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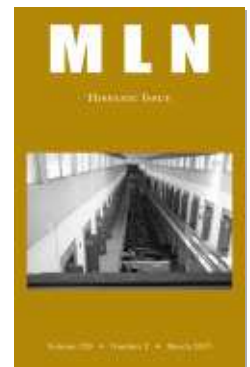
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Memory out of Line:
Hebrew Etymology in the
Roman de Brut and *Merlin*

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Michelle R. Warren

When modern scholars speak of medieval social groups, the conventions of typography constrain us to speak of *Anglo-Saxon kings, Anglo-Norman literature*, and *Judeo-Christian tradition*. We have inherited these hyphenated terms from modernist philology, and we continue to employ them because current critical discourses use hyphens to mark the places of accommodation and rupture among peoples and concepts. And although we know that medieval European cultures signified relationships between groups without such punctuation, hyphens nonetheless precondition our access to historical phenomena. By exposing how this band came to yoke together historical incommensurables, it may be possible to uncover the representation of similar processes before the hyphen.

  The history of the hyphen parallels the history of group identities in European cultural discourses. The typographical hyphen spread at the same time that explorations across the Atlantic brought Europeans into uncomfortable contact with unfamiliar peoples and cultures. This experience made the preservation of differences newly urgent for European powers that nonetheless aimed to join these new lands to their own. As the tension between the desire for unification and the fact of fragmentation coalesced into a powerful conceptual paradigm during the sixteenth century, typography underscored the mechanics of binary thought with the hyphen. In the environment of print, where the boundaries of vernacular words became increasingly

regulated and fixed,[1] the hyphen could link distinct word units
without dissolving their separate origins. The separate-but-related
powers of the hyphen correspond compellingly to the conceptual
needs of the colonizing cultures of early modern Europe. In forging
compounds, the hyphen turns previously independent entities into
fragments of a new whole. Indeed, A. Hume's definition of the
hyphen in 1620 as "a band uniting whol wordes joined in composi-
tion"[2] expresses both a typographical rule and a cultural principle. As
Europe recomposed itself in the face of new epistemologies, the unity
of the whole depended on the joining of separate groups. The visible
suture of the hyphen, however, continues to mark fractures within
ideologies of unity.

   At present, innovations in electronic media would seem to have
broken the constraints of typography, creating an environment more
akin to the medieval, in which the fluidity of word boundaries meant
that compounding did not necessarily require any special marks.[3]
Indeed, contemporary typographers are now turning to pre-print
strategies of representation for inspiration.[4] Nonetheless, the hyphen
persists in the electric environment, not only because typographical
conventions change more slowly than technology but also because
hyphenation is deeply implicated in processes of cultural and social
signification. Whereas for Hume the hyphen joins wholes, at present
the hyphen often communicates disjunction; for some, it even
indicates a complete severance of connection.[5] Isabella Furth has

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[1] The critical literature on the effects of printing is vast and growing. Marshall
McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy* is still a provocative introduction (Toronto: U of
Toronto P, 1962); M. B. Parkes offers a history focused on punctuation (but with little
discussion of the hyphen) in *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of
Punctuation in the West* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1993).

[2] "Hyphen," *Oxford English Dictionary*, eds. J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, 2nd.
ed., (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1989) 566.

[3] Although horizontal lines under words do appear in classical Greek manuscripts
to indicate compounding, medieval writing uses hyphens (*traits d'union*) to indicate
that a word continues on the next line: Edward Maunde Thompson, *Handbook of Greek
and Latin Paleography* (New York: Appleton, 1893) 72; Paul Saenger, *Space Between
Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997) 66–70. Yuri Lotman
posited a homology between the pre- and post-modern well before *postmodern* became
common critical currency: "Problems in the Typology of Culture," *Soviet Semiotics*, ed.
Daniel Lucid (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977) 213–22.

[4] Frances Butler, "New Demotic Typography: The Search for New Indices," *Visible
Language* 29 (1995): 89–111.

[5] T. Vijay Kumar, "Post-Colonial or Postcolonial? Re-locating the Hyphen," *Interrogat-
ing Post-Colonialism: Theory, Text and Context*, ed. Harish Trivedi and Meenakshi Mukherjee
(Rahtrapati Nivas, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1996) 195–202.

christened this mark of dispersion "the hyphen of ethnicity." Furth goes on to identify a relation between hyphenation and narration, explaining the current interest in "ethnic fiction" as a "clamor to see the hyphen."[6] The desire "to see" correlates to a desire to read the cultural argument implied in the typographic symbol, to remember the traumatic encounters it commemorates. Vijay Mishra identifies a corollary desire to live the hyphen, exposing the "law of the hyphen" according to which diaspora cultures "race to occupy the space of the hyphen" by adopting compound identities.[7] For both Furth and Mishra, the ethnic hyphen compels representation.

The "hyphen of ethnicity" suggests that the contemporary hyphen correlates with some of the discursive practices of medieval etymologies: both join words synchronically, without reference to time, while holding the place of a diachronic argument. While "ethnic fiction" expresses this argument in contemporary cultures, etymology often narrates the trauma of identity formation in medieval cultures. The genre of the etymological narrative captures in compressed form the essential elements of larger cultural tensions, and so provides a semiotic representation of culture through language. As a sub-set of this genre, multilingual etymologies address inter-cultural dynamics, often engaging the pains of accommodation between antagonistic groups. In this essay, I analyze the cultural valences of one kind of multilingual etymology: the attribution of Hebrew origins to several proper names in medieval French narratives. Of the three examples of Hebrew-French etymologies I have found, two concern the history of the Britons: the conversion of the Britons' English enemies in Wace's *Roman de Brut* (1155) and the defeat of their Saxon enemies in the anonymous *Estoire de Merlin* (c. 1230).[8] Both of these narratives include the beginning of Christianity as part of the Britons' history,

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[6] Isabella Furth, "Bee-e-een! Nation, Transformation and the Hyphen of Ethnicity in Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 40 (1994): 33–49; 34. W. M. Verhoeven analyzes the difference between ethnic hyphenation in Canada and the United States in "How Hyphenated Can You Get?" *Mosaic* 29.3 (1996): 97–116.

[7] Vijay Mishra, "The Diasporic Imaginary: Theorizing the Indian Diaspora," *Textual Practice* 10 (1996): 421–47; 432–33.

[8] I focus here on explicit attributions of Hebrew-language origins, and not on the *judeo-romance* etymologies that show French words influenced by Hebrew, e.g. Menahem Banitt, *L'Étude des glossaires bibliques des juifs de France au Moyen Age: Méthode et application* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences, 1967); Raphaël Levy, *Trésor de la langue des juifs français au moyen-âge* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1964); Levy, "The Use of Hebrew Characters for Writing Old French," *Mélanges de langue et de littérature du Moyen Age et de la Renaissance offerts à Jean Frappier*, vol. 2 (Geneva: Droz, 1977) 645–52.

along with some of the most famous stories associated with the legendary King Arthur of Britain. As a conquering and conquered people, the Britons embody the enduring presence of past cultures, even while the French-language narratives appropriate their history for foreign cultures. The Hebrew-French etymologies developed in these contexts recall still other inter-group encounters. They place the past in dialogue with the present, and specifically with the gradual reinterpretation of the roles of Jews in Christian culture that developed in the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The conceptual power of etymology in medieval European cultures has been influentially expressed by Ernst Robert Curtius, who declared the genre a "category of thought" and Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae sive origines* "the basic book of the Middle Ages."[9] Subsequently, a number of studies have substantiated Curtius's claims through detailed investigations of philosophy, grammar, and rhetoric.[10] Most importantly for questions of collective identities, R. Howard Bloch has formulated the privileged role of etymology in genealogical discourse. Beginning with Isidore's treatise, Bloch exposes the temporal structures that underlie medieval etymology through analyses of kinship and geography.[11] The common comparison of etymology to biography, adopted by both Derek Attridge and Nancy Streuver, further underscores the diachronic relationships mobilized in etymologies.[12] Just as genealogies represent relations between people of different times, etymologies represent the chronology of relations between words. In treatises devoted to linguistic description, etymology introduces a diachronic element into a synchronic explanation of language. For Isidore, this diachrony forms a stable unity across time, as meanings descend in single languages from originary kings, places,

[9] Ernst R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1953) 495, 496.

