AS students of medieval literature know, the coin clipping Jew is a stock character in late medieval depictions of greed. Consider the claim made by Coveteise in the late fourteenth-century poem *Piers Plowman*.

I learned among Lumbardes a lesson, and of Jewes
To weye pens with a peis, and pare the heyeste
B V. 238–91

[I learned among Lombards and Jews a lesson:
To weigh pennies with a pennyweight, and clip down the heaviest]

This was written roughly ninety years after Edward I expelled the last of his Jews from England, but it is typical of an idea about the way Jews handled coins that was believed by Englishmen who lived their entire lives without meeting any real Jews. It was the remarkable persistence of such thinking, and its ready availability as a literary motif, that first captured my interest. This idea arose and took hold during a period when government documentation of its own activities increased dramatically, during a period when the value of the English penny was thought to be threatened, when the physical appearance of the penny was changed. The change was at least partially a direct response to real or imagined clipping by Jews, and it was discussed in those terms in a rich variety of surviving texts, ranging from monastic chronicles to rabbinic responsa. The origins of this way of thinking in the mid thirteenth century, around the time of the change from short cross to long cross pennies, provide a glimpse of the almost lost cultural history of medieval English coins.

What first struck me was the divergence of the chroniclers’ accounts from other forms of the historical record. Some chroniclers express concern about the state of the coinage in years when administrative documents and numismatic evidence suggest that it was sound. Although in a majority of cases this concern is expressed in a brief reference, Matthew Paris links it explicitly to accusations against foreigners and Jews.

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1. *Piers Plowman: The B Version, Will’s Visions of Piers Plowman, Do-Well, Do-Better and Do-Best*, edited by George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 320–1. The actual mechanics of clipping are not entirely clear, but some understanding may be gleaned from the vocabulary used to describe the process. In medieval Latin the usual words are *tonsura* or *retonsura*, shearing, shaving, replacing classical Latin *cuta*, cut, mutilated, circumcized. In medieval Hebrew coin clipping is called *gezzazah* (shearing), *giluah* (shaving) and *pesil* (which means both carving and invalidating). At least in the case of the near-universal clipping down of 1279 the actual quantity of metal removed from each penny was minute – 0.3 grains (0.0194 grams), a piece quite a bit smaller than the head of a pin. It seems likely that thin shavings were pared off the edges of the coins. Such a reduction would have been invisibly minute, detectable only by weighing.

A brief look at thirteenth-century monetary theory will illustrate what was at stake in complaints about clipping. A universally available authority was Isidore of Seville’s Etymologies. Before 636 Isidore wrote: ‘Moneta appellata est quia monet ne qua fraus in metallo uel in pondere fiat. Nomisma est solidus aureus uel argentous, qui ideo nomisma dicitur quia nominibus principum effigiis que signatur . . . In nomismate tria quaeruntur: metallum, figura et pondus. Si ex his aliquid defuerit, nomisma non erit.’

Following Isidore, Innocent III (died 1216) defined a sound currency as a piece of precious metal bearing a stamp which certified, under the authority of the prince, that it was of fixed weight and fineness. This definition entered canon law, and was cited in 1265, when Gérard d’Abbeville responded to questions about Louis IX’s plan to demonetize the English pennies on Biblical verses and Gratian’s Decretum, he argued that a king had the right to manipulate the currency for a profit, and to impose his monetary policy on lay and cleric alike, so long as his decisions were in the public interest (propter utilitatem publicam).

This echoed an assumption so central to people’s thinking about money that it was, in fact, rarely enunciated — that a sound and stable currency is essential to the maintenance of a sound economy and a stable social order. Weak currencies were associated with disorder and weak kings; strong currencies were associated with strong and well-managed kingdoms. Such reasoning underlies article 13 of the First Lateran Council (1123), which condemns one who makes or knowingly passes false coins as an oppressor of the poor and a disturber of public order (civitatis turbator).

Thirteenth-century England saw economic reorganizations which had significant social impact. This was a century of steady inflation which created both winners and losers, disrupting the established social order in the process. In addition to social and economic change, this was a time of constitutional development which saw baronial pressure exerted on both John and Henry III. A particular grievance among the barons was the activities and protected status of the Jews. The primary customers of Jewish money lenders were the lesser aristocracy and city dwellers, but everyone borrowed. Most loans were for consumption rather than investment and the rate of default was high. As Jews were prohibited by law from

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3 It is called “money” because it warns (moneta/monet) that there should be no deception in metallic content or weight. A “coin” is a piece of gold or silver or bronze which is called a coin because of the name (nomisma/nominibus) of the prince whose effigy it bears ... Three things are required in a coin: metallic content, the figure of the prince, and proper weight’. Isidorus Hispalensis, Etymologiarum Siue Originum Libri XX, edited by W. M. Lindsay (Oxford, 1911), book 16, chapter 18, paragraph 8.


5 Michaud-Quentin argues that this notion of public good, which is central to Aristotelian monetary theory, could not have been known directly from the works of Aristotle, p. 141.

