This essay treats the opening years of Bill Jordan’s memorable book *The French Monarchy and the Jews* (1989): the beginning of the reign of Philip II, *Augustus*, near the end of the twelfth century. Philip, a child of Louis VII’s late years, was crowned before his father died in September 1180 and was sole ruler by the age of fifteen. Immediately after his succession he initiated a series of measures against Jews that culminated in their banishment from the royal domain in 1182. Jordan interpreted Philip’s sudden and dramatic actions as a form of royal self-assertion and a willful repudiation of his father’s lenient policies. In this paper I reconsider Philip’s use of the accusation of ritual murder as a justification for his actions. I suggest that the expulsion of the Jews should be considered in the context of the geographic and economic development of the city of Paris and Philip’s moves to expand royal power.

Historians considering motives for the expulsion of the French Jews have focused on the king’s youth, based on an assumption that he was influenced by stories told to him during his childhood. Kenneth Stow considered the king a moody adolescent: “remember, in late 1179 he was in his impressionable and often mercurial late teens.” Robert Chazan described him as “young and insecure upon the throne.” Jordan raised the possibility of “psychological dependency.” The return of the Jews to France later

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in his reign suggests that Philip came to realize that he had made a mistake and regretted the impulsive actions of his youth.

Philip’s willfulness, his later change of heart to welcome Jews back, and a religious repentance that bordered on the “fanatical,” are all said to confirm the notion that his precipitate orders against Jews were emotional and religious, focused on short-term advantage. They are held to differ from the later actions of the strategically minded king, who took care to calculate long-term costs and benefits. Philip’s actions are also framed almost exclusively in the context of Christian-Jewish relations and the assumed widespread knowledge of the ritual murder accusation in this period. They are rarely, if ever, mentioned in any discussion of the urban development of Paris. The historical focus often centers on the difficult question of what the young king believed rather than on what purposes his actions served.6

In this paper I propose another perspective on Philip’s actions and interpret them in light of his later deeds as a mature king. Rather than being anomalous, Philip’s decision to banish the French Jews and expropriate their land is in keeping with his demonstrated priorities. I suggest that Philip himself, far from being unduly pressured by others, powerfully influenced contemporary perceptions of Jews. The expulsion of Jews from the royal domain was not the petty and perverse decision of a whimsical adolescent (as he is generally portrayed) but was closely allied to some of the primary concerns that motivated Philip throughout his lifetime. These include the construction and enhancement of Paris, the acquisition of political and financial capital, the unification and implementation of royal authority within his domains, the quashing of the pretensions of powerful French lords, the promotion of the economy and of the Parisian bourgeoisie at the expense of his vassals, and the identification of the royal house of Capet with the Church and the special favor of God.

I begin with Philip’s notorious actions as they come down to us from the laudatory pen of the chronicler Rigord, a monk at the abbey of Saint-Denis who began his biography of the king, the Gesta Philippi Augusti, after 1186.7 Then I examine what was known of Richard “of Pontoise” or “of Paris,” the

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