[10] E.g. Roswitha Klinck, *Die lateinische Etymologie des Mittelalters* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1970); Klaus Grubmüller, "Etymologie als Schlüssel zur Welt? Bemerkungen zur Sprachtheorie des Mittelalters," *Verbum et Signum*, 2 vols., eds. Hans Fromm, Wolfgang Harms, and Uwe Ruberg (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1975) 1:209–30; Mark Amsler, *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1989).

[11] R. Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983) 41–44, 54–55.

[12] Derek Attridge, "Language as History/History as Language: Saussure and the Romance of Etymology," *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History*, eds. Derek Attridge, Geoff Bennington, and Robert Young (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987) 183–211; 195; Nancy Streuver, "Fables of Power," *Representations* 4 (1983): 108–27, at 112.

or customs. The passage of time hides the original meaning, but proper etymology can recover the memory of origins.[13] In historical narrative, however, etymologies introduce an alternate and even competing diachronic reference into an already diachronic structure. This alternate memory, often drawn from beyond the scope of the main narrative, supplements the memory recorded in the primary narrative. In this way, etymologies thematize not only word formation but culture formation across time, expressing what Daniel Rosenberg has called "a rhetoric of temporality."[14]

When etymologies refer to the present, they formulate a meaningful tension between historical signification and synchronic resonance. When they address more than one language, this tension becomes dramatically cultural. Etymology can act upon culture in part because, as Streuver argues, it forces relations between the largest and smallest scale. In the manipulation of scale, etymology becomes a "fable of power."[15] According to Attridge, this same manipulation enables etymology to both confirm and unsettle ideology.[16] Multilingual etymology thus works through both time and language: it translates counter-memories from the past while appropriating the culture of antecedent languages for the use of present cultural arguments.

If etymology is a dramatic genre, as Jean Paulhan suggested,[17] then Hebrew etymologies in French narratives of British history represent a particularly riveting drama of cultural conflict. First, the linguistic relation between Hebrew on the one hand and Latin and French on the other translates the cultural relation between Jews and Christians. Unlike the unifying memorialization operated by Isidore's etymologies,

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[13] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae sive origines, IX*, ed. and trans. Marc Reydellet (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1984) 117 (ch 2, 132–35). Isidore's mode of etymological argument exemplifies Streuver's conclusion that etymology advocates "linear social cohesion" ("Fables of Power," 112); Amsler offers a detailed exposition of Isidore's etymologies (*Etymology and Grammatical Discourse*, 133–72).

[14] Daniel Rosenberg, "'New Sort of Logick and Critick': Etymological Interpretation in Horne Tooke's *The Diversions of Purley*," in *Language, Self, and Society: A Social History of Language*, eds. Peter Burke and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) 300–29, at 321–22.

[15] Streuver, "Fables of Power" 122.

[16] Attridge, "Language as History" 193, 202. Judith N. Shklar makes a similar claim for genealogy in "Subversive Genealogies," *Myth, Symbol, and Culture*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971) 129–54, at 129.

[17] Jean Paulhan, *La Preuve par étymologie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1953) 72.

Hebrew etymologies of proper names in vernacular texts commemorate a fractured origin—the Jewish presence at the origin of Christianity. Although rare, or perhaps because rare, Hebrew etymologies recall vividly the trauma that lies at the source of Christian culture. The linguistic consequences of originary trauma have been compellingly articulated in Cathy Caruth's account of Sigmund Freud's Jewish identity. Caruth concludes that Freud expresses his own trauma of leaving home by moving to English at the conclusion of a 1938 letter to his son:

> [I]n the movement from German to English, in the rewriting of the departure within the languages of Freud's text . . . we participate most fully in Freud's central insight, in *Moses and Monotheism*, that history, like trauma, is never simply one's own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas.[18]

Multilingual etymologies trace a similar movement between languages and homelands. They identify the implications of one group in the language of another, the place of one history in the formation of another. Caruth argues further that to read Freud's multilingual sentence is to "depart" from ourselves.[19] Hebrew etymologies in vernacular French histories of the Britons invite a similar kind of departure, as they remind readers of the enduring agonies of British and Christian history. The forced "departures" of Jews from England and France in the course of thirteenth century painfully materialize this conceptual movement.

The *Roman de Brut* and the *Estoire de Merlin* were written during a period of substantial change in the relations between Jews and Christians in Europe. Their references to Hebrew, however brief, are therefore culturally significant. The large body of scholarship on Jewish culture and Christian politics in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries throws into relief the contrasting function of Hebrew etymology in these two works. Between 1150 and 1250, orthodox Christian attitudes toward Jews shifted from relative toleration toward what R. I. Moore has influentially called a "persecuting society."[20] Although this shift was neither absolute nor immediate, the political

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[18] Cathy Caruth, "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History," *Yale French Studies* 79 (1991): 181–92, at 192.

[19] Caruth, "Unclaimed Experience" 192.

[20] R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950–1250* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

landscape changed substantially during this period as both the
monarchies and the Christian Church sought to consolidate their
powers.[21] In both cases, the earliest assertions of centralized authority
through legislation sought to control Jewish populations, including
Philip II's expulsion order of 1182, the decrees of the Fourth Lateran
Council of 1215, and Louis IX's *stabilimentum* of 1230. By the end of
the thirteenth century, centralized institutions had redefined the
descendents of the witnesses to Christ's Passion as dangerous antago-
nists to the idea of Christian political hegemony.[22] Wace's *Roman de
Brut*, relating British history in the mid-twelfth century while official
Christian protection of Jews endured, uses Hebrew etymology to
represent the possibility of cultural accommodation to a Norman
audience. Nearly a century later, the Hebrew etymology in the *Estoire
de Merlin* plays upon increased ambivalences toward Jews in order to
critique political centralization from the perspective of the French
aristocracy.

Wace introduces Hebrew into the Britons' history when he tells
how Augustine of Canterbury founded an abbey at Cerne in the
course of converting the English to Christianity (long after Arthur's
death). The episode is interpolated from Goscelin of St. Bertin's
eleventh-century life of Augustine (one of only two lengthy interpola-
tions that Wace makes in the narrative of his main source, Geoffrey of
Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, c. 1138).[23] By combining
Goesclin's history with Geoffrey's, Wace juxtaposes the English perse-
cution of Augustine (taken from Goscelin) with the English persecu-
tion of the Britons (taken from Geoffrey): in Goesclin's narrative,
God punishes the English, as pagans, for harassing the Christian
missionary; in Geoffrey's, the Christian Britons are punished at the
hands of their recently Christianized English enemies for denying
Augustine's episcopal primacy. In both cases, punishment falls on

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[21] Recent nuanced views of these processes include Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christians
and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 1995), David Nirenberg,
Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages (Princeton: Princeton
UP, 1996) and Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval
Christianity* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1999).