6 Cencillorium Oecumenicorum Decreta, edited by Josepho Alberigo et al. (Bologna, 1973) p. 192, article 13. Tom Bisson writes that this conception ‘of the sound coinage as an element of public order ... was already a century old in the Spanish March’ (Conservation of Coinage - Monetary Exploitation and Its Restraint in France, Catalonia, and Aragon (c. A.D. 1000 - c. 1225), (Oxford, 1979), p. 168.). I find confirmation of my thesis in the recent work of J. LeGoff, Saint Louis (Paris, 1996), pp. 245–51, which appeared after the completion of the present essay. LeGoff’s comments on the monetary reforms of Louis IX will be of interest to many members of the Society.


9 Miller & Hatcher, Medieval England - Towns, Commerce & Crafts, pp. 383–5. Lipman notes that since the surviving evidence is mostly concerned with bad debits it is impossible to calculate the overall rate of return on Jewish lending. (Vivian Lipman, The Jews of Medieval Norwich (London, 1967), p. 92.) But it is not likely that the series of dona demanded of English Jews could have been funded by lending alone, even at the prevalent annual rate of 43 per cent. Indeed, it was their frequent confiscation of the land and chattels of defaulted debtors which undergirded many complaints against the operations of Jewish moneylenders. Harding estimates that between failure of bloodlines and financial default, ‘the majority of landowning families failed within six generations.’ (Alan Harding, England in the Thirteenth Century (Cambridge, 1993), p. 198.)
accumulating land, they were forced to sell the land of defaulted debtors to other Christians. The small group of men whose cash assets enabled them to buy when the Jews needed to sell prospered exceedingly.

These economic conditions led to overt hostility toward English Jews – hostility which tended to peak in times of crisis. From the barons’ point of view, English Jews were both economic competitors and protected royal property. This made them attractive targets in the passionate conflicts between the king and the barons. When baronial supporters looted London’s Jewry in 1215 they demolished Jewish houses and used the stones to mend the city walls. This may have been a deliberately symbolic gesture, using the property of resident aliens to reinforce a communal boundary. The first version of Magna Carta, which appeared the same year, also shows traces of Jewish-Christian antagonism. John granted relief from Jewish creditors in two articles. Article 10 states that interest shall not accrue on debts to Jews during the minority of those who inherit the estates of the debtors, and that no interest shall be payable on escheated debts. Article 11 ensures that widows and orphans get their share from the estate of a decedent before his Jewish creditors.

Complaints against Jews were often linked to complaints against aliens, especially Henry’s continental relatives whom he appointed to high office and to whom he granted lucrative royal preferences. Roger of Wendover complained against the royal relatives in 1233 and in the same year a clerk of the exchequer drew a cartoon in which the Jew Isaac of Norwich wears Henry’s crown. In 1258 the barons complained in a series of written declarations that Henry had given the country’s wealth into the hands of foreigners, and at the same time they complained about powerful Christians who bought bonds from Jews and used them to seize mortgaged land. The London Jewry was again looted by the barons and their supporters in 1264, and the ‘Song of Lewes’, which celebrated the triumph of the baronial forces in that year, described the victory as a triumph of native born Englishmen over foreigners.

By the thirteenth century the French-speaking gentry, though of Norman descent, had succeeded in establishing their right to transmit the lands they held in fief to their heirs. Their interests lay in managing their estates and forming alliances with each other; their lives were thus focussed on England and they, too, tended to see things from a domestic rather than an international perspective. Such nativist sentiments were remarkably persistent. The following condemnation of the Normans is from the Chronicle of Bury St. Edmunds, sub anno 1300: ‘... King William acquired England by force of arms; he reduced the earls to obedience; he divided the land into counties; he disinherited the native inhabitants; he enfeoffed foreigners (indigenas exheredavit, alienigenas infeudavit) and, to be brief, he who acquired the whole country allotted its parts where, how and to whom he wished. It seemed that under this new king and foreigner (sub rege novo et alienigena) another era had begun in England’. The chronicler’s bitterness about events more than two hundred years in his past is quite extraordinary, and indicative of the structure of class resentment throughout the thirteenth century.

11 Roger of Wendover, Flores Historiarum, edited by H. O. Coxe (English Historical Society, 1841–4) pp. 47–8, 51. Cf. Annals of Osney, edited by Henry R. Luard in Annales Monastici (Rolls Series, 1864–9) vol. IV, pp. 150–1. In the cartoon, drawn at the head of a Norwich exchequer roll of 1233, Isaac of Norwich wears the crown of Henry III. The crown, with its distinctive trefoils appears in contemporary portraits, and a base metal copy of it was found on Henry’s head when his tomb was opened in 1774. Isaac was the richest Jew in England when the sketch was made. He is accompanied by Mosse filius Abraham Mokke, his Jewish employee in the court case discussed in note 18. (Public Record Office, Exchequer of Receipt Jews’ Roll number 87, Hilary Term, 17 Henry III. Reproduced in Michael Adler, Jews of Medieval England (London, 1939), plate 1.)
12 Treharne and Sanders, Documents of the Baronial Movement, pp. 86–7.
There were no permanent settlements of Jews in England before the Conquest. Around 1070 Jews began arriving in England, probably from Rouen, with the permission and under the protection of King William. In the thirteenth century the English Jewish community was still overwhelmingly French, and it never ceased to be a cultural colony of French Jewry. English Jews travelled frequently to the continent and were in constant contact with their relatives in Normandy and the Rhine valley, marrying each other and transacting business in partnership with each other. The continent was the cultural focus of English Jews. Not only did English Jews speak French, they sent their sons to be educated abroad and looked to the continental rabbinate for the last word in legal disputes.\textsuperscript{14}

