jews. It also gave some significant insights about whose role it was to protect the Jews, the Archbishop or the city council. Both of them failed to protect the Jews and on 23 August, 1349, the Jews of Cologne were collectively murdered.

It is unfortunate that there are no sources on the relationship between Clement VI and the Archbishop Walram, because this would have shed more light on the role of church administration and the potential role of Clement in that. However, Clement is indirectly connected to the persecution of Cologne because he issued a bull against the flagellant movement, who were involved in many pogroms in the Rhineland area. The fact that Clement tried to suppress this movement and asked his clergy to help, indicates that he was trying to condemn the violence against the Jews. In the bull he specifically stated that the flagellants were responsible for the persecution of Jews and therefore this bull can serve as evidence for papal protection. On the other hand, Clement was quite late in the issuing of this bull; by that point almost every Jewish community in Southern Germany was already exterminated. So, why did Clement not react earlier to these massacres?

As discussed in the *status quaestionis* there are different views on the papal attitudes towards the Jews. Some historians, such as Grayzel and Chazan, have stated that several popes wanted to protect the Jews, and the *Sicut Judaeis* served as evidence for that view. But was this bull really protecting the Jews? As seen in the first chapter the bull concludes with the sentence that only Jews who are not

plotting against Christianity are to be protected. Therefore, the bull left room for a subjective interpretation of what 'plotting against the Christian faith' might mean. This research also showed that the re-issuing of this bull was not always very successful, because the Jews continued to be accused and persecuted for several crimes.

This research confirms the theory of Cohen, that there has been a shift in the papal-Jewish relations from the thirteenth century onwards. In this period the anti-Jewish violence increased due to the host desecration and blood libel charges and as a consequence, Christians saw the Jews as enemies of the Church. This changing view also effected the 'papal policy' towards Jews, which the examples of Boniface VIII and John XXII showed. Both of these Popes did not issue a single bull to protect Jews from the accusations that were made against them during this period. However, Clement VI might have been an exception to this theory, because as this research showed he tried to protect the Jews by issuing several bulls that addressed their persecution. Therefore, within the debate on papal-Jewish relations, Clement's 'policy' regarding the Jews can be placed in the midway position. Clement seemed to be genuine about the protection of Jews, however due to several circumstances he was not able to.

This study answered questions but also raised new ones. As we have seen, Clement tried to protect the Jews with the several bulls he issued, but he could not. This indicates that his papal power was limited. However, during the Middle Ages the papacy was a powerful institution, especially considering the thirteenth century development of papal authority, which has been investigated by Eamon Duffy in *Saints and Sinners* and by Colin Morris in *The papal monarchy*. So, what happened during the fourteenth century which made it possible that Clement's bulls were of no effect, especially in the German-speaking countries? The analysis of Cologne pointed out, there are many players and factors involved in the persecution of Jews, that are beyond papal control. For example, the death of Archbishop Walram probably triggered the pogrom in Cologne which is something Clement could do nothing about. It also showed that context matters and that institutions and organisations, such as city councils, might have had more impact on the protection of Jews than a papal bull. Therefore, it might even be too simplistic to say that the 'papal policy' towards Jews was underlined by protection, because in this case Clement did not have the power to do so. However, these conclusions are only visible once you go down to a town scale level, which demonstrates the importance of micro-history within this field of research. The importance of a micro-historical approach is also discussed by Nirenberg in *Communities of Violence*.

Unfortunately, this research is too limited in scale to give an answer to these new questions on papal power during the Black Death in the Rhineland area, because I only analysed Cologne. Before starting my research, I thought that the Rhineland was broadly investigated, but this appeared to be not the case at all. I got the feeling that many historians, myself included, assume that there has been

written extensively about the papal-Jewish relationship during the Black Death period, because numerous studies use the plague persecutions as a reference point. But when you actually zoom in on a town-scale, this does not seem to be true. Therefore, it would be very interesting if the Rhineland area would be investigated with a micro-historical approach, because to answer bigger questions, more detailed research is necessary on this particular area. Thus, the Black Death pogroms should not simply be a referring point, but the mass murder of Jewish communities should be in the centre of attention.

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