

**New Tools:
An Exploration & Examination of
Anti-Judaic and Antisemitic Spanish Medieval Material Art Objects in Culture**

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Introducing the Women: Setting the Stage

Doctors Sara Lipton, Debra Higgs Strickland, and Ruth Mellinkoff—pioneers and champions for the visibility of anti-Judaic and antisemitic medieval artwork—forged a path for the examination of material culture studies, history, art history, and the study of religion. These women created space for young scholars to position themselves as credible researchers of the cultural icons and art-objects that illuminated imagined Christian realities and ultimately influenced the actualization of violence. Art, visual culture, and material culture, for many textual scholars, are often secondary or complementary to texts.

Scholar Robin Jensen offers a new perspective. Jensen argues that art was not merely a substitute for text in early Christian art, but instead, she provides “evidence that visual art often serve[d] as a highly sophisticated, literate, and even eloquent mode of theological expression” (3). Jensen assumes an interdisciplinary approach that combines a textual history with an art historian’s methodology to assume an equal meaning making approach between the visual and the textual in early Christianity.¹ Jensen’s approach uses semiotics and symbols to establish a connection between the visual and the textual, offering my project firm footing for analyzing Christian produced images and art as a primary source of meaning-making for Christians about Jews. Non-textual evidence offers a different kind of engagement, as well as a “valuable testimony to the character or religious social life in the past.”²

As a material culture and religion scholar, Sally Promey suggests that text and images/objects, especially in relation to Christian scripture, “are not binary equations but are mutually constituting entities: each shapes the other, enables the other, and both lay out a fluid,

¹ Robin Margaret Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (Routledge, 2000), 1.

² Jensen, 1.

flexible matrix of symbols and tropes that... establish a set of possibilities for sensation, action, and imagination.”³

It is impossible, Gavin Langmuir offers, “to write about a history of antisemitism... without discussing religion, for religion is linked with antisemitism.”⁴ However, scripture worked alongside material culture, images, and objects produced by Christians, about Jews, to paint a holistic portrait of the imagined Jew within a Medieval Christian reality. Material culture studies pry the object alongside the textual, the social, the religious, and the political. Langmuir’s theory and study of the creation of antisemitism and attitudes of Jews by non-Jews favors the religious. By examining material culture of and about Jews by Christians, I can offer a more holistic, historical picture of attitudes of anti-Judaism and antisemitism in the High Middle Ages.

Theory:

Gavin Langmuir’s two monographs were both published in 1990. Across these two texts, he offers a bifurcation of the two terms, anti-Judaism and antisemitism. Used in concert, these books clarify his definition of nonrational anti-Judaism and irrational antisemitism. Nonrational Anti-Judaism is defined as “the total or partial opposition to Judaism—and to Jews as adherents of it—by people who accept a competing system of beliefs and practices and consider certain

³ Sally Promey, “Religion, Sensation, Materiality: An Introduction,” in *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 14.

⁴ Gavin I. Langmuir, *History, Religion, and Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), viii.

genuine Judaic beliefs and practices inferior.”⁵ These accusations often blamed Jews for the death of Jesus and a refusal to accept scripture.⁶

History, Religion, and Antisemitism, outlines these differences as well.

Antisemitism... both in its origin and in its recent most horrible manifestations, is the hostility aroused by irrational thinking about ‘Jews’...Anti-Judaism is a nonrational reaction to overcome nonrational doubts, while antisemitism is an irrational distinction between a period of religious and a period of racist hostility.⁷

The images I choose to explore will be analyzed using Gavin Langmuir’s nonrational and irrational theoretical model. I propose that Langmuir’s theoretical device be used as a tool to analyze medieval anti-Judaic and antisemitic representations of Jews in the High Middle Ages of Spanish and Iberian. Applying his historical theory to a small subset of material culture art objects, this will allow scholars and non-scholars a new way to assess and better understand anti-Judaic and antisemitic material culture produced between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries in Spanish and Iberian Europe.

Material culture studies aims to create a holistic picture of history that accounts for text as well as objects. By applying a material cultural approach to Langmuir’s theory, I can more aptly understand the bifurcation of anti-Judaism and antisemitism not only as terms but as feelings towards Jews, while also offering a way to distinguish between these attitudes in the art objects that were produced.

⁵ Gavin I. Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 57.

⁶ Langmuir, 109.

⁷ Langmuir, *History, Religion, and Antisemitism*, 275, 276.

Questions that will lead this study include: How can the bifurcation of the terms anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, when applied to a late Medieval Spain material canon, be useful in understanding the place of Jews in Christian Europe? How does the represented Jew differ (and in what ways) from the real Jew? If not all representations of Jews are anti-Judaic or anti-Semitic, how can we use those terms to differentiate types of representations of Jews?