The majority of Jewish families lived by commerce, though some worked as doctors or artisans and a few in those trades necessary to the functioning of any Jewish community — as ritual slaughterers, teachers, scribes. But the single economic activity which dwarfed all others in importance and profitability was money-lending. Until the 1240s the Jews were the principal significant source of credit in England. Most loans were syndicated to spread the risk, and in large loans the syndicates would include partners on the continent. From the records of these syndicates we get some sense of the extent of involvement in money-lending of the average Jew. Alongside tycoons who could lend a thousand marks one finds widows who lend ten marks. In wills and marriage contracts one often finds sums set aside for minor children, which are to be loaned out at interest, with specific stipulations regarding the expenditure of income and the conservation of capital. There was an after-market in which Jewish bonds were re-sold at a discount or premium, and in which the interest and principal portions of a bond might be split apart and sold separately.\textsuperscript{15}

English Jews were financially sophisticated people who had a virtual monopoly on the document-based world of credit which made them rich. Their cash income was easily taxable and they were, in turn, a lucrative source of income for English kings. In a time when there was only infrequent national taxation the Jews also served as \textit{de facto} tax collectors. Throughout the thirteenth century there were only fourteen national taxes on moveables assessed against non-Jews — in 1201, 1203, 1207, 1225, 1232, 1237, 1269, 1275, 1283, 1290, 1294, 1295, 1296, and 1297.\textsuperscript{16} But as the king's property the Jews, as well, were liable to periodic arbitrary taxation. Roth lists forty-nine tallages in the reign of Henry III alone.\textsuperscript{17} These tallages were highly organized, and by Henry's time accounted for a significant portion of royal income. When the king demanded money from his Jews, they in turn demanded money from their debtors. This might take the form of seizure of lands and chattels from defaulted debtors, an action which in the thirteenth century was taken suddenly and sometimes by force. At least a few Jews had large retinues of Christian retainers who assisted them in seizing property under the protection of the local sheriff.\textsuperscript{18} Because of their wealth and utility, the Jews were protected royal clients, answerable only to the King's justice and enjoying royal

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\textsuperscript{16} Fred A. Cazel 'Royal Taxation in Thirteenth Century England', \textit{Pro Civitate Collection Histoire} (Historische Uitgaven), in-8°, n. 13 (1966), 118. R. Stacey's account differs in detail but not in ways which affect my argument.

\textsuperscript{17} Roth, \textit{History of the Jews}, p. 273.

\textsuperscript{18} In 1219 a complaint was filed against Isaac of Norwich and his employees (twenty-one Christian and one Jewish) for wrongly breaking into the houses of Peter de Nereford and beating Peter and his men while collecting a debt. In 1220 a similar complaint was filed by Simon Le Bree against Elijah of Lincoln and his twenty-six Christian employees. (\textit{Calendar of the Plea Rolls of the Exchequer of the Jews} (Jewish Publications Society, 1905–93), vol. 1, pp. 13, 15, 25.) Shortness of time has kept me from searching the early unindexed volumes of the Plea Rolls for other cases, but a similar incident in 1272 cited by R. B. Dobson may have been less unusual than he suggests (R. B. Dobson 'The Jews of medieval Cambridge', \textit{Jewish Historical Studies}, vol. 32 (1990–92), 13.)
\end{flushright}
protection as the King’s property. As is evident, though, from the frequency with which royal charters of protection were issued, this Jewish immunity was unpopular and frequently violated. This is well-mapped territory. My point is to emphasize here the rôle I think Jews played in the political imagination of thirteenth-century England. To a moderately prosperous descendant of a knight granted land after the Norman Conquest the Jews were upstart foreigners who served a series of increasingly unpopular monarchs in exactly those aspects of their administrations in which royal interests conflicted with local ones.

In any system of precious metal coinage there is a certain amount of clipping, and those most often suspected are those who handle large amounts of money. Since anyone in the financial position of the Jews would probably have fallen under suspicion, the accusation itself may tell us little about Jewish-Christian relations. It appears that Jews were no different from their Christian neighbours in their handling of the currency. In periods of occasional clipping there was occasional clipping by Jews; in periods of extensive clipping there was extensive clipping by Jews. There are many Jewish records of medieval coin clipping. Whilst only a few of them refer explicitly to England, others illuminate the social context in which the clipping took place. Read as a whole, this corpus of Jewish writing shows the extent of rabbinic concern about coin clipping, which was seen precisely as a matter of Jewish-Christian relations.

The earliest Jewish reference to coin clipping of which I am aware appears in Sepher Hasidim, a collection of moral teachings completed in the Rhine Valley around 1230. The author uses a phrase which is the literal equivalent of the Latin tonsura monetae, ‘shearing money’. ‘Those who clip coins or cheat in weight, measure or goods or in any other way will in the end lose their property – their children will be separated from each other in a foreign land and become beggars . . .’