[22] Miri Rubin analyzes some of the later medieval consequences of this redefinition
in *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1999).

[23] Margaret Houk, "The Sources of the *Roman de Brut* of Wace," *University of California
Publications in English* 5 (1940–44): 161–356; at 261. Houk shows in detail how Wace
adapts Goscelin's narrative (279).

those who resist unifying authority, regardless of their religious or ethnic identity.

The differences between Geoffrey's account of Augustine's mission and Goscelin's are striking. Geoffrey follows Bede in focusing on the Christian Britons' resistance to the new ecclesiastical authority. The abbot Dinoot of Bangor refuses to help Augustine preach to the English because they are the Britons' enemies; as a result, the Saxon leaders slaughter the entire monastic population of Bangor.[24] Concentrating on the ethnic conflict between the Britons and the English, Geoffrey elides the glory of English conversion and makes Augustine shamefully responsible for the martyrdom of 1200 pious monks. In Geoffrey's narrative, then, Augustine's mission reiterates the theme of the Britons' persecution. Indeed, Ian Wood has proposed that the episode originally derived from Welsh criticism of Augustine.[25]

Goscelin's life of Augustine focuses instead on the recalcitrant English. It provides the earliest source for Augustine's persecution, and offers a Hebrew etymology in direct relation to the struggles of conversion.[26] According to Goscelin, the pagan English inhabitants of Dorchester harass Augustine and his followers by affixing fishtails to

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[24] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia regum Britanniae*, ed. Edmond Faral, *La Légende arthurienne: études et documents*, vol. 3 (Paris: Champion, 1929) 283–85 (par. 188–89); *The Historia regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth, II: The First Variant Version*, ed. Neil Wright (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1988) 178–80 (par. 188–89).

[25] Ian Wood, "The Mission of Augustine of Canterbury to the English," *Speculum* 69 (1994): 1–17; at 4. A thirteenth-century translation of Geoffrey's *Historia* into Welsh in fact includes a version of Augustine's mission that differs substantially from other accounts. Instead of narrating a Hebrew etymology, the *Brut y Brenhinedd* identifies *Cernel* as the Greek word for *secret place* (the closest Greek word with this meaning might be *keuthmón*, but the phonetic resemblance is slight at best): *Brut y Brenhinedd*, ed. and trans. John Jay Parry (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1937) 199. Moreover, only the Saxon king, not Augustine himself, reacts angrily to Dinoot's refusal (*Brut y Brenhinedd*, 200). The *Brut y Brenhinedd* thus amplifies Geoffrey's attention to ethnic differences while also modernizing Goscelin's Christian vision with reference to the sacred language of the New Testament (not the Old) (and, perhaps, setting aside the mundane possibility of a Welsh etymology derived from *carn*, "rock" [Eilert Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1960) 93]). The absence of Hebrew in the *Brut y Brenhinedd* may indicate an indigenous native tradition devoted to the sanctity and independence of British Christianity; at the very least, it overlooks the thematics of originary Christian trauma found in other sources.

[26] William of Malmesbury (c. 1125) provides a condensed account (also including the Hebrew etymology) when describing the founding of Cerne Abbey in his *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* (ed. N. E. S. A. Hamilton, *Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores*, vol 52 [London: Longman and Trübner, 1870] 185).

their backsides, and then chase them out of town. Distraught, Augustine prepares to leave for Rome to complain to the pope. God appears to him, and instructs him to remain in Britain and continue his mission. Augustine then strikes his staff in the ground where God had stood, and a fountain boils up; to commemorate the miracle, Augustine christens the site *Cernel* and builds an abbey. The pagans immediately convert. At this moment of miraculous reconciliation, Goscelin explains the Latin-Hebrew etymology of *Cernel*: in order to preserve the eternal memory of his vision of God, Augustine chose the name, of which the first syllable is Latin (from *cernendo*, seeing) and the second Hebrew (from *hel*, God).[27]

This bilingual etymology represents several reconciliations. First, the Hebrew *El* witnesses the conversion of the English, just as Jews witnessed the conversion of Christ. According to Augustine of Hippo, Jews merit tolerance because of their historical presence at the sacred origins of Christianity.[28] Like the historical Jews, the Hebrew *El* in Goscelin's narrative recalls God's presence on earth. The Hebrew etymology thus associates the memory of Augustine's encounter with the pagan English with the traumas of conversion in the time of Christ. In relation to Goscelin's own time, *Cernel* commemorates the refounding of the missionary Augustine's cult with the 1091 translation of his relics (for which Goscelin composed the *vita*). Richard Sharpe's detailed account of Goscelin's role in the reconstitution of St. Augustine's fractured community suggests that Goscelin's story of Cerne's founding responds to the recent refounding of the abbey at the same site.[29] In Goscelin's text, then, the bilingual etymology attests to the resolution of past and present conflicts. In Wace's text, this resolution may function as a fantasy of secure conversion that

[27] Goscelin, *Vita S. Augustini, Patrologia Latina* 150: 743–64, at 760. The *historia maior* version of these events is briefer but similar in outline (*Patrologia Latina* 80: 43–94, at 84).

[28] Augustine, "Tractatus adversus Judeos," *Patrologia Latina* 42: 51–64; *De Civitate Dei* (Turnholt: Brepols, 1955) 643–45; Bernard Blumenkranz, "Augustin et les juifs; Augustin et le judaïsme," *Recherches augustiniennes* 1 (1958): 225–41; Kenneth Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992) 242–45; Cohen, *Living Letters* 23–65.

[29] Richard Sharpe, "Goscelin's St. Augustine and St. Mildreth: Hagiography and Liturgy in Context," *Journal of Theological Studies* 41 (1990): 502–16. On Goscelin's use of Bede, see Fiona Gameson, "Goscelin's *Life* of Augustine of Canterbury," *St Augustine and the Conversion of England*, ed. Richard Gameson (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999) 391–409.

counters contemporary anxieties about the apostasy of converted Jews.[30]

Wace interpolates Augustine's problems in Dorchester into Geoffrey's narrative, displacing both the narrative structure and language of his sources in order to appropriate the Britons' past for the Norman present. Although Wace follows Goscelin's outline, his etymology of *Cernel* describes a detailed process of linguistic conversion. Rather than letting the Latin and Hebrew fuse together silently behind the French translation, Wace narrates the graft at length:

> Cernel cest nun que jo ai dit
> En romanz est: Deu veit u vit.
> Li clerc le poënt bien saveir,
> Cerno, cernis, ço est veeir
> E Deu ad nun en ebreu El;
> De ces dous moz est fait Cernel.
> Cerno e El sunt ajusté,
> Li uns dit Vei, l'autre dit Dé;
> Mais une lettre en est sevree,
> De la fin de Cerno ostee,
> Si est par une abscisiun
> Faite la compositiun;
> L'un est ebreu, l'autre latins.[31]

[*Cernel*, this name that I have said, in romance is: he sees or saw God. Clerics can know it well: *cerno, cernis*, that is *to see*; and God has the name in Hebrew *El*. From these two words is made *Cernel*. *Cerno* and *El* are adjusted together, the one says *I see*, the other says *God*. But one letter is severed from it, from the end of *Cerno* taken away—thus by an abscission is made the composition: the one is Hebrew, the other Latin.][32]

