



THE BLOOD LIBEL THEN AND NOW

THE ENDURING IMPACT OF AN IMAGINARY EVENT

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

COVER: Stone medallion with the purported martyrdom scene of Simonino di Trento. Palazzo Salvadori, Trent, Italy.
Photo by Andreas Caranti. Via Wikimedia Commons.

YIVO INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH RESEARCH PRESENTS

THE BLOOD LIBEL THEN AND NOW

THE ENDURING IMPACT OF AN IMAGINARY EVENT

CONFERENCE
OCTOBER 9, 2016

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SINCE ITS FABRICATION IN THE MIDDLE AGES, the accusation that Jews kidnapped, tortured and killed Christian children in mockery of Christ and the Crucifixion, or for the use of their blood, has been the basis for some of the most hateful examples of organized antisemitism. The blood libel has inspired expulsions and murder of Jews, tortures and forced mass conversions, and has served as an inescapable focal point for wider strains of anti-Jewish sentiment that permeate learned and popular discourse, social and political thought, and cultural media. In light of contemporary manifestations of antisemitism around the world it is appropriate to re-examine the enduring history, the wide dissemination, and the persistent life of a historical and cultural myth—a bald lie—intended to demonize the Jewish people.

This conference explores the impact of the blood libel over the centuries in a wide variety of geographic regions. It focuses on cultural memory: how cultural memory was created, elaborated, and transmitted even when based on no actual event. Scholars have treated the blood libel within their own areas of expertise—as medieval myth, early modern financial incentive, racial construct, modern catalyst for pogroms and the expulsion of Jews, and political scare tactic—but rarely have there been opportunities to discuss such subjects across chronological and disciplinary borders. We will look at the blood libel as historical phenomenon, legal justification, economic mechanism, and visual and literary trope with ongoing political repercussions.

SCHEDULE

9:30am

Welcome

JONATHAN BRENT, YIVO Executive Director

9:45am · Session 1

The Origins of the Blood Libel in Medieval Western Europe (1150-1500)

E.M. ROSE

Political Uses of Spain's Blood Libel Myth: Queen Isabel and her Successors

BARBARA WEISSBERGER

Discussion / Q&A

11:00am · Session 2

What's New in the Early Modern Period? Blood Libel after Trent 1475

MAGDA TETER

Italy and the Church: Reinventing the Medieval in Fascist Italy

DAVID KERTZER

Discussion / Q&A

12:15pm · Lunch Break *on your own*

1:45pm · Session 3

Modernity, Science, and Ritual Murder: Toward a Phenomenology of 'Modern' Ritual Murder Trials.

HILLEL KIEVAL

Beyond Beilis: The Blood Libel Under the Soviets

ELISSA BEMPORAD

Discussion / Q&A

3:15pm · Session 4

The Blood Libel in the Islamic World

RAPHAEL ISRAELI

3:45pm · Roundtable Discussion

ALL SPEAKERS. Chaired by Jonathan Brent.

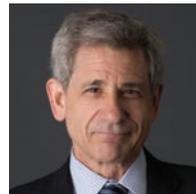
4:15pm · Closing Reception



WELCOME

— JONATHAN BRENT

JONATHAN BRENT is the Executive Director of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York City. From 1991 to 2009 he was Editorial Director and Associate Director of Yale Press. He is the founder of the world acclaimed *Annals of Communism* series, which he established at Yale Press in 1991. Brent is the co-author of *Stalin's Last Crime: The Plot Against the Jewish Doctors, 1948-1953* (Harper-Collins, 2003) and *Inside the Stalin Archives* (Atlas Books, 2008). He is now working on a biography of the Soviet-Jewish writer Isaac Babel. Brent teaches history and literature at Bard College.