The first explicit reference to coin clipping by English Jews appears somewhat later, during the reign of Edward I. Rabbi Meir of Rottenburg wrote a letter to a London rabbi sometime between 1278 and 1286, supporting his condemnation of coin clipping. Rabbi Meir was the greatest scholar of his generation and the final legal authority for European Jews. Although only his response survives, it is possible to reconstruct the question which elicited it. The London rabbi had written of some English Jews who were asked by the Christian residents of their city (apparently London) to swear that they would not clip coins. The Jews swore not to clip coins and then clipped them anyway, justifying themselves to other Jews by citing the talmudic ruling that an oath given with mental reservations is not binding. Rabbi Meir wrote about these coin clippers, ‘Cut off their hands! . . . How much blood has been spilled by these and others like them who invalidate the currency. These are the ones who have brought destruction upon the Jewish inhabitants of France and England . . .’ After interpreting the relevant talmudic passages in support of this judgment, he concluded: ‘If our combined influence is great enough let them be publicly flogged.’ The amputation suggested by Rabbi Meir is not, in fact, allowed under Jewish law; his suggestion that the clippers should suffer

19 Royal protection orders were issued in 1203 and 1218 (Roth, History of the Jews, pp. 33, 39), 1219 (Plea Rolls 1219, p. 18); 1223 (Close Rolls 1223, p. 567); 1236 (Matthew Paris, Historia Anglorum Sive Historia Minor, edited by Frederic Madden (Rolls Series, 1866-9), vol. II pp. 381-2); 1236 (Ibid., vol. II pp. 391-2).

20 It has traditionally been argued that Jews were impoverished by the ban on usury in 1275 and may have been forced to clip by financial desperation. For a recent statement to this effect, see Mate, ‘Monetary Policy’, 39. A recent study has shown, however, that the ban on usury did not so much end Jewish money lending as change its form. The archaic


21 I have translated the Hebrew generic singular subjects of this sentence as generic plurals. (Sepher Hasidim, edited by Jehuda Wistinetzki, (Frankfurt, 1924), §1223).

the punishment traditional under English law must be read as an indication of his anger at the coin clippers, whom he saw as a danger to the entire Jewish community.

Writing around 1500, Isaac Abarbanel described the English expulsion as the first nationwide expulsion of Jews, adding: 'There is a tradition among the Jews that this was because of the clipping of the coinage to which the Jews of that land were addicted, that the king had reproved them about it many times and they did not listen, and that in the end he expelled them from his land.' Abarbanel came from a family which had produced generations of prominent advisors to the Christian nobility of the Iberian peninsula - treasurers, secretaries of state, royal councillors. When he was expelled from Spain with the rest of the Jews in 1492 he was allowed to take with him a substantial fortune in recognition of his services to the Spanish crown.

Abarbanel’s text is interesting for several reasons. First, because of his background in government he understood the implications of coin clipping for a country’s economy. He saw it from both the king’s point of view and from the point of view of Jews for whom it led to a deterioration of relations with their neighbours. Second, it tells us how the Jews of England were remembered by other Jews. We know that coin clipping was disapproved of by thirteenth-century continental Jewish authorities, who were concerned about its impact on Jewish-Christian relations. We see with Abarbanel that Jewish disapproval of the currency crimes of English Jews had become part of the Jewish historical tradition. Third, the Hebrew phrase he used to describe the intensity of English Jews’ involvement in coin clipping alludes to a well-known piece of rabbinic lore which further illuminates his understanding of what had happened in England. The phrase I have translated ‘addicted to’ is the Hebrew shetufim be-, literally ‘sunk in’. This is part of a medieval rabbinic cliché: shetufim be-zimah, ‘sunk in depravity’. In medieval texts it often refers to the spiritual situation of Jews who get rich among gentiles and forget their Jewishness, go native. Abarbanel may have been suggesting that the financial success of English Jews had made them materialistic and corrupt.

Abarbanel’s account of the expulsion from England had great currency and authority among subsequent scholars, and shaped subsequent Jewish historical interpretations through to the nineteenth century. There is evidence, though, that continental Jews had already formed an unfavourable opinion about the behaviour of English Jews by the early fourteenth century. In a record of a lawsuit which took place in Manosque in 1338, a French Jew impugns the credibility of another Jewish resident of Manosque on the grounds that his ancestors had been expelled from England for clipping coins: ‘Vos [patres] fuistis Engles qui exiverunt de terra eorum quia rotundabitis monetam!’ The accusation was not contested.

All these texts belong to a rabbinic tradition which assumes that Jewish communities are punished collectively by God for the actions of individual Jews. According to this view, a great disaster is proof of great transgression. When Rabbi Meir blamed coin clippers for bringing disaster upon the Jews of France and England he probably had in mind the mass executions of 1248 (France) and 1279 (England). Abarbanel, who himself lived through the mass expulsion from Spain in 1492, was writing about the ways in which certain great disasters fit into a sequence of traumas the Jewish people must suffer before the coming of the messiah. Moreover, all three rabbis were acutely aware that criminal activity by Jews may be used as a justification for persecution. Addressing themselves to Jewish communities, they would tend to emphasize the possibility of collective punishment by God as a way of inciting peer pressure against Jewish criminals.