Gavin Langmuir's theory offers a valuable way to think about and consider acts and interpretations of anti-Judaism and antisemitism while placing them in historical, cultural, political, and religious context. Therefore, my thesis is two-fold—an analytical exploration of history as well as a developed method. First, I argue that the culture in Spanish Europe in the high middle ages allowed for changing attitudes towards Jews that escalated from anti-Judaic to antisemitic. This will be demonstrated through historical events, social histories, and surviving documentation of the time. Second, by looking at artistic representations of Jews and themes of sacrifice as they pertain to Jews, Judaism, and Spanish, Christian Europe, we can use Gavin Langmuir's theoretical premise to discern whether they are representative of nonrational anti-Judaism or irrational antisemitism. By applying Gavin Langmuir's theoretical model of the nonrational and irrational to material culture, I will create an analytical tool to evaluate and question medieval representations of Jews, the impact these representations had on Spanish European Jewry, the attitudes towards Jews from both Christian and Muslim communities, and the ways in which nonrational and irrational depictions create useful categories of visual anti-Judaism and visual antisemitism.

This project is not an exhaustive overview of an artistic thematic canon. Instead, my project will utilize only a selected canon of images and objects to demonstrate how this

methodological tool can be used and applied to understand histories of visual anti-Judaism and visual anti-Semitism.

Methodology:

This project will undertake a material culture studies methodological approach. Although Material Culture studies offers both theories and methods, this project is specifically using Material Culture methodology to accompany and test Gavin Langmuir's theory. This project is not art historical, but this does not exclude art historians from providing valuable insight. At its core, the interdisciplinarity of the project will place art history and material culture studies in conversation with one another, but will not stray into art historical territory. Scholars Robin Jensen, Jeffrey Hamburger, Caroline Walker Bynum, Sara Lipton, Ruth Mellinkoff, and Debra Higgs Strickland all work within art history but cannot be excluded from a conversation regarding Material Culture Studies in Medieval Europe.

Employing a material culture methodology requires careful consideration of the objects' location and context, while also asking: where was this object made; what is the process for creation; what are the materials used; and where would people encounter this object. Alongside context, material culture studies emphasize relationality and thing-ness, discussed in detail by Sally Promey and Bjørnar Olsen, respectively.

My methodological approach focuses on the utilization of Langmuir's theories to investigate types of material culture using illuminated manuscripts produced between the 12th and 15th centuries. To complete this project, I will first employ pictorial comparison. Using this method, I will examine differences in nonrational and irrational visual depictions of Jews in Spanish and Iberian Medieval Europe. Alongside the utilization of comparison, I will offer

material studies cultural analyses that investigates the material, reproduction frequency, sensory experiences, relationality between object, viewer, producer, and consumer, as well as religious context. This will first, situate the production of the pieces, the historical, cultural, and political climate that allowed for these representations of Jews, and second, include the interactions of the material/artifacts with “users, interactions with observers, and the effect on the cultural...environment.”⁸ I will also employ a text-image analysis to examine accompanying text with objects to situate the object within its textual framework.

By combining the study of religion and material culture, I can consider the role of the researcher, the interactions between the material and the religious world, and the role of the observer(s) in their specific cultural context. Therefore, this project is not a history of images nor is it an art historical investigation about image style or form. This project situates itself in Material Culture and Religion Studies to study people and religion interacting and reacting to material culture manifested primarily in visual art objects. My method will question the representations of Jews and the way that these representations changed over time and created a context for violence. The representations of Jews depicted by Christians ignited a fiery passion that created hostile and violent circumstances for the living Jews of Medieval Christian Europe.

Contribution:

This project contributes to the fields of Material Culture and the Study of Religion because it investigates Christianity in Medieval Europe, Judaism in Christian Europe, religious hostility, interreligious violence, and the use of material culture to distort or change societal balance. It contributes also to the field of Medieval Judaism in Christian Europe because to

⁸ Richard Carp, “Material Culture,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler, n.d., 482.

understand the treatment of Jews by Christians, I first had to understand the place of Jews—culturally, politically, socially, and religiously—within a Christian European framework.

Additionally, I will also be contributing to the field of Late Medieval Material Culture studies which has been largely unexplored.

While the scope of this dissertation will be constrained by time, resources, and specific academic compliances, my hope is that this material-based analytical tool will be a way for others to interact with and engage with Medieval Judaism in Christian Europe, anti-Jewish tropes, and antisemitic pasts. Antisemitic art, propaganda, and media did not begin with the Holocaust. This analytical tool will allow people to investigate material culture, visual culture, images, and media in the Medieval Period to interact with and understand the contexts that produced the visual representations of Jews, the ramifications of those representations, and the change in representations of Jews over time as understood through the theoretical lens of the nonrational and irrational.

Chapter Outline:

Introduction: Histories of Hate

The Legacy of Pioneering Women

Theoretical Scope: Defining Key Terms

- Rationality
- Irrationality
- Anti-Judaism
- Antisemitism (decision to not hyphenate)
- Rhetoric

Thesis, Theory, Method

- Thesis
- Argument for application of Gavin Langmuir's Theory
- Argument for application of the theory to a Material Culture Methodology
- Methodologies: Context, Relationality, Material Interactions, Text-Image Analysis

Limitations

- What is accessible?
- What is the time-period? (1190-1492)
- Where are the material art objects? (Spain, Iberia, Mediterranean)
- Who (religiously, culturally, temporally) produced/created these material art objects?