THE ORIGINS OF THE BLOOD LIBEL IN MEDIEVAL WESTERN EUROPE (1150-1500)

— E.M. ROSE

The blood libel—the accusation that Jews killed Christian children—is seared into the cultural memory of Europe. Yet no case of alleged ritual murder was based in fact. The blood libel is a lie – one of the most devastating and enduring lies ever told. The charge that Jews used the blood of young children in hatred and mockery of Christ originated in the High Middle Ages, motivated by a complex combination of financial exigencies, local political circumstances, and against a backdrop of broad patterns of religious thought. The charge was exploited by local authorities to gain power and money, underpinned by new Biblical commentaries that increasingly denigrated Jews.

The medieval blood libel was not a product of longstanding Christian-Jewish rivalry or animosity as commonly believed, but originated a thousand years after the birth of Christianity. It was invoked in the context of local power struggles, and reveals the fault lines of other divisions in society when Jews were often substitutes and collateral damage for the true objects of conflict.

Those accused were lay leaders of the Jewish community, usually bankers and money-lenders, and, although politically motivated, the occasion of the accusation was often tied to the liturgical year. The accusation was linked to veneration of the Virgin Mary, and Eucharistic piety. It was spread by word of mouth and by visits to the shrines of these children; textual accounts and images were rare. Among the early cases are those of William of Norwich (1150), Little Hugh of Lincoln (1255) and Werner of Oberwesel (1287). None, however, became of national importance until the case of Simon

of Trent, Italy (1475), which was widely disseminated through the new technology of print. Many of the supposed medieval cases were, in fact, backdated or invented in the Early Modern period.

The few purported child victims were regarded as holy martyrs, like the Holy Innocents of the New Testament, which discouraged serious investigation into the circumstances of their deaths. The cults of these young boys, modeled after Christ, ebbed and flowed, but endured in popular discourse. The accusation was repeatedly denounced by kings, popes and other authorities, to little effect.

Although regarded as a quintessential 'medieval' accusation, the blood libel had far less importance or impact in its first few hundred years than in the centuries that followed when it was disseminated and elaborated. All later accusations built on the foundations of the medieval cases. ■

E. M. ROSE is a historian and author of *The Murder of William of Norwich: The Origins of the Blood Libel in Medieval Europe*. The book was chosen as one of the Top Ten History Books of the Year by the *Sunday Times* (London) and has just received the Ralph Waldo Emerson award from Phi Beta Kappa for a study that "contributes significantly to interpretations of the intellectual and cultural condition of humanity." Rose has taught at Johns Hopkins University, Villanova University, Princeton University, Rutgers University, and Baruch/CUNY. She is Visiting Scholar in the Program in Medieval Studies, Harvard University.



POLITICAL USES OF SPAIN'S BLOOD LIBEL MYTH: QUEEN ISABEL AND HER SUCCESSORS

— BARBARA WEISSBERGER

The Edict of Expulsion of all unconverted Jews that Queen Isabel and King Fernando issued in April of 1492 ended more than a millennium of coexistence between Christians and Jews in the Spanish kingdoms. Between 1391 and 1413 that often fragile coexistence began to unravel when real and threatened violence against Jews caused a massive wave of conversion to Christianity, creating a diverse group known as *conversos*. Prior to the conversions, blood libel accusations against Jews in Spain, unlike in the rest of Europe, had been exceedingly rare.

The *conversos* varied widely in their religious beliefs and practices, from those who

