

# Book Reviews

England's Jews: Finance, Violence, and the Crown in the Thirteenth Century. *By John Tolan*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023. 264 pp. + 9 b/w illus. Hardcover, \$45.00. ISBN: 978-1-5128-2389-9.

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Reviewed by Dean A. Irwin

John Tolan's *England's Jews* is a welcome addition to the growing body of scholarship on medieval Anglo-Jewry. Despite its title, relatively few of England's Jews are actually discussed in this book and, with the exception of Isaac of Norwich (chap. 1), they are dealt with quickly. Instead, this is a rich, and accessible, history of the policy and attitudes of both crown and church towards Anglo-Jewry during the thirteenth century. The reign of Henry III receives particular attention because it "paradoxically represents both the high-water mark in Jewish integration into medieval English society and the beginning of a precipitous decline" (p. 2). It is testament to the amount of material which now exists in modern editions that a book such as this could be researched in libraries (p. viii). Regrettably, many of the sources which were generated as a result of the crown's demands for cash, or Jewish moneylending, can still only be accessed in the archives. These sources have been well explored (see Robert C. Stacey, "1240–1260: a Watershed in Anglo-Jewish Relations?," *Historical Research* 61 [1988]: 135–150; and Robin R. Mundill, *England's Jewish Solution: Experiment and Expulsion, 1262–1290* [Cambridge, UK, 1998]). Even so, this study is able to cover a substantial amount of ground and challenges some received wisdom. Hugh of Avalon, bishop of Lincoln (d. 1200), for example, is generally credited with intervening to protect the Jews of Lincoln during the massacres which followed Richard I's coronation (September 3, 1189). As Tolan shows, however, when you go back to the original source, the evidence for this is circumstantial at best, and far from conclusive (p. 26). This serves as a salient reminder of the importance of establishing the sources needed to write Anglo-Jewish history.

Throughout this study, Tolan adopts a chronological approach, with each successive chapter (sensibly) dedicated to a different period and theme. Chapter 1 explores the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, focusing on the career of Isaac of Norwich and the troubles of King John's reign. Chapter 2 takes up the 1220s, with particular emphasis

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on the church's efforts to keep Jews and Christians physically and spiritually separate. As such, the Jewish badge, or *tabula*, receives special attention here. Moving into the 1230s, chapter 3 explores Simon de Montfort's expulsion of the Jews from Leicester, and Henry III's dealings with the Jews in the early years of his majority including: the foundation of the *domus conversorum* (House of Converts) in 1232; the imposition of the Statute of the Jewry (1233); and the privileges of Peter des Roches and Peter de Rivallis. In chapter 4, there is a welcome break from national discussions of the Jews, and the political manoeuvring relating to them, to explore the development of Christian Hebraism and intellectual culture in Oxford, particularly under the guidance of Robert Grosseteste as chancellor of Oxford. Resuming the chronological exploration, chapter 5 deals with the Mandate to the Jews (1253), which represented a real hardening of royal policy towards the Jews, before turning to the infamous case of Little Hugh of Lincoln (1255). The penultimate chapter deals with the Second Baronial Revolt from 1258 through to the Dictum of Kenilworth in 1267, which saw the Jews targeted first with constitutional reform, and then with violence. Chapter 7 concludes the story, outlining the steps which the crown took to reassert its authority over the Jews after the Battle of Evesham (August 4, 1265), and the experience of Jews under Edward I, which culminated in the Expulsion.

A curious distinction is drawn between the title (*England's Jews*) and the contents whether they are identified as "the king's Jews" throughout. The latter choice, as Tolan notes, reflects the language of royal documents in which Henry III cited "our Jews" (p. 17). Yet the extent to which this phrase is applicable to the case studies in chapters 3 and 6 is not altogether clear. As is noted in the case of Leicester, the Jewry there might have been removed from the jurisdiction of the crown in the 1220s by Ranulph of Chester (p. 68). This surely had important local implications for Simon de Montfort, given that the Crown would surely have moved to assert its authority over "our Jews" now that they were no longer shielded as (possibly) "the earl of Chester's Jews" in all but name. Equally, on June 4, 1262, the Anglo-Jewish community had been granted to Lord Edward for three years. In this sense the attacks on the Jews (and *archae*) were directed not at "the king's Jews" but, rather, "Lord Edward's Jews." Consequently, when the rebels sought to seize the chests containing Jewish debts as at London and Canterbury (pp. 155, 156), the effects of their action would have impacted not on the crown, but directly on Lord Edward's income. What were the implications of this in the two case studies? This is an interesting question which further research will be needed to address. It does not, however, detract from Tolan's broad, yet lucid, telling of Anglo-Jewish history in the thirteenth

century. Ultimately, as he concludes, ‘The history we forget or choose not to remember comes back to haunt us’ (p. 189). This is an admirable effort to make the history of England’s Jews more accessible.

DEAN A. IRWIN, *University of Lincoln, Lincoln, UK*

*Dr. Irwin is Visiting Fellow at the University of Lincoln. He works on manuscript sources relating to the Jews of medieval England. He completed his Ph.D. thesis, “Acknowledging Debt in Medieval England: A Study of Anglo-Jewish Moneylending Activities, 1194–1276,” in 2020 at Canterbury Christ Church University.*

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*Virtuous Bankers: A Day in the Life of the Eighteenth-Century Bank of England.* By Anne L. Murphy. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023. 288 pp. Hardcover, \$35.00. ISBN: 978-0-691-19474-5.

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Reviewed by Robert Yee

Adam Smith once referred to the eighteenth-century Bank of England as “a great engine of state.” Until its nationalization in 1946, the central bank had been a private corporation, owned and operated by shareholders. At the same time, its wide range of activities, from the management of the national debt to the issuance of notes, often supported public-oriented goals. Based in the heart of the financial center known as the City of London, the Bank seemed to represent the strength and stability of the British economy to the outside world.

These points serve as the foundation for Anne L. Murphy’s book, *Virtuous Bankers*. With a narrative that is broad in scope yet comprehensive in perspective, the book examines the Bank’s centrality in both the City and the larger national economy. It showcases the colorful personalities of numerous individuals, from the principal gate porter William Watkins to those in the Three Per Cent Consols Office, such as Bowler Miller and Abraham Vickery. One can also learn a great deal about the Bank’s various administrative bodies, including the Committee of Inspection, the Accountants Department, the Bullion Office, and the Court of Directors. With these details, the “Old Lady of Threadneedle Street” appears as an institution in constant motion, with porters, tellers, and clerks moving in clockwork fashion to run operations during business hours, while the tasks of nighttime cleaners, housekeepers, and watchmen ensured that the Bank was prepared for another day.

Much of the book also explores how and when the Bank interacted with members of the business community, for whom personal