Chapter 1: Medieval Material Culture, Religion, and Judaism: Material Art Objects

Defining Terms

- Material Culture
- Medieval Material Culture

Exploration of Culture

- Explanation using Material Culture theorists and Art Historians to rationalize and explain the decision to use Material Culture and Religion rather than Art History to undertake this project
- What does material culture offer that art history does not?

Primary Source Material

- Location of Source Material
- Themes in Source Material
- Rationale for Thematic Decision
- Rationale for Medium(s) chosen

Chapter 2: Rationale for Late Medieval Spanish Europe: Brief History of Medieval Spain Jewish-Christian Relations

Late Medieval Spanish History

Neighboring Faiths:⁹ Religious Relationships

- Christian-Jewish Relationship

⁹ David Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today*: (Chicago, University of Chicago Press), 2014.

- Jewish-Authoritarian Relationship
- Jewish-Muslim Relationship

Development of Folklore

- Accusations Against Jews

Spanish/Moorish Legacy

Chapter 3: Rationality

Rationality Defined by Langmuir
Defining Rationality: Psychological, Religious, and Other Sources
Rationality in Medieval Material Culture
Precedence for Retrospectively Applied Modern Ideas
Limitations and Disagreements

Chapter 4: Nonrationality

Nonrationality: Defined for Medieval Culture

- What does nonrational religious dissonance look like?
- Was this a phenomenon only found in Christian-Jewish relationships?

Visual Nonrational Anti-Judaism: Exemplified Through Material Culture Mediums

- Instances of Deicide

Significance: Nonrationality's Application

Chapter 4: Irrationality

Irrationality: Defined for Medieval Culture

Guiding Questions:

- What does irrational religious hate and/or violence look like?
- Was this only a phenomenon found in Christian-Jewish Relationships?
Jewish-Muslim Relationships?
- What are the implications for folkloric accusation as irrational v. implications of actualized violence against Jews as irrational? Are these different, and if so, how?
- Is there any truth to the myths of Jewish blood libels, ritual murders, host profanations, kidnappings, castrations, etc.? If so, what do the sources say?

Visual Irrational Antisemitism

- Ritual Murder and Blood Libel
- Child Sacrifice

Chapter 5: Visual Methodology in Practice:

Application of Visual Methodological Tool

- Differentiating between visual anti-Judaism and visual antisemitism using a criteria basis of the nonrational and the irrational
- Applicability of this model

Limitations

Guiding Questions:

- What is the baseline for examination?

- What do we do with future WWII propaganda? Is WWII deicide propaganda considered anti-Judaic and not antisemitic
- What do we do with art about Jews not created by Christians?
- What will the criticisms from the field look like?

Conclusion:

Thinking Beyond the Theoretical

-Project in practice

Concluding Remarks & Future Projects

Bibliographic Method:

The initial starting point for this bibliography came from significant courses and comprehensive exams that were relevant to my research. In 2018, I undertook an independent study with Dr. Sarah Pessin entitled “Antisemitism.” This was my first course that looked at histories and definitions of antisemitism and anti-Judaism, and this was the first course where I read Gavin Langmuir’s work. I also included resources from my four comprehensive exams: Perspectives in the Study of Religion, Religion, Art, and Media, Art History Methods, and Medieval Judaism. Additional sources were gathered from my initial reading list(s) from my undergraduate honors college thesis as well as my master’s thesis.

My project will include looking at the databases provided through both the University of Denver Library as well as the Iliff School of Theology Library. I conducted several database searches that used the following terms and phrases: *antisemitism*, *anti-Judaism*, *Gavin Langmuir*, *medieval antisemitism*, *medieval anti-Judaism*, *irrational + Langmuir*, *nonrational + Langmuir*, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism + irrational*, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism + nonrational*, *irrational antisemitism*, *nonrational anti-Judaism*, *anti-Judaism + Spain + medieval*, *antisemitism + Spain + medieval*.

In addition to the databases supplied by the two libraries, I used Google Scholar, ATLA (University of Denver), Web of Science, (University of Denver), Annual Reviews (University of Denver), Theology and Religion Online (University of Denver), and Proquest Dissertations and Theses. While using the resources I had previously compiled, I used the bibliographies of authors whose work would be influential to my project. I used Sally Promey’s endnotes and bibliography to identify key works, Gavin Langmuir’s bibliography to identify influential texts for his own research, and the bibliographies and footnotes of Sara Lipton, Ruth Mellinkoff, and Debra Higgs

Strickland. Presently, many of my resources are monographs, edited collections, or chapters in edited volumes. While there are some scholarly articles, many of the texts I will be working with will be books or chapters, specifically regarding late medieval studies.

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