were devout Christians, to those who combined beliefs and practices of both Judaism and Christianity, to those who held no religious beliefs at all. But unlike Jews, *conversos* fell under the jurisdiction of the Inquisition, instituted by Papal decree in 1478 to eradicate heresy. It quickly created a climate of fear and denunciation between so-called “Old” and “New” Christians that set the stage for the spectacular blood libel accusation that is my subject today: the case of the Santo Niño de La Guardia or Holy Child of La Guardia. In 1487-88, a group of Jewish and *converso* neighbors from two villages near Toledo were arrested by the Inquisition, accused of kidnapping, torturing, and crucifying a Christian boy. No child was ever reported missing; no body ever found. Nevertheless, after a long trial, six *conversos* and two Jews were found guilty and burned at the stake in an auto-de-fe on November 16, 1491. Modern scholars maintain that these events were instrumental in the royal decision just a few months later to expel Spain’s Jews. The testimony of the accused and other trial documents in this trumped-up case reveal both the complex daily interaction of Christians and Jews living under the scrutiny of the Inquisition and the Inquisition’s determination to read coexistence as a threat to the unity and security of the emerging nation. Isabel and Fernando, engaged in a long war of succession, were highly susceptible to the insistence of Inquisitor General Tomás de Torquemada that expelling the Jews would eliminate social and political tension by imposing religious unity. The political appropriation of the La Guardia myth persisted up to the twentieth century and the dictatorship of Francisco Franco and his ideology of National Catholicism. ■

BARBARA WEISSBERGER has written extensively on gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and sovereignty in Medieval and Renaissance Spanish literature, and is considered a leading feminist scholar in the field of Hispanomedievalism. Her essay, “Gender and Genre: The Gendered Taxonomy of Spanish Romance,” received the John K. Walsh Prize, awarded for most outstanding essay by the MLA Division of Medieval Hispanic Languages, Literatures, and Cultures in 2001. In 2006 she received the International La Corónica Book Award for her book examining the role of competing gendered representations of the Catholic Queen in the construction of her public image, *Isabel Rules: Constructing Queenship, Wielding Power* (University of Minnesota Press, 2004). Together with María Judith Feliciano, Leyla Rouhi, and Cynthia Robinson, she co-edited a 2006 special issue of the journal *Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue*, entitled *Interrogating Iberian Frontiers*. She is currently working on another book-project, entitled *Anti-Semitism and Nationhood in Spain: 1490-1945*.





WHAT'S NEW IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD? BLOOD LIBEL AFTER TRENT 1475

— MAGDA TETER

The 1493 *Chronicle of the World* by Hartmann Schedel contains two images showing Jews killing Christian children – one is of William of Norwich, whose body was found in 1144, and the other of Simon of Trent, who died in 1475. The stories of William of Norwich and Simon of Trent serve as bookends of the medieval accusations against Jews. Simon of Trent became a liminal story. The death of Simon of Trent, and its aftermath, resulted in fundamental changes that had an impact not only on the early modern anti-Jewish libels, but on the Church responses to them all the way until the Second Vatican Council. This talk will discuss what was new about the early modern period in the history of anti-Jewish blood libels. ■

MAGDA TETER is Professor of History and the Shvidler Chair in Judaic Studies at Fordham University. She specializes in early modern religious and cultural history, with an emphasis on Jewish-Christian relations in Eastern Europe, the politics of religion, and transmission of culture among Jews and Christians across Europe in the early modern period. Teter is the author of *Jews and Heretics in Catholic Poland*, *Sinners on Trial* (Cambridge University Press), and a co-editor of and contributor to *Social and Cultural Boundaries in Pre-modern Poland* (Littman). Teter's work has been supported by the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation (2012), the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation (in 2007 and 2012), the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, the YIVO Institute, and the Yad Ha-Nadiv Foundation (Israel), among others. In 2002 she was a Harry Starr Fellow in Jewish Studies at Harvard University, and in 2007-2008, an Emeline Bigelow Conland Fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies, also at Harvard University.



