One of the more prominent aspects of medieval Passion texts was their anti-Semitism, the degree and quantity of which varied from author to author. While theological and historical scholars have not traditionally emphasized the anti-Semitism present in most Passion narratives, medieval Passion writers were in fact the creators of many of the anti-Jewish allusions and references commonly associated with the Passion story, the majority of which were not present in theCanonical Gospels. In fact, Kupfer asserts that the Passion story was “the prism through which Christianity has historically fashioned and purveyed representations of Jews and Judaism.” Beginning in the twelfth century, Passion texts displayed an ever-increasing amount of anti-Semitic content, and throughout the Middle Ages, “the formation of attitudes that led to growing hostility toward Jews in the later Middle Ages was not merely reflected in, but actively supported by, the way Jews were treated in the narratives on the Passion of Christ.” As the anti-Semitism in Passion texts developed alongside increasing regulations and even violence against the Jews, a more in-depth analysis of the development of these attitudes is in order, particularly of the anti-Jewish passages found in the Thesoro de la passion. These beliefs were so well-established by the end of the fifteenth century that even the converso Li did not hesitate to include them in his own Passion text. The anti-Semitic biases found in the Thesoro de la passion take on even greater cultural significance in light of Li’s converso status. Li’s attitudes

1 Kupfer, The Passion Story, 3.
2 Bestul, Texts of the Passion, 69.
toward the Jews left no doubt as to the veracity, or perhaps better said, the ferocity of his Christianity, which may have been testimony to both Li’s faith and his frustration with those who were not true in their own beliefs.

The increased attention paid to the Jewish role in the Passion occurred in large part because of the shift in the eleventh and twelfth centuries toward a more affective piety and the importance given to the contemplation of the image of the crucified Christ. By casting Jews as malevolent forces of absolute evil, Passion writers created empathy for Christ and his suffering, the redemptive value of which increased proportionally with the magnitude of his torment at the hands of Jews.

Central to affective piety, Passion accounts fixed on a taxonomy of pain and torture, articulated so strikingly in medieval drama, with a concomitant emphasis on the contrast between Christ and the Jews, who were held responsible for His Crucifixion. In texts and images of the Passion we find the most violent and widespread anti-Semitic images, serving not only to represent Jews as the killers of Christ but also to vitiate and objectify the Jewish image more generally.3

Part of the blood piety tradition in which Passion texts were so integral was the post-1300 conflation of the importance of Christ’s blood with its consequent violation by the Jews. The literal and figurative blood on Jewish hands was seen as a violation of Christ’s perfection, and the visualization of the suffering that caused the blood to spill provoked an intense Christian empathetic reaction, along with equally strong backlash against the Jews. As the medieval preoccupation with the blood and mangled flesh of Christ grew, so did the augmentation of the the severity of his wounds. The descriptions of his Jewish tormentors also changed, their faces and bodies distorted to represent the warped nature of sin itself. This exaggeration was seen in the descriptions of Jewish features, especially their noses, skin, fingers, and heads. In addition, Jews often were denied human status because of their “inability” to understand Christ’s purpose, and were instead classified as animals, most frequently dogs.

The Passion author who had the dubious distinction of first singling out the Jews was Ekbert of Schönau in the twelfth century. Schönau’s Stimulus amoris demonstrated a particular distaste for bodily contact

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