Wace begins by appropriating the foreign word through translation (just as he has dominated his Latin sources). By beginning with a translation, he underscores his symbolic possession of the other culture through its language. The translated word is itself linguistically double, a combination of Latin and Hebrew. With the trilingual

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[30] Kenneth Stow, "Conversion, Apostasy, and Apprehensiveness: Emicho of Flonheim and the Fear of Jews in the Twelfth Century," *Speculum* 76 (2001): 911–33, especially 930.
[31] Wace, *Le roman de Brut*, ed. Ivor Arnold, 2 vols. (Paris: Société des anciens textes français, 1938–40) vv. 13791–803.
[32] This and subsequent translations are my own; they are more literal than elegant.

knowledge of a cleric, Wace renders the form monolingual and monocultural. The translation, however, remains uncertain, as Wace hesitates between the present and past tense. Because the root *cern* expresses no time reference, it casts the act of perception out of time and so resists fixation. The double translation expresses a temporal equivocation that co-locates synchronic and diachronic perception: *Cernel* contains both past and present perception, while the etymology renders the form itself a diachronic event that begins when Latin and Hebrew are *ajusté*, and ends after *abscisiun* with a new *compositiun*.

The adjustment creates a crisis of subjectivity as well as a temporal dissonance because *cerno* (the Latin paradigm introduced by Wace) means *I see*, not *he saw*: the absence of the "*o*" of personal expression and present tense universalizes the perception of the truth of God's presence. It is precisely the individual, the speaking and seeing "*o*," that is *sevree* through the *abscisiun* that results in the *compositiun* of a new collective identity. The trauma of identity, which would now be marked by a hyphen, finds expression here in the absent "*o*." If the hyphen of ethnicity is "the mark of a wound, one inflicted in the process of signification that takes place in cultures and in wars,"[33] here, the severed letter of both Latinity and individual subjectivity marks a similar wound. Moreover, since the process of compounding has left no graphic traces, it is only visible in Wace's etymological narrative. The linguistic process of severance and abscission that composes the two words into one reflects the historical efforts of Christian culture to accommodate its Jewish origins: etymology links language and identity formation. The union of Hebrew and Latin in *Cernel*, for example, parallels the reconciliation of Old and New Testament effected by Christian exegesis. Exegesis and etymology both narrate epistemological unities; they also commemorate difference, as Wace indicates with his concluding insistence on the separate origins of the roots of *Cernel* ("L'un est ebreu, l'autre latins"). Wace's *ebreu* thus refers to the Jewish origins of Christianity in order to reinforce the plenitude of Christian epistemology. This plenitude, however, must incorporate its troubled origins and form a unity out of fracture.

Wace's explanation of Augustine's motivation for composing this word underscores the need to remember the resolution of originary trauma:

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[33] Furth, "Bee-e-een!" 43.

Ço vit e volt saint Augustins
Quant il a Cernel cest nun mist
Que remenbrance nus feïst
Que Damnedeu en cel lieu fu
E en cel lieu l'aveit veü;
Quant nus cest nun Cernel oüm
Saver e remenbrer devum
Que Damnedeu s'i demustra
E estre e parler i deigna.[34]

[This saw and wanted Saint Augustine when he put this name to Cernel: that it make us remember that God was in this place and in this place he had seen him. When we hear this name *Cernel* we should know and remember that God showed himself there and deigned to be and speak there.]

Wace shows Augustine concerned for the preservation of memory, affirming the necessity to construct mechanisms of recall. *Cernel*, then, leads directly and transparently to God, even though it is a multilingual composition in two specialized languages. It reminds "us," speakers of French, of the enduring presence of the divine. The reminder only succeeds, however, because of Wace's explanatory etymology. Without narrative exegesis, memory of the event would fail. (Likewise, narrative secures the memory of the ethnic conflicts inscribed within hyphens.) Furthermore, God only appeared because of the failed conversion in Dorchester: the sacred originates in antagonism, and endures through the memory of its resolution. Etymology contains this memory, joining history to the synchronic experience of the word in the present. The function of Hebrew in Wace's description of the Britons' history thus mirrors that of the Jewish people in Christian historiography: it reminds people of origins.

The dramatic Christian-pagan encounter at Dorchester has a peaceful Christian resolution. For the Britons, however, the drama continues, as the English massacre them in the following episode for refusing to submit to Augustine's ecclesiastical authority.[35] Like the Jews, the Britons end in exile. Wace's interpolation thus introduces an episode of reconciliation into what is otherwise an inexorable lesson in failed cultural accommodation. The complete story of

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[34] Wace, *Roman de Brut*, lines 13804–12.
[35] Wace, *Roman de Brut*, lines 13813–924.

Augustine's mission describes a successful religious accommodation (represented semiotically in the Latin-Hebrew word *Cernel*) followed by a dramatic failure of ethnic accommodation (the massacre of the Bangor monks). In Wace's narrative, this founding trauma of the converted English evokes the Jews in relation to Christianity, the Britons in relation to the English, and the English in relation to the French-speaking Normans. Since *Cernel* is after all an Insular name, its Hebrew etymology recalls the recent dramas of Anglo-Norman encounters for a twelfth-century Norman audience. Wace's narrative flatters that audience by showing the punishment of all who resist the idea of unity; the etymology reflects the desirable success of a seamless unification.[36]

Wace's expression of linguistic and cultural accommodation through Hebrew also responds to the tradition of Jews' protected status within Christian culture. In eleventh- and early twelfth-century French lands, forms of accommodation included relationships with rabbinical scholars in which Parisian theologians (particularly at the school of St. Victor) sought to deepen their knowledge of biblical texts. Andrew of St. Victor, for example, employed extensive Jewish exegesis, while Stephen Harding "corrected" the Cistercian Bible by comparing it to Hebrew texts.[37] And in urban settings, especially in Rouen, Troyes, and Paris, social and economic contacts with Jews were relatively common.[38] These interactions represent the last vestiges of what Kenneth Stow has referred to as an equilibrium between the protection of Jews and their restriction. As anxieties over conversion and the threat of apostasy grew after 1096, the idea of restriction and even persecution became more widespread.[39] In the late twelfth century,

[36] A similar process colors the Hebrew etymology of another French text with Anglo-Norman connections, Philippe de Thaün's *Bestiaire*. In the prologue, Philippe claims that Alice, queen of England, owes her name to a Hebrew word meaning "praise of God" (E oëz de sun num / Que en ebreu truvum: /Aaliz sis nuns est; /Loënge de Dé est / En ebreus en verté / Aaliz, *laus* de Dé) (ll. 13–18). Like Wace, Philippe draws on Hebrew's sacred prestige to exalt both his patroness and his own labors of translation.

[37] Gilbert Dahan, *Les Intellectuels chrétiens et les juifs au moyen âge* (Paris: Cerf, 1990) 273–74; Aryeh Grabois, "The *Hebraica veritas* and Jewish-Christian Intellectual Relations in the Twelfth Century," *Speculum* 50 (1975): 613–34, at 620–24, 627–28; Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P 1964) 336–55.

[38] Dahan, *Intellectuels chrétiens* 229–37.

