

MEDIEVAL ANITISEMITISM ACTIVITY

This activity is designed to enable students to examine multiple historical documents related to the discrimination and persecution of Jews during the Middle Ages (primary and secondary sources, text and visual), to respond to a series of questions and to share their work with their peers.

Procedure:

This activity can be conducted as either an individual, paired or group exercise.

After the students have been assigned their topic(s) and given their documents, they should complete the exercise.

Each of the 9 documents (text and visual) has a series of specific questions for the document. In addition there are two generic questions:

- What is your reaction to the text and images?
- Which historical root(s) of antisemitism are revealed in this documents?

Students should write their responses in the space provided on the question sheet.

Report out. After the students have had a chance to complete their specific task, they should share their responses with the rest of the class. Depending upon the number of students assigned to each topic and the time allotted for this activity, it could be a Think-Pair-Share strategy, or a modified Jigsaw Cooperative Learning strategy.

After all have shared their responses, you should ask the students to identify the themes that intertwine to characterize antisemitism in the Middle Ages.

List of Documents

1. *Ecclesia and Synagoga*
2. Crusades
3. Lateran Council of 1215
4. Expulsions from Western and Central Europe
5. *Judensau*
6. Blood Libel
7. Jewish Quarter or Ghetto
8. Moneylenders and Usurers
9. *The Black Death*

Ecclesia and Synagoga



Ecclesia and Synagoga above the portico of the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris (c. 1240).

The statues, known as Ecclesia and Synagoga, respectively, and generally found in juxtaposition, are a common motif in medieval art and represent the Christian theological concept known as supercessionism, whereby the Church is triumphant and the Synagogue defeated. It describes the influential idea of the Middle Ages that Christians (the people of “the new covenant”) have replaced Jews (the people of “the old covenant”) as the people of God. Synagoga is depicted here with head bowed, broken staff, the tablets of the law slipping from her hand and a fallen crown at her feet. Ecclesia stands upright with crowned head and carries a chalice and a staff adorned with the cross.

Questions

- What is your reaction to the text and images?
- How was church art used to instruct Christians in the Middle Ages?
- How are Christianity and Judaism represented in the two figures? What is the message being conveyed to the churchgoers?
- Which historical root(s) of antisemitism are revealed in this document?

The Crusades



"I know not whether by a judgment of the Lord, or by some error of mind; they rose in a spirit of cruelty against the Jewish people scattered throughout these cities and slaughtered them without mercy, especially in the Kingdom of Lorraine, asserting it to be the beginning of their expedition and their duty against the enemies of the Christian faith. This slaughter of Jews was done first by citizens of Cologne. These suddenly fell upon a small band of Jews and severely wounded and killed many; they destroyed the houses and synagogues of the Jews and divided among themselves a very large, amount of money. When the Jews saw this cruelty, about two hundred in the silence of the night began flight by boat to Neuss. The pilgrims and crusaders discovered them, and after taking away all their possessions, inflicted on them similar slaughter, leaving not even one alive."

Albert of Aix, Eyewitness of the First Crusade, 1096

Questions

- What is your reaction to the text and images?
- What was the purpose of the Crusades?
- Why did these attacks occur in Europe?
- Which historical root(s) of antisemitism are revealed in this documents?

Lateran Council 1215 Decree and Images

"We decree that such Jews ... of both sexes in every Christian province and at all times shall be marked off in the eyes of the public from other peoples through the character of their dress... Moreover, during the last three days before Easter and especially on Good Friday, they shall not go forth in public at all, for the reason that some of them on these very days, as we hear, do not blush to go forth better dressed and are not afraid to mock the Christians who maintain the memory of the most holy Passion by wearing signs of mourning."



Questions

- What is your reaction to the text and images?
- Why did the Church establish these decrees?
- What effect do you think they had on society?
- Which factor(s) of antisemitism are revealed in this document?

Expulsions from Western and Central Europe

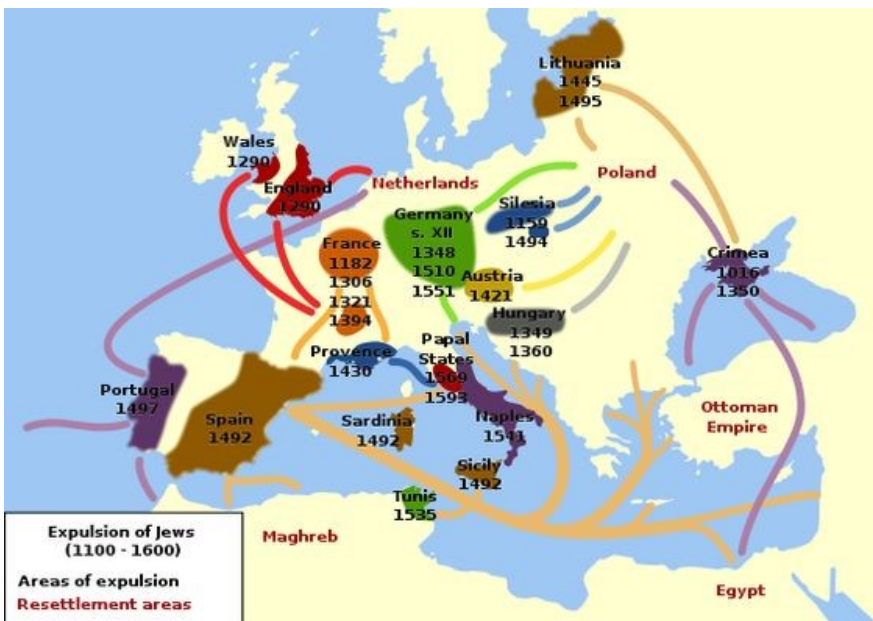


A miniature from Grandes Chroniques de France depicting the expulsion of Jews from France in 1182 by King Philip Augustus.

