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## Glossary

**Blood accusation:** see blood libel.

**Blood libel:** The allegation, arising in the medieval period, that Jews kill non-Jews, especially Christians, in order to extract their blood for consumption or some other purpose (medicinal, for example). Early Christians, heretical Christian groups, and witches were also accused of the same acts. A synonym for blood accusation. This term is used rather than blood accusation as it accurately communicates the slanderous nature of the charge.

**Corpus Christi:** A Christian feast day held in honour of the sacrament at the centre of Catholic worship, the Eucharist. Pope Urban IV ordered the observance of the feast in 1264 C.E.

**Crucifixion:** A mode of execution made popular by the Romans whereby the victim is nailed through hands and feet or tied to a wooden cross, where he or she remains until death ensues.

**Crucifixion murder:** A murder perpetrated using the crucifixion method. In the medieval period especially, the Jews were accused by Christians of crucifying individuals in emulation of the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth.

**Deicide:** the killing of God.

**Eucharist:** The consecrated elements of bread and wine consumed by priest and congregation during the Mass; the Christian sacrament in which Christ's Last Supper is commemorated by the consecration of bread and wine as Christ's body and blood.

**Exegesis:** Explanation or critical interpretation of a text, most especially a biblical or other religious text.

**Eschatology:** A branch of theology concerned with the end of the world or the "four last things": death, judgment, heaven, and hell.

**Host Desecration:** The Christian accusation that Jews steal a Eucharist wafer in order to destroy or defile it.

***Kiddush Ha-Shem:*** A Hebrew term referring to the sanctification of the Name of God. In medieval Jewish history, the term refers to a Jew who chose to forfeit his own life (by suicide or martyrdom at the hands of crusaders, for example) for the sake of his or her faith. This meaning was extended during the Holocaust to incorporate the struggle to preserve life in the face of destruction.

**Millennialism:** The loosely defined Christian belief that Jesus of Nazareth would return 1000 years after his birth or death (c. 1033 C.E.) and establish the promised kingdom in Israel (*Revelations* 20.10). Thereafter he would reign on earth for 1000 years.

**Mutilation murder:** The body of the murdered victim is reported as being disfigured or dismembered.

**Plain murder:** A murder is alleged to have been perpetrated.

**Ritual murder:** A shorthand but incorrect term used by historians when referring to the accusations made against Jews of plain murder, crucifixion murder, mutilation murder, and blood libel/blood accusation.

**Transubstantiation:** The dogma that the body and blood of Jesus Christ are truly present in the Eucharist under the outward appearances of bread and wine, the bread having been transubstantiated into the body and the wine into the blood.

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## **Introduction and Prologue**

In the vocabulary of evil, what could be a more potent and patent set of images than kidnapping, mutilation, murder, and cannibalism? That children are the common victims makes such behaviour all the more heinous. The perpetrators must, therefore, have an innate and immutable characteristic that places them beyond the pale, people who are other than human. Such is the ideation, and the depiction of the blood libel allegation against Jews—undoubtedly the most enduring example of hate ideation in recorded history.

This book is about the terminology given to that idea. It traces the authorship, transmission, permutation, and longevity of the idea that members of a minority conspire to murder members, particularly children, of a majority group. Collecting and/or consuming their blood or flesh is the essence of such unspeakable behaviour.

### MOTIVATION

I examine the origins of the terminology and the motives behind the bringing of such allegations. While secondary motives will be seen to be myriad, the primary motivation behind these beliefs and their consequences is the denigration and dehumanization of members of the targeted minority group. The aim of dehumanizing the group is to facilitate and justify physical retaliation as anticipated and/or perpetrated by the majority group. This form of hateful ideation is what seems to me the pinnacle of human hatred. The blood libel runs contrary to facts and has an extraordinary ability not only to endure but to mutate. One would expect such aspects to detract from any credence such an idea might attract. To the contrary, these same aspects have helped the idea to take root and proliferate. Attempts at refutation are overwhelmingly difficult. The lives of hundreds, if not thousands, have been prematurely ended because of this ideation. Despite the passing of 1900 years, the accusation is alive and well today.

## METHOD AND EXPLANATION

For ten years I have collected, compiled, analysed and classified almost all of the literature relating to the allegations of “blood libel,” “ritual murder,” “blood accusation,” and “ritual crucifixion,” between circa 148 C.E. and the present. In the main, my source material has drawn on the compilation of primary sources referenced in important secondary works, such as those by Hermann Strack, Salo Baron, Leon Poliakov, Paul E. Grosser, and Edwin G. Halperin and, more recently, Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, Gavin Langmuir, Jonathon Frankl, Steven Katz, Alan Dundes, Rainer Erb, and Helmut Walser Smith.<sup>1</sup> I have sought assistance from and conducted personal research in the archives and document repositories in England, France, Germany, Hungary, Israel, and the United States.