[39] Stow, "Conversion" 919–21. Stow distinguishes carefully between theological and legal thought of the presence of Jews in Christian societies. On the earlier history of these relations, see D. Malkiel, "Jewish-Christian Relations in Europe, 840–1096," *Journal of Medieval History* 29 (2003): 55–83.

the drama of failed accommodation was played out in the first expulsion of Jews from French royal lands in 1182. In this context, Wace's *absciciun* would no longer evoke accommodation but rather cultural separation, as the *lettre sevree* becomes the letter of the Jew, finally *ostee*, ousted, from royal lands. The effort to complete this severance will continue throughout the later Middle Ages, but by 1240 the memorial status of the Jewish people had already been radically reconfigured by rationalist theology, economic policy, and Hebrew philology. The burning of the Talmud at Paris in the 1240s represents the literal severance of the letter in this process, as Christians destroyed Hebrew books in an effort to eradicate antagonistic texts.[40]

Not surprisingly, the consolidation of exclusionary judgments also surfaces in contemporary French vernacular literature. A number of the examples that have been analyzed recently originate in or near the court of Champagne.[41] Since the *Estoire de Merlin* was probably conceived and read in this same milieu,[42] its Hebrew etymology can be interpreted in relation to the particular history of the Champenois Jews. This context also suggests a possible link with the controversial "judaizing" interpretations of Chrétien de Troyes's *Conte de graal*. Urban T. Holmes and Amelia Klenke proposed to read the *Conte de graal* as an appeal for toleration in relation to the conversion of Jews, an appeal directed at Philip of Flanders.[43] Although some of the direct correlations with Jewish ritual proposed by Holmes and Klenke are difficult to substantiate, their general thesis usefully locates Jewish culture in relation to the development of French romance narrative—which is of course entirely separate from identifying Chrétien himself as a converted Jew.[44]

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[40] *Le Brûlement du Talmud à Paris, 1242–44*, ed. Gilbert Dahan (Paris: Cerf, 1999).

[41] Rubin, *Gentile Tales* 8–16; Maureen Boulton, "Anti-Jewish Attitudes in Twelfth-Century French Literature," *Jews and Christians in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. Michael A. Singer and John Van Engen (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2001) 234–54.

[42] Ferdinand Lot, *Étude sur le Lancelot en prose* (Paris: Champion, 1954) 140–51; Jean Frappier, *Étude sur La mort le roi Artu* (Geneva: Droz, 1972) 22–23.

[43] Urban T. Holmes and Amelia Klenke, *Chrétien, Troyes, and the Grail* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1959). Most critics reject outright the very idea of a Jewish connection; e.g. Jean-Charles Huchet, "Le Nom et l'image: De Chrétien de Troyes à Robert de Boron," *The Legacy of Chrétien de Troyes*, eds. Norris J. Lacy, Douglas Kelly, and Keith Busby, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988) 2:1–16.

[44] Sarah Kay has recently offered a thorough reconsideration of the provocatively named "Christian from Troyes" ("Who Was Chrétien de Troyes?," *Arthurian Literature* 15 [1997]: 1–35). Kay mostly dismisses the idea that "Chrétien" refers to a converted Jew (16n54, 20n69), while also arguing that the name does embed a Christian presence.

From its earliest episodes, the Arthurian prose cycle engages Hebrew and the historical origins of Christianity. The cycle's fictional chronology begins with the Crucifixion, narrated in the *Estoire del saint graal.* In fact, the opening segment presents the entire cycle as a translation from a book written by the hand of the Savior, a decidedly heterodox idea that the narrator later makes explicit.[45] Although the narrator does not specify the language of this book, pronouncements originating from God can be associated with the first sacred language, Hebrew (Bloch cites a long list of authors who affirm the originary status of Hebrew[46]). This book, translated into French, begins just after the Crucifixion with the story of Joseph of Arimathea. As Joseph embarks on his mission to settle a new land, his son Josephé witnesses an image of Christ:

> Et chil hom entour qui li angele estoient, si avoit escrit enmi le front en ebrieu letres blanches qui disoient: "En cheste samblanche venrai jou jugier toutes choses au felon jour espoentable." Ensi disoient les letres.[47]

> [And this man, around whom the angels were, had written in the middle of his forehead in Hebrew white letters that said: "In this semblance I will come to judge all things on the fatal dreadful day." So said the letters.]

This Hebrew writing functions as a sign of the sacred, manifesting the direct word of God. The white letters merge with the semblance of God Himself in a prophecy of the end of time. As reported by the narrator, the prophecy introduces an irrecoverable gap between God's sacred Hebrew expression and its human understanding in French. The repeated affirmations of the letters' speech ("qui disoient," "ensi disoient") draw attention to this gap while apparently trying to close it through translation.

The *Estoire de Merlin* carries on the Britons' sacred history with the birth of Merlin and the creation of a new sacred text, dictated by Merlin to the priest Blaise. The celestial cycle will be completed in the *Queste del saint graal* with the arrival of Galahad; the terrestrial line of history develops through Arthur and his knights in the *Estoire de Merlin*, the *Livre de Lancelot*, and the *Mort le roi Artu*. Within this line, Hebrew makes a surprising appearance as Arthur fights to subdue the rebel kings who refuse his rule. In the midst of battle, and recovering

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[45] *L'estoire del saint graal*, ed. Jean-Paul Ponceau, 2 vols. (Paris: Champion, 1997) 21, 257–59.
[46] Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies* 39–40.
[47] *Estoire del saint graal* 73.

from the stun of a particularly hard blow, Arthur unsheathes his sword, which the narrator identifies in a brief aside:

> & ce fu cele espee quil ot prinse el perron. Et les lettres qui estoient escrites en lespee disoient quele auoit non escalibor & cest .j. non ebrieu qui dist en franchois trenche fer & achier & fust si disent les lettres voir si comme vous orres el conte cha en arriere.[48]

> [And this was the sword that he had taken from the stone. And the letters that were written on the sword said that it had the name *Escalibor*. And this is a Hebrew name that means in French *cuts iron and steel and wood*, and the letters tell the truth as the story will show you hereafter.]

The translation of Hebrew in the etymology provokes an equivocation, as three ideas (cutting iron and steel, as well as wood) are introduced to translate the one word. As if to defend this multiplicity, the narrator invokes an unspecified subsequent narrative ("en arriere") as guarantor of the etymology's truth.

In contrast to the sacred contexts of the *Roman de Brut* and the *Estoire del saint graal*, Hebrew appears here in the political context of battle. While in the *Roman de Brut* Augustine arrives in Britain after Arthur's death and faces the challenge of religious conversion, the battle here ensues from Arthur's need to convert political allies at the very beginning of his reign. And, while Wace's Hebrew refers to God and designates a permanent topographic location (the spring at Cerne Abbey), the *Estoire de Merlin* attaches Hebrew to a mobile and aggressive instrument of war. The multivalence of the weapon mirrors the new instability of Hebrew and Jews. Here, the narrator's *non ebrieu* encapsulates references to a range of ambivalent relations that together challenge the stability of centralized authority. *Ebrieu* disturbs categories of judgment by placing a sign of oppositional culture in the hands of the arbiter of official culture, thereby contributing to the Arthurian cycle's challenge to strong central authority.

Escalibor's Hebrew etymology seems to be an invention of this redactor. Familiarity and even knowledge of Hebrew would not have been hard to come by in Champagne, where the rabbinical school of

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[48] *L'estoire de Merlin*, ed. Oskar Sommer, *The Vulgate Version of Arthurian Romances*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1908) 94; a slightly different version is edited in *Le livre du graal*, ed. Daniel Poirion (Paris: Gallimard, 2001) 789. I discuss this episode more briefly, and to rather different ends, in *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain, 1100–1300* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000) 192–95.