23 Isaac Abarbanel, Sepher Yeshuot Meshiho (Konigsburg, 1861), p. 460.
24 Joseph Shatzmiller, 'Solomon Ibn Virga and the Jewish Expulsion from England' [Hebrew, with transcription of Latin document], in Exile and Diaspora, Studies in the History of the Jewish People Presented to Professor Haim Beinart on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 349-55. I am grateful to Christoph Cluse for bringing this reference to my attention.
JEWISH CURRENCY CRIMES

The association of Jews and money in thirteenth-century culture went beyond the obvious connection of personal wealth. Non-Jews have been preoccupied with circumcision since antiquity, and in classical Latin the ideas of circumcision and money were combined in a single word – *curtus* – which meant both a clipped coin and a circumcised Jewish man. This equation had entered English by 1200. Just as Jews were clipped/circumcised so could coins be clipped/circumcised. Just as Jews multiplied money by usury so too could it be multiplied by clipping. In fact, the association of usury with clipping was a commonplace in scholastic monetary theory. Both are unnatural multiplications of money, but clipping is worse since it is not consensual.

The recoinage of 1205 is not much noted in the chronicles; this is not surprising, since the new coins were merely a continuation of the 1180 Short Cross (i.e. they looked like the old ones) and there was no demonetization of full-weight coins. Sources outside the chronicles suggest that there was no significant clipping in this period. None of the chronicles accuses the Jews of clipping in this period. Although harsh penalties for Jews convicted of coin clipping are stipulated in the writs ordering the recoinage, there was only one such accusation during the recoinage, recorded in a Pipe Roll among similar accusations against Christians. Not only is there no evidence of significant clipping outside the chronicles in the early thirteenth century, when cases do appear in administrative documents there are no corresponding accusations in the chronicles. Jews were arrested for ‘*tonsura denario rum*’ in 1230 and sent to the Tower. In 1238 coin clipping by Jews was investigated in Guildford. In 1243 a Jew was detained in Winchester for ‘*retonsura*’. In 1244 two Jews were detained in Lincoln for clipping money and sent to Westminster to hear judgment before the Justices of the Jews. In the same year a Jew was arrested in Hereford for counterfeiting and coin clipping, ‘*falsarium et retuntorem denario rum*’. These legal proceedings, which were public and led in some cases to executions, did not capture the imagination of the public. They sank into the background of current events and never appeared in the chronicles.

Complaints about clipping appear in the chronicles in 1247. This recoinage was much more visible than that of 1205 for two reasons: it was a change of type in which Long Cross pennies replaced Short Cross pennies, and it was relatively expensive for those turning in their old pennies at the mints. All but one of the chronicles – Abingdon – mention the recoinage. Eight chronicles merely note the event; five chronicles say more (see table 1). These five make similar comments: the currency was much reduced by clipping, and for the good of the realm King Henry borrowed money from his brother Richard Earl of Cornwall to finance a recoinage. This loan was to be repaid from the proceeds of the recoinage.

The records of the recoinage and numismatic evidence, however, suggest that there was no significant clipping and no debasement in fineness. It is worth noting, though, that as many of the pennies in circulation in 1247 had been minted in 1180 a certain amount of wear from use was inevitable. One study suggests that as much as sixteen per cent of the weight of some coins may have been lost to wear, which would have put them under the 12.5% limit below which coins had been culled in 1205.

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26 Pipe Roll 7 John, p. 213.
27 Close Roll 1230, p. 304.
29 Liberare Roll 1243, p. 187.
30 Liberare Roll 1244, p. 242.
31 Close Roll 1244, p. 245.
32 I have included the continuation of the chronicle of Abingdon both because it is listed by Graves as significant and because it varies from the other chronicles in its coverage of the recoinages of 1247 and 1278. In my judgement, though, this chronicle is not an original, contemporaneous account but a fourteenth-century abridgement of an earlier chronicle. I hope to demonstrate this in a future paper.
33 N. J. Mayhew interprets the provisions of the 1205 recoinage as evidence of a serious and conservative attempt to deal with a real problem of underweight coin. ‘From Regional to Central Minting, 1158-1464’ in *A New History of the Royal Mint*, edited by C. E. Challis (Cambridge, 1992), p. 98.
An unusually high charge of 10d per pound weight of old pennies was assessed at the mint in 1247. This charge must have been rationalized on the grounds of decline in the metallic content of the coins since it was assessed — on the authority of an unusual public assay of Short Cross coins done at the Exchequer — by weight rather than face value. Such a misrepresentation of the import of the assay would have worked to the advantage of the crown. The recoinage would have been unpopular on the basis of cost alone, but it also happened at a time of high tension between Henry and the barons. It is interesting to note, therefore, that the chroniclers who said the coins were clipped and in need of replacement tended to side with the royalists. There is at least a suggestion of an attempt to use the allegation of Jewish coin clipping as a justification for the recoinage. In 1246 Justices of the Jews were commanded to bring before the King’s bench Jewish men and women accused of coin clipping (Judeos et Judeas rettatos de tonsura denariorum). Whilst the supporters of the barons simply note the change in currency without mentioning any deterioration, the royalists recount what must have been the official justification offered by the crown.