Following location and acquisition of the primary sources, I have ascertained (where possible) biographical information on the author/s of each allegation, together with the composition date and provenance of the work/s. I conducted searches for English translations of the foreign language primary source material; if none existed, within the limitation of my personal resources and with the assistance provided by a small grant from Macquarie University, I had a large number of the texts translated. The texts that appear in Part V of this book are, for reasons of space, only a selection of the five hundred I collected; the rest can be accessed from my Database at <http://www.bloodlibeldbp.com>

As precedents for the chronological arrangement and ordering of my primary sources, I have taken Menahem Stern’s inspiring *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, and the more recent work compiled by John McCorquodale, *Aborigines and the Law: A Digest*. The result has been the collection and organization of what I believe to be a comprehensive collection of primary source material and secondary literature relating to the allegations. My work brings up to date and enhances the previous most complete compilation, that undertaken by Hermann Strack over a hundred years ago. This work differs from Strack’s in two ways. First, it documents the history of the allegations against the Jews to the conclusion of World War II; second, it encompasses the allegations brought against the early Christians and “heretical” sects, which are, in ideational form, the predecessors of the anti-Jewish allegations.

For my five hundred texts, the primary source material was entered into an interrelational database. Specific elements drawn from the data, both contextual and empirical, were subsequently sorted into discrete categories.

These were determined by the questions I asked of the evidence. For example, the author's provenance, the date of the composition of the text, the alleged age of the victim at death, the alleged killing location, the alleged date of death, and so on. I then compared and analysed the data and was able to identify trends in the material and subsequently the allegations. The analysis of these trends constitutes the substance of this book.

I make no claim that the five hundred texts in my Database exhaust the possible sources. Some material, due to age, condition, loss, or size, has remained tantalizingly out of my grasp. In such cases, I have referenced the source only. In some instances the source material is presented here in the original language without translation. Most importantly, the unequal "quality" of the primary source material available—a problem inherent in any empirical historical examination, but here perhaps more crucially so—warrants particular note by the reader. Many of the references to the very first allegations in the medieval period, albeit derived from medieval histories and chronicles, are fragmentary and scattered. Such issues have led Ronnie Po-chia Hsia to state that:

Sources...before the mid-fifteenth century are few and unreliable; the chronicles that recorded these cases are generally inaccurate, uncritical, and deeply biased as historical sources. Often only a few lines of information describe a purported ritual murder. The medieval chronicles depict a scenario far removed from the actual historical reality; beyond naming the alleged victims, perpetrators, motives for killing, dates, places, and punishments, they provide insufficient context for the analysis and interpretation of these persecutions. Beginning with the second half of the fifteenth century documentation becomes more abundant.<sup>2</sup>

Many of these concerns are legitimate. Some allegations are only known to us or supported by the evidence provided in medieval Hebrew poems, laments, or lists of those murdered following the raising of an allegation. In the modern period (eighteenth to twentieth centuries) a different form of "veracity problem" emerges. Many allegations are known primarily through newspaper reports, virtually impossible to verify from any other source. Lastly, and most significantly, many other allegations have simply been "listed" in anonymous antisemitic compendiums, which purport to document the "truth" of the allegations.<sup>3</sup>

Despite gaps and incomplete case studies, the Database attempts to reference and attribute in chronological order, according to authorship, all

allegations to 1945. I have been able to discover previously “specified” allegation locations—towns, cities or villages, and dates—where no allegation can be found in any primary source. Through the referencing and attribution, the reader can recognize instantly the originating source of a particular allegation and/or the documentary account of that allegation. Identification of actual error/s, or probable errors in present sources, and antisemitic obfuscation of allegations can be detected. The ramifications of this approach are considerable and I discuss these in Chapter 4.

There is a need to address briefly the issues raised by R. Po-chia Hsia. Although many of the sources for the early medieval period are, as he rightly points out, unreliable, biased, uncritical and scanty, they are, quite simply, all we have to go on. It is possible to discern socio-historical trends that are interwoven through the elements he enumerates: the alleged victims, perpetrators, motives, and so on. As notable as Po-chia Hsia’s work is on examining the blood libel allegations in the late medieval period, it can be seen that by the second half of the fifteenth century, the blood libel allegation had long crystallized into an established anti-Jewish stereotype, one widely known in most of Europe. The origins and formative stage of this particular variation of anti-Jewish allegation had ended. Only mutation would follow. If we wish to explore and unravel the origins and early development of the allegations, there is no alternative but to examine the “unreliable” sources dating from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries.