Rashi had flourished in Troyes since the eleventh century. Hebrew-French glossaries were widely available in the first half of the thirteenth century, and texts written in French with Hebrew characters are known.[49] Moreover, shared knowledge of French facilitated scholarly relations between Christians and Jews.[50] Indeed, Curt Leviant has suggested directly that the writer of the *Estoire de Merlin* had some knowledge of the Hebrew language because of his proximity to monastic libraries where Hebrew texts survived.[51] A French writer acquainted with a Hebrew-French or Hebrew-Latin wordlist may have perceived a phonetic resonance between *chereb* (one of the Old Testament words for *cutting instrument*, variously translated as *sword, dagger, knife* or any other sharp instrument[52]) and *Escalibor*. Alternatively, someone familiar with the French glosses of Rashi's commentaries might have encountered the form *calibs* as a translation for *acier* (steel).[53] Since *calibs* does not otherwise occur as an Old French word,[54] this gloss might have been understood as a transliteration of Hebrew rather than as a translation and so suggested the idea that *Escalibor* is related to a Hebrew word.

Of course, constructing *Escalibor* as a transliteration of a Hebrew word that describes the action of a sword, while perhaps not entirely spurious, does overlook the evident Latin root of *calibs* and *Escalibor*: *chalyb*, a poetic Latin word for *steel*.[55] Probably adapting this form, Geoffrey of Monmouth calls Arthur's sword *Caliburn*, as do many of

[49] Banitt, *Étude* 191; Banitt, "Les *Poterim*," *Revue des études juives* 125 (1966): 21–33; Mayer Lambert and Louis Brandin, *Glossaire hébreu-français du XIIIᵉ siècle: recueil de mots hébreux bibliques avec traduction française* (1905; reprint, Geneva: Slatkine, 1977); Susan Einbinder, "The Troyes Laments: Jewish Martyrology in Hebrew and Old French," *Viator* 30 (1999): 201–30. Colette Sirat reproduces images from some of these manuscripts in *Hebrew Manuscripts of the Middle Ages*, ed. and trans. Nicholas de Lange (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) fig. 4, 37, 95.

[50] Banitt, *Étude* 195–96, 203–05.

[51] Curt Leviant, ed. and trans., *King Artus: A Hebrew Arthurian Romance of 1279* (New York: Ktav, 1969) 79.

[52] James Strong, "A Concise Dictionary of the Words of the Hebrew Bible," *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (1890; reprint, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986) 1–169; 56.

[53] David Blondheim, *Les Gloses françaises dans les commentaires talmudiques de Raschi*, vol. 2 (Paris: Champion, 1937) 48; Leo Spitzer, review of Américo Castro, *Glosarios latino-españoles de la edad media*, *Modern Language Notes* 53 (1938): 122–46; 128.

[54] Frederic Godefroy has no entry related to this form (*Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française* [Paris: Viewig, 1881–1902]), nor do Adolf Tobler and Erhard Lommatzsch (*Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch* [Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1925–1989]).

[55] P. G. W. Glare, ed., *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (New York: Oxford UP, 1982); Ronald E. Latham, ed., *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* (London: Oxford UP, 1975–).

those who translate his text into French and English. William of
Malmesbury in fact offers a Latin etymology for *Caliburn* in his
Polyhistor.[56] Although the prefix "*es*" may have obscured the relation
between *Escalibor* and *caliburn* or *calibs*, the prefix is common in Old
French[57] and should not have caused difficulties for a French writer.
Given the plausible availability of several explanations for the etymol-
ogy of *Escalibor*, the preference for Hebrew and the invention of the
etymology itself suggest a strategic use of linguistic history to com-
ment on cultural history.

In the first half of the thirteenth century, such a choice engenders
ambivalence in several registers. First, the Hebrew language itself
represents both the divine and the diabolical. On the one hand, both
Christians and Jews revered Hebrew as a sacred tongue, the original
human language according to Isidore and one of the three sacred
languages (along with Greek and Latin).[58] Christian theologians even
argued that several Hebrew characters literally resemble the Trinity.[59]
Moreover, as the *Estoire del graal* shows, Hebrew was considered the
language of God. Indeed, Hebrew characters mark the portals of
some churches, inscribed as sacred signs of the path to salvation.[60]
The Hebrew etymology thus reminds the audience of the sword's own
sacred role as the sign of Christ's direct election of the rightful king.[61]
The narration of the etymology in the pitch of battle recalls the divine
sanction of Arthur's military success.

At the same time, however, Christians associated Hebrew with evil.
Many believed that Jews practiced black magic in order to destroy
them, and they treated Hebrew writing itself with great suspicion.[62]
Christians frequently associated Jews with the devil, and Judaism with

[56] *Polyhistor: A Critical Edition*, ed. Helen Testroet Ouellette (Binghamton: Center for
Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1982) 62. I thank Hugh Thomas for bringing
this reference to my attention.

[57] René Louis, "Le Préfixe inorganique *es-* dans les noms propres en ancien français,"
Festgabe Ernst Gamillscheg (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1952) 66–76.

[58] Isidore, *Etymologiae* 31, 33 (ch 1, 1–7); Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies* 39–41;
Dahan, *Intellectuels chrétiens* 239–40.

[59] Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews* 96–97, 133.

[60] William Chester Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews: From Philip Augustus to the
Last Capetians* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1989) 15.

[61] *Estoire de Merlin* 81–82; *Le livre du graal* 759.

[62] Jordan, *French Monarchy* 16; Ruth Mellinkoff, "Hebrew and Pseudo-Hebrew Letter-
ing," *Outcasts: Signs of Otherness in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages* (Berkeley:
U of California P, 1993) 1:97–108.

Satanism.[63] Hebrew thus represents a malevolent attack on the sacred, and the strange threat of the foreigner who cannot be understood or assimilated. The sword's own demonic potential is unleashed soon after Arthur gives it to Gawain. With Escalibor in hand, Gawain slaughters his fellows on the steps of St. Stephen's; eventually, the knights flee Gawain, crying out that a devil has been loosed from hell.[64] Contaminated by demons, Gawain not only destroys the very foundation of social order by killing other Arthurian knights, he blasphemes by murdering them in front of the sacred portals. This bloody episode underscores the sword's literal status as a fatally sharp instrument, capable of indiscriminate and even diabolical destruction. The Hebrew definition of *Escalibor* thus demonizes the name at the same time that it sanctifies it, introducing ambivalence into the linguistic form.

Practical knowledge of this powerful language also engenders ambivalence because it both disrupts and extends the powers of the Church. Hebrew challenged orthodoxy because comparisons among different texts of the Bible promoted changes to the Latin text. The authority of Christian truth, however, rested on the immutability of this Latin text. As early as the eleventh century, the threat of Hebrew philology was registered in Gilbert Crispin's *Disputatio Iudei et Christiani*, where the interlocutors debate the relative authority of the Hebrew and Latin Bibles.[65] Rufinus and other canonists respond to the threat of philology when they assert that the available text of the Hebrew Bible is corrupt, and therefore useless for the understanding of Scriptures.[66] Rufinus's denigration of the *hebraica veritas* (that is, the truth of the Hebrew Bible) engages directly with Hugh of St. Victor's declaration of the superiority of Hebrew texts over Greek, and Greek over Latin.[67] Ecclesiastical decrees against Christian Hebraism also react to the disturbing potential of biblical correction. In 1198, for

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[63] Raoul Glaber, *Patrologia Latina* 142: 657–59; Dahan, *Intellectuels chrétiens* 520–27; J. Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1943).