Matthew Paris is at once more expansive and more ambiguous than the other chroniclers, and deserves to be treated separately. His political allegiance is far from clear. In the later years of his life Matthew had frequent (apparently friendly) contact with Henry and his court, so it is unlikely that he was an overt supporter of the barons. But he was harshly critical of Henry’s leadership. His account of the recoinage situated it within a discussion of royal politics, bringing together threads which run separately through the other sources. Matthew was evidently anxious about the state of the currency, describing the penny as something desirable which was being clipped away by foreigners. This erosion of value he attributed to the weak stewardship of Henry, whom he slightingly compared to Louis IX of France. But Matthew was a master of innuendo, and rather than a clear statement of opinion his observations on the currency only suggest what his feelings might have been. Matthew wrote:

... moneta esterlingorum propter sui materiam desiderabilem detestabili circumcissione coepit deteriorari et corrupti, per illos falsarios monetarum quos tosiores appellamus ... Hujus autem fraudis auctores, videlicet mercatores Angliae contermini, praecepue Flandrenses, plus in partibus transmarinis inveniabantur manifeste convicti quam in partibus cismarinis: unde rex Francorum tales in partibus suis plus punivit quam in nostris partibus reg Anglorum. Cum igitur coepisset supra modum et intolerabiliter moneta adulterari et vitari, coepit domini regis consilium de remedio tractatum habere diligentem, ut videlicet moneta in forma vel materia alteraretur vel mutaretur. Et visum est multis discretis, quod utilis foret materiam mutare quam formam alterare cum ratione materiae et non formae tales suscepsisset moneta deturpationem et dispendium. De quo, Francorum numisma et multorum aliorum principum perhibet testimonium et exemplum.

Because of its desirable material, the English penny (moneta esterlingorum) began to be detestably reduced and corrupted by circumcision done by those falsifiers of moneys whom we call clippers (tusiores) ... the authors of which fraud, merchants of countries near England, principally Flemings, were more plainly caught overseas than on this side of the sea; hence the king of the French punished such people more in his parts than the king of the English did in our parts. When the money had begun to be immeasurably and intolerably adulterated and weakened, the council of the lord king began to consider some remedy, viz.

34 For Annals of Waverly see Luard’s introduction. Gransden characterises the Waverly chronicle as constitutional and anti-royalist, citing as well its evident affection for Simon de Montfort’s wife Eleanor (Historical Writing pp. 414–6). Eleanor was also Henry’s sister; and the chronicle mentions the king’s generous benefactions and his admission to confraternity despite its political disagreements with him. In my reading the Waverly chronicler shares with Matthew Paris a fundamental allegiance to Henry which is always stronger than his disaffection. For Wykes’ Chronicle see Graves Bibliography, p. 454. For Cronica Londoniarum see the entry for its author, Arnold Fitzthedmar, in Dictionary of National Biography, vol. XIX, p. 213. The case of Matthew Paris is more complex and will be discussed below.

35 Close Roll 1246, p. 433.


37 Here again, J. LeGoff has much to add to our understanding of Matthew (as in note 6, pp. 432–50, and extensively in passing).
whether it might be better to alter and change the material or form of money. Many discerning individuals thought it would be better to change the metal than to alter the form, since it was because of its material and not its form that the money had suffered such disfigurement and loss.\textsuperscript{38}

Even in questioning the justification for the form of the new pennies Matthew insinuated that Henry was lacking in leadership. It is interesting to compare this passage to the parallel entry in Bartholomew Cotton's \textit{Historia} - a mixture of original contemporaneous commentary with extracts from other chronicles. Drawing his coverage of events in 1247 from Matthew's \textit{Historia Major}, Cotton abridged Matthew's tendentious account (above) to a brief '\textit{nova moneta fabricata est}'.\textsuperscript{39} Here, as elsewhere, Matthew wrote that the coins were circumcised, insinuating that they had been clipped by Jews; but he went on to identify the circumcisers as foreign merchants, principally Flemings, who were presumably not Jews. His punning references to circumcised coins at once allude to what may have been the royal justification for the recoinage and convey his anxieties about Henry's weak leadership.

Only once did Matthew explicitly accuse English Jews of clipping. Writing about the state of the English pennies which were circulating in France, he both blamed the Jews and excused them by pointing to Henry's mismanagement: 'It was alleged and found to be true (\textit{dictum est insuper et compertum}), that coins were being circumcised by the circumcised, and it had come about by the faithlessness of the Jews, who now were compelled - by the excessive tallage of the King - to beg.'\textsuperscript{40} Is there a hint in this oddly legalistic phrase that other allegations had not been found to be true?

Matthew located his ambivalent sentiments about Jews within a criticism of Henry's fiscal policy. He contrasted Henry's '\textit{inertia}' with the decisive actions of Louis IX in combatting the coin clipping in France:\textsuperscript{41}

\begin{quote}
\textit{Ipsis quoque diebus, moneta Angliae per detestabiles tonsores et falsarios adeo intolerabiliter est corrupta, quod non indigenae vel etiam alienigenae eam aculo recto vel iliaeso corde poterant intueri. Circumcidebatur enim usque ad interiorem circulum, limbo literato totaliter vel deleto vel enormiter deturpato. Praeceptum estigitur poe vocae in civitaiibus, burgis, nondinis, et foris, ex parte dominii regis, ne quis demarius nisi legitimi ponderis et circularis formae acciperetur, necquaquo modo a vendente vel emente vel commutante acceptaretur, punirenturque hujusmodi praeseperti transgressores. Adhibita est etiam diligentia, ut memorati falsarii invenirentur, ut de tanto scelere convicti condigna poena judicialiter pinnenretur. Facta igitur diligentissima inquisitione, inventi sunt in hoc facinore culpabiles Judaei, Caursini infames, et quidam mercatores lanarum Flandrenses. Jussit etiam dominus rex Francorum omnes tales in regno suo compertos patibulis laqueatos vento praesentari.}
\end{quote}