The time span encompassed within this work (c. 148 C.E.–1945) is vast for any specific study. The literature is voluminous. Such volume demands a number of limitations. First, I focus on the empirical elements, their ideation and trends. Second, my level of detail is not evenly distributed across the work. My aim is to magnify the use of the allegations, examining not only how they have survived but how they have been exploited to the present. I will not be delving deeply into those periods or allegations that have been previously studied by others in close detail. These allegations include, but are not limited to, the Lincoln allegation of 1255, the Damascus allegation of 1840, the Koenitz allegation of 1900, the Waldkirch allegation of 1504, the Trent allegation of 1475, the Emden allegation of 1492, the Regensburg allegations of 1470–76. In many of these instances, a summation largely derived from work already undertaken together with my classification, has been inserted into the selections in Part V. There is little to gain by reduplicating these studies when so much more remains to be undertaken.

Accordingly, one of the foci of the book will be two chapters on the Nazi period—one concentrating on the “popular” exploitation of the allegations made by the publisher and writers of the Nazi newspaper *Der Stürmer* between 1923 and 1945; and the other on the “pseudo-academic” use of the allegation and its role in Nazi genocidal policy. Themes and elements originating in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries will be seen to resonate in the twentieth century. Last, if I omit extenuating historical factors or secondary arguments that may hinge on, but not affect, the outcome of the course of my arguments, it is in an attempt to retain control of the size of the work.

#### PROLOGUE

In 1879, the German political agitator Wilhelm Marr introduced a new word into the historical vocabulary of Jew hatred: antisemitism. Not more than three years later, in 1882, another term, *Ritualmord* (ritual murder), was coined. Géza von Ónody, a self-proclaimed antisemitic Member of the Hungarian Diet, used the adjective-noun combination—*ritueller Mord*, *rituellen Mordes*—in his writing, in an attempt to define an alleged historical Jewish practice.<sup>4</sup> Jews habitually murdered non-Jews, Ónody argued, in order to obtain non-Jewish blood for consumption. The most recent example, Ónody argued, followed the murder of a young woman whose body was recovered from the river below the Hungarian town of Tiszaeszlár. Similar accusations had been levelled against the early Christians of the second century, “heretical” Christians of the eighth century, and witches in the Middle Ages. In the long history of anti-Jewish persecution too, this was not the first time such an accusation had been raised. Indeed, Ónody used alleged historical precedent in support of his newly coined terminology. The accusation that Jews from time to time kidnap and murder Christians, usually children, to obtain their blood for use in making the unleavened bread (*matzot*) during the Passover festival has always been viewed as a defamation. Hence the term for this body of calumnies—“blood libel.” The very word libel implies that the accusation is false, malicious and intended to be injurious. With the introduction of the term *Ritualmord* (ritual murder), however, the entire balance of this phenomenon changed: no longer a false accusation, *Ritualmord* carries the explicit meaning that the accusation is true and, furthermore, ritualized, patterned and institutionalized as part of Jewish religious tradition or custom. The hearer and reader of the term are left with a much stronger sense of verity, an aura of ‘scientific fact’ rather than merely a

piece of folklore. Ónody's term not only served to obfuscate the historical record, but through continued usage it allowed rerouting of the future historiographical interpretation of this particular anti-Jewish accusation. From 1882, "ritual murder" became the umbrella term used by historians to describe and analyze all prior historical instances where it was considered such an allegation had been leveled against Jews. Historiographical usage of the term in this way continues to this day. Simultaneously, from 1882, "ritual murder" became the term used by antisemites to describe what was broadcast as the worst Jewish excess: alleged behaviour of and particularly befitting Jews, a byproduct of Jewish hereditary predisposition. The new term was not difficult to sell. It was a panacea for those insisting on quantifiable racial differences between Jews and other men. Clearly, it was argued, those who fostered and engaged in "ritual murder" were patently *untersmenschen* (subhuman); and those participating in such behaviour were to be countered and stopped.

From 1923, under the fledgling Nazi Party, reporting of the 'ritual murder' fantasy was taken to dizzying heights. First, it was packaged and mass-marketed at a hitherto unprecedented scale, primarily through the newspaper *Der Stürmer*; second, it was actively endorsed, employed and promulgated by the full apparatus of a modern industrialized state. The actual and potential population exposure to the accusation would become greater than it had ever been throughout world history. The motive was not only to dehumanize Jews collectively but to erase and dull any empathy the accusing group may have had for the existence of Jews living in their midst. Last, the accusation was marketed at this time as a radical justification for the swift physical removal of Jews from Germany. In the course of the following chapter, I focus on the "ritual murder" allegation as it was used in *Der Stürmer*, drawing examples from editions published before and after Hitler came to power in 1933.

#### NOTES

1. See the Bibliography.
2. R. Po-chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 4.
3. *Die Juden und das Christenblut* (Germanicus Verlag, Leipzig, 1892).
4. Géza von Ónody, *Tisza-Eszlár in der Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, transl. into German by G. von Marzianni (Budapest: Wilckens and Waidl, 1883), 64, 78, 109, 138.