

The Expulsion of the Jews from France, 1182 CE

The Jews had already been settled in France for over a thousand years when Philip Augustus came to power in 1179. This brilliant but unscrupulous ruler, then about fifteen years of age, needed money and help to strengthen his hold on the throne and to fight the powerful feudal barons. He gained these objectives, in part, by confiscating Jewish wealth; thus he secured not only money but also the goodwill of the Church and of the Christian debtors. That he himself actually believed that Jews committed ritual murders is difficult to determine. It is sufficient to say that, in taking drastic action against his Jewish subjects, he had recourse to such accusations.

Four months after taking over the reigns of government he imprisoned all the Jews in his lands and released them only after a heavy ransom had been paid (1180). The next year (1181) he annulled all loans made to Christians by Jews, taking instead a comfortable twenty per cent for himself. A year later (1182) he confiscated all the lands and buildings of the Jews and drove them out of the lands governed by himself directly. It is difficult to determine if his decree affected the Jews in the baronial lands.

Several years later (1198) Philip Augustus readmitted the Jews and carefully regulated their banking business so as to reserve large profits to himself through a variety of taxes and duties. He made of this taxation a lucrative income for himself.

The following account describes the events leading up to the expulsion in 1182. It is taken from the Gesta Philippi Augusti, a contemporary Latin history by the monk Rigord who first began this chronicle about 1186. Rigord, who was rather naive, tells his story from the point of view of a devoted son of the Church. He died some time after 1205.

[Philip Augustus had often heard] that the Jews who dwelt in Paris were wont every year on Easter day, or during the sacred week of our Lord's Passion, to go down secretly into underground vaults and kill a Christian as a sort of sacrifice in contempt of the Christian religion. For a long time they had persisted in this wickedness, inspired by the devil, and in Philip's father's time, many of them had been seized and burned with fire. St. Richard, whose body rests in the church of the Holy Innocents-in-the-Fields in Paris, was thus put to death and crucified by the Jews, and through martyrdom went in blessedness to God. [Louis VII, then king, held the Jews guiltless in this death.]

Wherefore many miracles have been wrought by the hand of God through the prayers and intercessions of St. Richard, to the glory of God, as we have heard.

And because the most Christian King Philip inquired diligently, and came to know full well these and many other iniquities of the Jews in his forefathers' days, therefore he burned with zeal, and in the same year in which he was invested at Rheims with the holy governance of the kingdom of the French, upon a Sabbath, the sixteenth of February [1180], by his command, the Jews throughout all France were seized in their synagogues and then bespoiled of their gold and silver and garments, as the Jews themselves had spoiled the Egyptians at their exodus from Egypt. This was a harbinger of their expulsion, which by God's will soon followed. . . .



At this time [1180-1181] a great multitude of Jews had been dwelling in France for a long time past, for they had flocked thither from divers parts of the world, because peace abode among the French, and liberality; for the Jews had heard how the kings of the French were prompt to act against their enemies, and were very merciful toward their subjects. And therefore their elders and men wise in the law of Moses, who were called by the Jews *didascali* [teachers], made resolve to come to Paris.

When they had made a long sojourn there, they grew so rich that they claimed as their own almost half of the whole city, and had Christians in their houses as menservants and maidservants, who were open backsliders from the faith of Jesus Christ, and *judaized* with the Jews. And this was contrary to the decree of God and the law of the Church. And whereas the Lord had said by the mouth of Moses in Deuteronomy [23:20-21], "Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother," but "to a stranger," the Jews in their wickedness understood by "stranger" every Christian, and they took from the Christians their money at usury. And so heavily burdened in this wise were citizens and soldiers and peasants in the suburbs, and in the various towns and villages, that many of them were constrained to part with their possessions. Others were bound under oath in houses of the Jews in Paris, held as if captives in prison. [Germanic law permitted a creditor to hold a debtor prisoner.]

The most Christian King Philip heard of these things, and compassion was stirred within him. He took counsel with a certain hermit, Bernard by name, a holy and religious man, who at that time dwelt in the forest of Vincennes, and asked him what he should do. By his advice the King released all Christians of his kingdom from their debts to the Jews, and kept a fifth part of the whole amount for himself.

Finally came the culmination of their wickedness. Certain ecclesiastical vessels consecrated to God-the chalices and crosses of gold and silver bearing the image of our Lord Jesus Christ crucified -had been pledged to the Jews by way of security when the need of the churches was pressing. These they used so vilely, in their impiety and scorn of the Christian religion, that from the cups in which the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was consecrated they gave their children cakes soaked in wine. . . .

In the year of our Lord's Incarnation 1182, in the month of April, which is called by the Jews Nisan, an edict went forth from the most serene king, Philip Augustus, that all the Jews of his kingdom should be prepared to go forth by the coming feast of St. John the Baptist [June 24]. And then the King gave them leave to sell each his movable goods before the time fixed, that is, the feast of St. John the Baptist. But their real estate, that is, houses, fields, vineyards, barns, winepresses, and such like, he reserved for himself and his successors, the kings of the French. [Some of this wealth may have been used to build the Louvre.]

When the faithless Jews heard this edict some of them were born again of water and the Holy Spirit and converted to the Lord, remaining steadfast in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. To them the King, out of regard for the Christian religion, restored all their possessions in their entirety, and gave them perpetual liberty.

Others were blinded by their ancient error and persisted in their perfidy; and they sought to win with gifts and golden promises the great of the land-counts, barons, archbishops, bishops-that through their influence and advice, and through the promise of infinite wealth, they might turn the King's mind from his firm intention. [The lords appealed to



were the political enemies of the king.] But the merciful and compassionate God, who does not forsake those who put their hope in Him and who doth humble those who glory in their strength so fortified the illustrious King that he could not be moved by prayers nor promises of temporal things. . . .

The infidel Jews, perceiving that the great of the land, through whom they had been accustomed easily to bend the King's predecessors to their will, had suffered repulse, and astonished and stupefied by the strength of mind of Philip the King and his constancy in the Lord, exclaimed with a certain admiration: "*Shema Israel!*"[that is, "Here O Israel"] and prepared to sell all their household goods. The time was now at hand when the King had ordered them to leave France altogether, and it could not be in any way prolonged. Then did the Jews sell all their movable possessions in great haste, while their landed property reverted to the crown. Thus the Jews, having sold their goods and taken the price for the expenses of their journey, departed with their wives and children and all their households in the aforesaid year of the Lord 1182.

Source: Jacob Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Sourcebook, 315-1791*, (New York: JPS, 1938), 24-27

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