In these days English money was so intolerably corrupted by clippers and forgers that neither natives, nor even foreigners could look at it straight on with an untroubled heart (\textit{non indigenae vel etiam alienigenae}). It was circumcised almost all the way to the inner circle, its lettered border either completely destroyed or enormously damaged. It was ordered, therefore, by cries in cities, towns, fairs and markets on behalf of the King that no coin should be accepted except it be of full weight and circular form. Nor should it be accepted in any way by seller or buyer or changer, and the violators of this order should be punished. Pains were taken to find these forgers, that convicted of such crimes they might receive the appropriate punishment. A most careful inquiry was made, and Jews, infamous Cahorsins, and certain Flemish wool merchants were found guilty of this crime. The lord King of the French ordered that all such convicted in his realm should be strangled on the gallows and presented to the wind.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{39} Historia Anglicana, edited by Bartholomew Cotton and Henry R. Luard (Rolls Series, 1859) p. 126.
\textsuperscript{41} Less literary sources strongly suggest that the clipping in France was real rather than imaginary. Summarising important events of the past fifty years, Matthew complains in 1250 that the English Church has been reduced to the state of the Jews by annual tallage, "\textit{per avaritiam papalis curiae et regum inerciam}" (Historia Anglorum, vol. III, p. 316).
The literary flavour of this passage – *oculo recto vel illaeso corde ... limbo literato ... patibulis laqueatos vento praesentari* – suggests to me that more than the usual amount of story telling is happening here. I believe it is in the literariness of Matthew's writing that his thought patterns most clearly emerge. While Louis punishes Henry ponders; Jews and foreigners are clipping the King's pennies; he is a weak and emasculated king.

When Henry demanded yet another tallage in 1255 the Jews responded that he had ruined them, that they had nothing left to give, and asked his permission to emigrate. Henry's response, as reported or imagined by Matthew, suggests that he (or at least Matthew as he imagined Henry) equated the financial status of the crown with its political power and stability.

> Quod cum rex audisset, exclamavit querula voce, dicens, non est mirandum si aveo pecuniam. Horrendum est imaginari debita quibus teneor obligatus. Per caput Dei, ascendunt ad summam ducentorum milium marcarum, et si dicerem trium metas non transpenderer veritatis. Sedecor undique. Mutilatus rex sum et abbreviatus, immo iam dimidiatus. Facta enim redditiuum certa extensionis aestimatione, ascendit summum annui redditus Edwardi filii mei ad plus quam .xv. milia marcarum. Necesse igitur habeo vivere de pecunia undeucunque, a quibuscumque, qualitiercumque adquisita. Factus igitur alter Titus vel Vespasianus, vendidit Judaeos per aliquot annos comiti Ricardo fratri suo, ut quos rex excoriaverat, evisceraret.

When the king had heard their response, he exclaimed in a woeful voice, saying, 'it's no wonder I need money. It is horrible to imagine the debt to which I'm obligated. By God's head, it's upwards of 200,000 marks! And if I were to say 300,000 I would not exceed the limits of truth. I'm divided all around! I am a mutilated and shortened king, even half a king! (Seducor undique. Mutilatus rex sum et abbreviatus, immo iam dimidiatus.) ... I need money to live – from wherever and whomever and however I get it!' Having become, then, another Titus or Vespasian, he sold the Jews for a certain number of years to Earl Richard his brother – that those whom the king had flayed the earl might gut.\(^{43}\)

The monetary imagery here is striking, as is the suggestion of castration. Like his coins, Henry is pulled apart, mutilated, and halved. The odd phrase, 'sedecor undique' is reminiscent of Peter Langtoft's description of clipping: *'Ley rays .../Fet sa monoye chaunger, ke fu trop vilement/Roygne de tuz pars ...'*\(^{44}\) In this passage, Matthew punningly equated Henry with his own money in a way that would not make sense if his audience did not strongly associate the strength of the king with the value of his coins. King Henry, who suffered from coin clippers, was read as weakened, feminized and partially castrated. It is clear that by 1255 this idea was in general circulation, just like Henry's Long Cross pennies which, for the first time in generations, bore the name of a living monarch. According to this equation, the mutilation of the moneyers – who lost their right hands and testicles for debasing the currency in 1124 – was a precise retribution for their crime against the King. It was only natural for subjects who equated the king with his coins to be concerned about the circumcision of Henry's pennies.

