

*Blood Libel: On the Trail of an Antisemitic Myth.* Magda Teter.  
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020. xii + 540 pp. \$39.95.

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In mid-twelfth-century England allegations arose that Jews murdered Christian boys to reenact the killing of Jesus. While these accusations did not meet with general endorsement, later ones—insular and Continental—achieved wider credibility. The papacy refused to countenance the charges, in particular when they incorporated another accusation—namely, that Jews used the blood from the alleged victims in their rites, such as the preparation of matzah for Passover. Most lay rulers also refused to endorse the allegations. Thus, though the accusations did not cease, they remained few in number. Then things changed. The key event was the discovery of the corpse of the three-year-old Simon of Trent in 1475. Drawing on medieval precedents, the prince-bishop of Trent, Johannes Hinderbach, understood Simon's alleged killing as a martyrdom. Canon lawyers and theologians in Rome, relying on their knowledge of mainstream Judaism, did not agree. The charges were ludicrous: an infant could not be a martyr—the special status of Herod's victims, the Holy Innocents, notwithstanding.

Hinderbach persisted, subjecting the Trentino to a media blitz with treatises, broadsides, woodcuts, etc., to persuade people that Simon merited a cult. The campaign was rife with fake news. The principal papal investigator was told that Simon's body was uncorrupted. When he went to examine it, the stench nearly made him vomit. Multiple embalmings were preserving what remained of the corpse, and herbal infusions were being used to lessen the fetor and mimic the fragrances of blessedness. The pope, Sixtus IV, refused to support Hinderbach.

The pressures endured, however, and in the long aftermath of the bishop's death, the papacy yielded somewhat. Simon's name was enrolled in the official Roman martyrology in 1583 during the pontificate of Gregory XIII, and Pope Sixtus V authorized a local cult in Trent in 1588, even though he did not formally canonize the boy. Pope Benedict XIV (r. 1740–58), who published the definitive treatise on canonization before his pontificate, refused to raise Simon to the catalogue of saints, but accepted that some Jews had murdered or might murder Christian children in hatred of the Catholic faith. He did not regard them as martyrs, but many other Catholics felt free to do so in the wake of his words. What principally mattered to the pope was that Jews accused of murder should receive fair trials, that the tribunals judging them should not admit the blood libel as evidence, and that the crimes of those condemned ought not to be imputed to the Jewish people as a whole.

Yet, books of pseudo-scholarship kept up the anti-Semitic drumbeat. Writers rifled through medieval chronicles and early printed trial records seeking evidence of Jewish bloodlust. Mere repetition and authorial statements to the effect that the reported cases were but the tip of the iceberg conjured up the fear of an epidemic of child murders. Any Christian child who disappeared or was found dead around Passover could become the focus of anti-Semitic rumors of infanticide. Torture was the predominant mode of

proof at trial. Many of the accused died under torture, committed suicide to avoid it, or confessed and converted to Christianity to escape it. Conversion did not preclude execution, but converts were allowed a quick death by beheading rather than a humiliating one by drawing, quartering, and burning.

Jews commemorated these tribulations. Here Professor Teter makes large claims that Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews stressed different aspects of the persecutions. In particular, Ashkenazim invoked the victims' martyrdom in Hebrew liturgical poetry and Yiddish songs. The author also identifies broad differences between Northern and Southern Europe and Protestant and Catholic attitudes to the accusations. Christian Hebraists (mainly Protestants) had a moderating effect on the number and intensity of allegations in Western Europe. Catholic administrative elites in the Papal States had fashioned a rule-bound legal system that also prevented the worst excesses from taking place in Italy. Some Christians wrote impassioned defenses of the Jews. The popes, nonetheless, felt as though they were in a bind. They genuinely loathed the blood libel, but clergymen in what they regarded as benighted Poland, which became the hotbed for trials and where Christian Hebraism was of little influence, wrote vicious pamphlets that sustained the panic. Working intently behind the scenes, as papal nuncios did, to stanch the libel or protect Jews who were accused had little effect. The pontiffs, unwilling to risk alienating their flock in the precarious state of religious politics in Poland, did nothing more.

Teter's broad generalization about the role of Christian Hebraism and the binaries with regard to differences between North/South, Sephardic/Ashkenazic, Catholic/Protestant, Italian/Polish, etc., may be challenged or nuanced by future scholars. Some readers will also be unhappy with the quality of proofreading in so important a study. The bottom line, however, is that this book is a must read for those who want to understand how judicial persecution so long endured in parts of Europe. It is a chilling revelation.

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*Embodiment, Identity, and Gender in the Early Modern Age.* Amy E. Leonard and David M. Whitford, eds.

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The volume is a festschrift, an homage to the work of Merry Wiesner-Hanks. Natalie Zemon Davis, the editors, and Susan Karant-Nunn respectively summarize and praise Wiesner-Hanks's pioneering scholarship in women's, gender, and world history. Wiesner-Hanks has been an important contributor in opening and defining these as new fields of research. Starting with her first book, *Women and Gender in Early*