Expulsion of the Spanish Jews in 1492: The following account gives a detailed and accurate picture of the expulsion and its immediate consequences for Spanish Jewry. It was written in Hebrew by an Italian Jew in April or May 1495:

"After the King [Ferdinand] had captured the city of Granada from the Moors, and it had surrendered to him on the 7th [of January [1492] ... he ordered the expulsion of all the Jews in all parts of his kingdom-in the kingdoms of Castile, Catalonia, Ara-gon, Galicia, Majorca, Minorca, the Basque provinces, the islands of Sardinia and Sicily, and the kingdom of Valencia. Even before that the Queen had expelled them from the kingdom of Andalusia. "

Source: Marcus, Jacob. *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Sourcebook, 315-1791*, (New York: JPS, 1938), 51-55 as quoted in the Fordham Jewish History Sourcebook: *The Expulsion from Spain, 1492 CE*. <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/jewish/1492-jews-spain1.asp>



Map source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edict_of_Expulsion

Questions

- What is your reaction to the text and images?
- What contributed to the expulsion of the Jews from Western Europe?
- Where did they eventually settle?
- Which historical root(s) of antisemitism are revealed in this document?

Judensau (Jewish sow)



Judensau at the minster in Wimpfen

Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judensau#/medi>



Judensau at the city church of St. Mary in Wittenberg/Germany

Source: <https://www.alamy.com/stock-image-medieval-judensau-jewish-pig-anti-semitic-mockery-of-the-jews-at-the-164757145.html>

Judensau (German for "Jews' sow" or "Jewish sow") is a derogatory and dehumanizing image of Jews in obscene contact with a large sow (female pig), which in Judaism is an unclean animal. The Jewish prohibition against eating pork comes from Torah, in the Book of Leviticus Chapter 11. The image appeared during the 13th century in Germany and some other European countries.

Questions

- What is your reaction to the text and images?
- Why do you think the image of a sow or pig was used?
- The image of the Judensau appeared in church architecture? What impact might this have on the average person?
- Which historical root(s) of antisemitism are revealed in this document?

Blood Libel



In 1144, the dead body of a boy was found on Good Friday. The boy was later referred to as William of Norwich. The testimony of a monk was the only record of the event. No proof was ever found to substantiate the accusation. A myth began in England that the Jews needed the blood of a Christian, preferably a child, during Holy Week for the preparation of *matzoh* (the unleavened bread used for Passover.) The William murder was responsible for the crowd attacking a Jewish delegation coming to the coronation of Richard the Lionhearted in 1189. The following year, most of the Jews of Norwich were slaughtered in the village. More accusation of ritual murders and blood libels followed the first one throughout England. Jews were eventually expelled from England in 1290, and they were not allowed to return until 1655 under Oliver Cromwell.

Questions

- What is your reaction to the text and images?
- Why do you think this myth began during Holy Week? Why were the Jews implicated?
- Which historical root(s) of antisemitism are revealed in this document?

Jewish Quarter or Ghetto



The “ghetto” refers to an enclosed place where European Jews were once relegated to live. The term, derived from the Italian *gettare*, which refers to the casting of metal, was first used in Venice in 1516, when authorities required Jews to move to the island of Carregio (the *Ghetto Nuovo*, new ghetto). Though the term “ghetto” was first used in Venice, this was not the first instance of Jews being forced into segregated quarters. Compulsory segregation of Jews was common in medieval Europe. Inside the confines of the Jewish Quarter or ghetto, Jews had the autonomy to govern themselves and to sustain their own social, religious and educational institutions. Often the area was enclosed by a wall and gates which were locked at night.

Questions

- What is your reaction to the text and images?
- Why were the Jews required to live in special sections or streets of a medieval town? What impact might this have on Jewish-Christians relations?
- Which historical root(s) of antisemitism are revealed in this document?

Moneylenders and Usurers

Usury is the act of lending money at an interest rate that is considered unreasonably high or that is higher than the rate permitted by law. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (the three Abrahamic faiths) take a very strong stance against usury. Several passages in the Old Testament condemn the practice of usury, especially when lending to less wealthy individuals. In the Jewish community, this created the rule of lending money at interest only to outsiders. The Old Testament's condemnation of usury also led to the Christian tradition against moneylending. In the Middle Ages, since Jews were prohibited from owning land or being part of a guild, out of necessity Jews became moneylenders or usurers, or tax and rent collectors.



Questions

- What is your reaction to the text and images?
- Why did the Jews tolerate being moneylenders or tax and rent collectors?
- What effect did being in these positions have on the Jews' status in medieval society?
- Which factor(s) of antisemitism are revealed in this document?

The Black Death



The Black Death, a pandemic of the bubonic plague, killed about a quarter of the population of Europe between 1347 and 1350. Not knowing the medical/scientific causes of the plague, many placed blame on the Jews, who lived in more isolated communities in Europe and Asia. Rumors spread that they caused the disease by deliberately poisoning wells. Hundreds of Jewish communities were destroyed by violence, in particular in the Iberian peninsula and in the Germanic Empire. Although the Pope Clement VI issued a papal bull in 1348 declaring that Jews were not responsible, many Jews were burned alive or hanged by enraged mobs. The large and significant Jewish communities in such cities as Nuremberg, Frankfurt, and Mainz were wiped out at this time.

Questions

- What is your reaction to the text and images?
- How did Jews become the scapegoat during the 14th century outbreak of the plague?
- From the medieval point of view, what was this a logical explanation?
- Which historical root(s) of antisemitism are revealed in this document?