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Between Foreigners, Strangers and Jews: The Changing Perception of Parisian Jews on the Eve of the 1306 Expulsion

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Abstract

An unpublished document from late thirteenth-century Paris contains evidence of a Jewish-Christian public confrontation, on the one hand, and of Jewish-Christian economic criminal collaboration on the other. Using methods of micro-history, this article traces the story of Merot the Jew and his father-in-law, Benoait of St. Denis, who were caught attempting to smuggle merchandise by way of the River Seine. Their story is told in a verdict handed down by the *parloir de Paris*, the municipal judicial authority in charge of economic infractions. The *parloir* decreed the complete confiscation of Merot and Benoait's merchandise on the grounds that "they were foreigners." Taking this terminology as a point of departure, this paper tackles broader socio-economic aspects of belonging and foreignness among medieval Parisian Jews, and asks: in what ways were Jews considered "foreigners" in late thirteenth-century Paris? What were the implications of such a designation, and how did these perceptions change in the years leading up to the expulsion of 1306?

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