[64] *Estoire de Merlin* 330; *Le livre du graal* 1340.

[65] *Patrologia Latina* 159: 1005–36, at 1026–28.

[66] Jeremy Cohen, "Scholarship and Tolerance in the Medieval Academy: The Study and Evaluation of Judaism in European Christendom," *Essential Papers in Judaism and Christianity in Conflict: From Late Antiquity to the Reformation*, ed. Jeremy Cohen (New York: New York UP, 1991) 310–41, at 319.

[67] Hugh of St. Victor, "Adnotationes elucidatoriae in Pentateuchon," *Patrologia Latina* 175: 30–85, at 32.

example, the Cistercian General Chapter sentenced a "judaized" monk to correction at Clairvaux, and forbade the study of Hebrew with Jewish masters.[68] In 1231, Pope Gregory IX warned theologians in Paris of the dangerous distraction of Hebrew study, later prosecuting Jews apparently because some of them were instructing Christians in Hebrew.[69] Because the Hebrew etymology of *Escalibor* implies Christian Hebraism, it suggests a similar challenge to centralized authority.

But again, Hebrew falls into the category of ambivalence because by the second quarter of the thirteenth century, the friars, and especially the Dominicans, actively cultivated Hebrew language skills in order to support the hegemony of the Latin Church.[70] In a sense, the friars radicalized Odo's recommendation in the *Ysagoge in Theologiam* (c. 1140) that Christians learn Hebrew as a defense against Jewish deception.[71] They preached conversion to Jews, and organized debates of Jewish exegesis in order to expose its errors (most famously at the trial of the Talmud in Paris in 1240). These missionizing efforts aimed explicitly to eradicate the heterodox faith.[72] Practically, then, Hebrew supports the extension of the Latin Church's hegemony at the same time that it has the capacity to disrupt doctrinal authority.

Hebrew leads ultimately to Jews themselves, as the language is almost completely coextensive with the social group in this case.[73] Like the Hebrew language, the Jewish people are constructed ambivalently by the Christian Church. Indeed, Kenneth Stow has characterized the life of the Jews of Western Europe during the thirteenth century as "a state of existential ambivalence."[74] On the

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[68] Grabois, "The *Hebraica veritas*" 629; Dahan, *Intellectuels chrétiens* 276.

[69] Walter Pakter, *Medieval Canon Law and the Jews* (Ebelsbach: Rolf Gremer, 1988) 71.

[70] Cohen, "Scholarship" 326; Dahan, *Intellectuels chrétiens* 258–63.

[71] Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews* 94–96.

[72] Robert Chazan, *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1989); *Medieval Jewry in Northern France: A Political and Social History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1973) 124–33.

[73] The introduction of the etymology in the *Estoire de Merlin* ("cest un non ebrieu") in fact resembles a common Latin formula for citing a Hebrew source, "in Hebraeo est;" the formula often serves as a synonym for "the Jews" themselves (Herman Hailpern, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars* [Pittsburg: U of Pittsburg P, 1963], 107; Rebecca Moore, *Jews and Christians in the Life and Thought of Hugh of St. Victor* [Atlanta: Scholars P, 1998], 84–85).

[74] Stow, *Alienated Minority* 241. See also Cohen on the "hermeneutical Jew" (*Living Letters* 313–89).

one hand, the medieval Church followed Augustine of Hippo and considered Jews a protected social group. The popes routinely renewed the bull known as *Sicut Judeis*, which articulated the principle of papal protection. In the early thirteenth century, Innocent III strengthened the bull by making its terms of protection more specific.[75] At the same time, however, Jews were considered dangerous outsiders, and their persecution increased after 1200. The Church sought greater social control over Jews with several decrees at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, including the requirement that Jews wear distinguishing clothing.[76] Although not initiated as a punitive measure and not widely enforced, this so-called "badge" could make Jews more visible as a separate group, and it ultimately facilitated their identification as an oppositional, alienated sector of society.[77] Eventually, segregation orders became common in edicts concerning Jews, and Louis IX ordered enforcement of the badge in the royal domains in 1269.[78] These theological maneuvers rendered Jews integral yet alien to the fabric of Christian culture.

This theological ambivalence gave way to determined social displacement in the course of the thirteenth century. New theological arguments positioned Jews as a literal *impedimentum* to social unity;[79] their very existence was increasingly seen as undermining the foundation of the Christian polity. Concurrently, legislation against usury initiated between 1223 and 1235 reduced dramatically Jews' traditional economic value to Christians.[80] The expansion of urban economies also displaced their formerly vital role in the marketplace. As a result, Jews became less and less necessary to the practical functioning of society and more vulnerable to social pressures.[81] Furthermore, increased knowledge of Jewish traditions, facilitated through Hebraic study, exposed the gap between current Jewish

[75] Solomon Grayzel, "The Papal Bull *Sicut Judeis*," *Essential Papers in Judaism and Christianity in Conflict: From Late Antiquity to the Reformation*, ed. Jeremy Cohen (New York: New York UP, 1991) 231–59.

[76] Stow, *Alienated Minority* 247–51; Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982); Edward A. Synan, *The Popes and the Jews in the Middle Ages* (New York: Macmillan, 1965) 103–6.

[77] Stow, *Alienated Minority* 238.

[78] Chazan, *Medieval Jewry* 149.

[79] Stow, *Alienated Minority* 235–38.

[80] Chazan, *Medieval Jewry* 113; Emily Taitz, *The Jews of Medieval France: The Community of Champagne* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994) 147–81.

[81] Chazan, *Medieval Jewry* 101, 138–39.

practices and those described in the ancient sources,[82] thus depriving Jews of their authenticity as historical witnesses to Christian truth. In a variety of ways, the spirit of protection weakened and persecution increased.

For a Champenois audience, the role of Jews in mediating aristocratic relations with the French monarchy may have had a further impact on the meaning of *un non ebrieu* in the *Estoire de Merlin*. In the thirteenth century, the Capetian kings Philip II, Louis VIII, and Louis IX consolidated their political authority, in part by legislating Jewish social roles. As Stow has observed, "Kings . . . used their authority over Jews to widen powers over major vassals."[83] Philip began his centralizing efforts early in his reign, and expressed his control of the counties most directly and most bloodily against Champagne in the 1191 massacre of the Jews of Bray-sur-Seine.[84] The resistance of both Brittany and Champagne to the king's Jewish policies further supports the idea of the Jews as a distinct locus of contested sovereignty.[85] These two counties had strong traditions of local autonomy, and both produced Arthurian narratives that problematize relations between lords and their vassals.

The Champenois rulers succeeded for a time in maintaining their sovereignty with respect to Jews, even as they were increasingly subjugated to the monarchy in other areas. Jews are the subject of the mutual decrees that grant the county the greatest autonomy with respect to the king: Philip, for example, agreed to respect the count's sovereignty in an agreement of 1198 that established the non-transferability of jurisdiction over Jews.[86] And Emily Taitz has suggested that only Blanche's retention of control of the Champenois Jews kept her from a complete capitulation to Philip when she became regent in 1201.[87] When Philip sought stricter measures

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[82] Cohen, "Scholarship" 324.

[83] Stow, *Alienated Minority*. 278. On Philip in particular, see John W. Baldwin, *The Government of Philip Augustus: Foundations of French Royal Power in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1986) 230–33.

[84] Chazan, *Medieval Jewry* 69–70. Sophia Menache shows in further detail the Jews' role in the centralization of the monarchy in the thirteenth century: "The King, the Church, and the Jews: Some Considerations on the Expulsions from England and France," *Journal of Medieval History* 13 (1987): 223–36.