The third period of currency anxiety was the last before the expulsion in 1290. In 1278-79 nearly all the chronicles complain of clipping, blaming both Christians and Jews. On 18 November 1278 all of the Jews in England were arrested and detained while their houses were searched. Several chronicles record that abundant evidence of clipping was found. Some also mention that homes of Christian accomplices were searched as well and damning evidence found. On 7 December goldsmiths and moneyers were also arrested. The chronicles record that many Jews were subsequently executed, and other Jews and some Christians fined and imprisoned. Zefira Rokeah estimates, on the basis of unpublished documents at the Public Records Office, that 481 Jews and 1110 Christians were convicted of currency offences, of

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whom at least 269 Jews and 61 Christians were executed. The scale of the executions, surprising as it is, is conclusively verified by the notation in Pipe Roll 7 Edward I of the expenses of the executioner – £11 0s 4½d iusticiam facere tam de cclxix. Iudeis quam de .xxix. Christianis. This number of Jews would have amounted to about half the Jewish heads-of-households remaining in England. It seems fair to assume that, at least in 1278–79, there was widespread clipping by Jews and Christians alike. The arrest of both Christians and Jews for the crime, as recorded in most of the chronicles, is confirmed in numerous government documents. Rabbi Meir’s letter to a London rabbi reflects on these events, suggesting that the rabbinate was disturbed by the practice of clipping by English Jews. And the fact that many of the accused Jews were acquitted suggests that the trials were more than show trials.

We have seen how allegations of clipping and political disaffection figured in descriptions of the currency in 1247. It appears that royal allegations of widespread clipping (possibly by Jews) were not accepted by the barons, who saw them as an excuse to raise minting fees. Matthew Paris seems to have had a foot in each camp, at once repeating the story about clipping and echoing harsh baronial criticisms of Henry. The most striking feature of the accounts of 1278 is their tone in recounting the arrests of Christians. When the Annals of Dunstable gloats that Christians arrested had included ‘praecipue de nobilioribus Londoniae’ one senses the writer’s pleasure in justice too long deferred. But while the later chronicles recount the arrests and executions with a certain relish, they also seem curiously more credulous about Jewish involvement in currency crimes. The mass execution of Jews is accepted as appropriate by chroniclers who tend to exculpate Christians by describing clipping as a Jewish crime which requires Christian collusion. Pro-baronial chroniclers of 1247, whose accounts reflected (I believe) a more popular view of events, resisted royal attempts to deflect discontent on to coin clippers; but between 1247 and 1278 a predisposition to currency crimes had become fixed in the minds of the chroniclers as part of the collective public identity of the Jews. In the change of attitude implied by the chronicles of 1278, and in the concern of the rabbis, one may find traces of the popular acceptance of a stereotype.

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45 Zefira Entin Rokéah, ‘Money and the Hangman in Late-13th-century England: Jews, Christians and Coinage Offenses Alleged and Real,’ Jewish Historical Studies, vol. 31 (1988–90), 96–8, and vol. 32 (1990–92), 160–1. Rokéah gives a lower figure for Jews executed in her tabular listing of condemned persons mentioned by name, but it is not clear that she has retreated from her interpretation of the notation of the executioner’s expenses.

46 Six cases of tensura, changing, or the related charge of possessing clippings in 1278 (Plea Rolls 6 Edward I 1278, pp. 272, 459, 467, 576, 577, 581).
TABLE 1: Recoinages 1200–1290 in English chronicles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHRONICLE</th>
<th>1205</th>
<th>1247/8</th>
<th>1278</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anns Dunstaplia</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>nova moneta p. 175</td>
<td>clipping by Jews &amp; Christians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anns of Burton</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>vetus moneta mutata fuit p. 285</td>
<td>Christians taken for conspiring with Jews include ‘praecipue de nobiliirbus Londoniae’ p. 279 ends in 1263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anns of Osney</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>alternatio monetae p. 137</td>
<td>gap in chronicle ends in 1263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anns of Tewkesbury</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>money so clipped it was nearly worthless p. 339</td>
<td>clipping by Jews &amp; Christians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anns of Waverley</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>mutatio monetae p. 79</td>
<td>monetae mutatio pp. 300–1 ends in 1277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anns of Winchester</td>
<td>mutatio monetae p. 79</td>
<td>nova moneta p. 91</td>
<td>clipping by Jews &amp; Christians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bury St Edmunds</td>
<td>begins 1212</td>
<td>mutacio monete p. 14</td>
<td>clipping by Jews &amp; Christians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chr of Abingdon</td>
<td>begins 1218</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>clipping by Jews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton, Bartholomew</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>nova moneta p. 126</td>
<td>novae monetae f. 89v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronica Londoniarum</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>retonsa p. 13</td>
<td>clipping by Jews &amp; Christians ends in 1274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew Paris</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>clipping by Jews and foreigners (quoted in text)</td>
<td>ends in 1259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wykes’ Chronicle</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Rex mutavit monetam suam, quia vetus sic fuit retonsa quod quasi nullius fuit valoris ... Rex prospiciens regnum suum per egestatem pecuniae desolatum p. 96</td>
<td>clipping by Jews and Christians</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I also consulted the following chronicles, which did not contain significant contemporaneous coverage of the recoinages: Adami de Domerham, Annales Furnesienses, Annales S. Edmundi, Annales S. Pauli Londoniensis, Annales Stantoncienses, Annals of Margam, The Chronicle of Melrose, Ralph of Coggeshall, Walter of Coventry, Flores Historiarum, John de Tavist, Roger of Wendover and William Rishanger. For complete bibliographic information on these chronicles consult Graves.