[85] Jordan, *French Monarchy* 99.

[86] Chazan, *Medieval Jewry* 75; Jordan, *French Monarchy* 38–39, 69; Gavin Langmuir, "'Judei nostri' and the Beginning of Capetian Legislation," *Traditio* 16 (1960): 203–69; 210–11.

[87] Taitz, *Jews of Medieval France* 150.

against Jews in 1222, Thibaut IV exercised his sovereignty as count by not following the king's policy;[88] Thibaut and his mother Blanche then issued their own agreement, allowing Jews to purchase their liberation.[89] Thibaut also carefully preserved his sovereignty in relation to the towns of Champagne by retaining his jurisdiction over urban Jews when he dispensed town charters. In later periods, the municipalities contested these agreements as they sought to define their own jurisdictional rights against those of both the king and the count.[90]

The negotiation of Louis VIII's *stabilimentum* in 1223 marks a turning point in Champenois sovereignty. For the first time, Gavin Langmuir argues, royal legislation sought to suppress rather than merely regulate Jewish lending activities—and Thibaut refused to recognize this expansion of royal jurisdiction.[91] In theory, the *stabilimentum* regulated all French Jews; all the French lords signed it, except Thibaut.[92] By withholding his signature, Thibaut defined his territory as a separate legal system. The wealthy Jews of nearby Dampierre (where the king's decree was in effect) recognized the fiscal and social advantages of Thibaut's resistance and sought to relocate to Champagne. Their efforts to avoid royal interference in their affairs provoked a further crisis of jurisdictional authority between the lords and the king.[93] Certainly Thibaut resisted the *stabilimentum* because of his own recent agreement with the Champenois Jews, but the success of the resistance demonstrates that relations with Jews comprised a special aspect of relations with the king, emblematic of general principles of relative sovereignty.[94]

The *stabilimentum* touched the count's fiscal as well as political interests, as he was deeply in debt to the king's Jews. In 1224, Louis VIII required him to pay his debts to Jews under the terms of the *stabilimentum* and arranged a payment schedule. This assertion of authority was the beginning of the end for Champenois autonomy: in 1230 the count signed Louis IX's general order concerning Jews

[88] Jordan, *French Monarchy* 88.
[89] Taitz, *Jews of Medieval France*, 166; Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century, 1198–1254* (1933; reprint, New York: Hermon Press, 1966) 351–56.
[90] Chazan, *Medieval Jewry* 140, 159–60; Taitz, *Jews of Medieval France* 179.
[91] Langmuir, "Judei nostri" 215, 220.
[92] Jordan, *French Monarchy* 97
[93] Chazan, *Medieval Jewry* 107; Taitz, *Jews of Medieval France* 167–68.
[94] Jordan, *French Monarchy* 98–99.

along with all the other lords.[95] As Langmuir has shown in detail, 1230 marks a general turning point in the legal status of the Jews as a distinct category of law—and until Thibaut signed, the law did not apply to Champagne.

Since the *Estoire de Merlin* was written between 1230 and 1250, this capitulation of jurisdiction over Jews provides a revealing immediate context for the impact of *un non ebrieu* for an aristocratic Champenois audience. On the one hand, Jews represent part of the county's historical resistance to royal jurisdiction. On the other hand, they show the count indebted and subjugated to the king, his autonomy eroded (much like the Jews'). The Hebrew sword thus asserts aristocratic autonomy, striking against the very kingship of the man who carries it; it also testifies to the erosion of comital sovereignty, and the king's power to successfully assert jurisdictional authority over his vassals. Narratively, the Hebrew sword is placed in Arthur's hand just as he begins to consolidate his own power over rebellious lords. It is the instrument that can create that power (as the Jews did for Philip) or resist it (as the Jews did for the counts): Escalibor and the Jews are both instruments in the contest of royal authority.

Jewish readers may have identified with the challenge presented by the *Estoire de Merlin* and other French narratives. In the same period, the Rabbi Judah of Paris (1166–1244) forbade Jews to read "tales of battle written in the vernacular."[96] The Rabbi does not explain his reasons, but the prohibition attests to the popularity of vernacular literature with Jewish readers, who may have perceived the narratives as ideologically compatible with other forms of resistance to hegemony. The translation of the *Estoire de Merlin* itself into Hebrew in 1279 afforded Jews direct access to these tales of battle in a form that eliminates Christian references and accentuates Jewish parallels.[97] The translation "judaizes" several fragments from the prose cycle both culturally and linguistically—although it does not include any episodes with Escalibor.

All of the linguistic, social, and political relations compressed in the Hebrew etymology of Escalibor fall into the category of ambivalence: the language is revered yet feared; Jews themselves are a necessary yet dangerous element of society; in politics, they attest to

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[95] Jordan, *French Monarchy* 101, 133.
[96] Cited in Leviant, *King Artus* 78.
[97] Leviant, *King Artus* 61–72.

aristocratic autonomy as well as subjugation. The Hebrew etymology "judaizes" Escalibor and inaugurates a reign of ambivalence: the sword guarantees Arthur's rule at the same time that it condemns him; it is an unreliable artifact that stands for both legitimacy and transgression. Later in the Arthurian cycle, Galahad (and his sword) reconcile this ambivalence—against Arthur. The avatar of Christian chivalry and direct descendent of the biblical David, Galahad embodies the redemption of *Judeo* in *Christian.* Likewise, he carries a formerly Jewish sword, redesigned and resignified as a recuperation of the Old by the New.[98] When Galahad accomplishes the quest for the Grail with this sword at his side, he establishes the celestial order in opposition to the earthly, Arthurian order. This opposition is signified partly through Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament and of the earliest historical period narrated in the prose cycle itself. Escalibor's own Hebrew etymology draws the sword into this symbolic matrix of anti-Arthurianism. In this way, the "judaized" Escalibor represents the fragility of the Arthurian order that it defends. It represents, in a word, the hyphen of ambivalence.

The Hebrew etymologies of both the *Roman de Brut* and the *Estoire de Merlin* conjure memories of originary trauma in the midst of narratives of conflict. They thus forge relations between the linguistic scale of word histories and the human scale of cultural history. The manipulation of relations between these two scales establishes etymology, especially multilingual etymology, as a contestatory genre—a discursive form that locates the past in and against the present, expressing cultural relations in compressed time. For a Norman audience, for example, the memory of Augustine's vision recalls English and Welsh submission to their own prelates: the memory of originary discord here legitimizes more recent extensions of hegemonic powers. The etymology of Arthur's sword, by contrast, attests to the unstable negotiation of similar powers for an aristocratic audience mindful of the erosion of its own authority by a strengthened monarchy. In both cases, the foreign language of the etymology (Hebrew) shadows an equally foreign proper name (an Insular place called *Cernel* and a weapon named *Escalibor*). The etymologies doubly witness the usefulness of an alien *elsewhere* in the formation of a coherent *here.*

[98] Warren, *History on the Edge* 213–16.

The Hebrew etymologies deployed in the *Roman de Brut* and the *Estoire de Merlin* demonstrate that identity conceptions depend in no small part on the mechanics as well as the metaphorics of representation. Etymologies and hyphens both memorialize the making and breaking of historical bonds. Before and after the hyphen of mechanical typography (in the Middle Ages and in the present), narrative fills the gap between the elements of composition, meditating on history's graphic sutures and severed letters.[99]

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