ITALY AND THE CHURCH: REINVENTING THE MEDIEVAL IN FASCIST ITALY

— DAVID KERTZER

The official position of the Vatican (articulated in the 1998 statement, “We Remember”) holds that the kind of demonization of the Jews associated with the Shoah (“anti-Semitism”) was wholly different from the demonization of the Jews practiced over the centuries by the Roman Catholic Church (“anti-Judaism”). Serious historical examination shows how fallacious this position is, both because the Church promul-

gated many of the images of the Jews associated with “modern” antisemitism, and because the Nazis and Fascists made ample use of classic Church-linked demonic images. Here we look at the Italian Fascist regime’s use of the ritual murder charge as part of its efforts to promote its antisemitic “racial” campaign of 1938-43. We also examine the background to this campaign in the ample use of the ritual murder charge by major Vatican-linked publications in the decades preceding the Italian racial laws. ■

Winner of the 2015 Pulitzer Prize for Biography, DAVID I. KERTZER’s latest book, *The Pope and Mussolini: The Secret History of Pius XI and the Rise of Fascism in Europe*, was published by Random House in North America. Kertzer is an authority on Italian politics, society, and history; political symbolism; and anthropological demography. He is co-founder and served for many years as co-editor of the *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*. In April 2016, Steven Spielberg announced that he would be making a film in 2017 based on one of Kertzer’s earlier books, *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara*, with a screenplay by Tony Kushner. In 2005 Kertzer was elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. From 2006 to 2011, he was the Provost of Brown University where he is currently the Paul Dupee University Professor of Social Science and Professor of Anthropology and Italian Studies.



MODERNITY, SCIENCE, AND RITUAL MURDER: TOWARD A PHENOMENOLOGY OF ‘MODERN’ RITUAL MURDER TRIALS.

— HILLEL KIEVAL

When trials against Jews for “ritual murder” reappeared in Central Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, after a hiatus of some three centuries, they seemed to be a throwback to the Middle Ages. The truth is, however, that the modern trials were very different from traditional proceedings. The “rules of the game” had changed; ritual murder accusations, and the criminal examinations that ensued, could no longer be framed in pre-Reformation language and symbols. Prosecutors, magistrates, trial judges, and police investigators shared an implicit understanding that a new universe of knowledge was in place in which academic experts and practitioners of science defined the boundaries of plausible argument and were to be accorded deference. This does not mean that traditional religious beliefs suddenly ceased to be disseminated or no longer influenced courtroom proceedings, but cultural traditions and psychological predispositions would no longer suffice. New arguments and new appeals to authority were now required to move states to indict or judges and juries

to convict. My paper will highlight a few examples of the ways in which the epistemological contours of modern ritual murder trials were articulated—and with what consequences. ■

HILLEL KIEVAL is the Gloria M. Goldstein Professor of Jewish History and Thought at Washington University in St. Louis where he teaches European Jewish history from medieval to modern times; directs graduate students in both Jewish and Central European history; and also offers courses in history and memory, ethnicity and nationalism, the Holocaust, and Jewish identities in the “age of nationalism.” Kieval’s research focuses on transformations in Jewish culture and society in East Central Europe (Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Poland) from the Enlightenment to the Second World War, including the effects of modernization projects, ethnic and national struggles, social conflict, and antisemitism on Jewish life and Jewish-Gentile relations. Kieval’s work displays a particular interest in changing linguistic, cultural, and communal affiliations among Jews; in cross-cultural conflicts and misunderstandings; the function and phenomenology of the “ritual murder” trial in modern Europe; and, most recently, in the relationship between sacred text and ascribed identity in urban Central Europe at the turn of the twentieth century. Kieval’s publications have dealt with such topics as national conflict and the formation of modern Jewish culture in the Bohemian lands; language, community, and Jewish experience in the Bohemian lands; trials against Jews for “ritual murder” in modern Europe; Jewish cultural mediation in multi-ethnic societies; the creation of the Golem legend in Prague; and Jewish resistance in Vichy France.



BEYOND BEILIS: THE BLOOD LIBEL UNDER THE SOVIETS

— ELISSA BEMPORAD

Largely associated with the Jewish experience in Imperial Russia, the ritual murder accusation did not die out after the Beilis Affair of 1913. In fact, it persisted after the Bolshevik revolution under the Soviets. By looking at specific cases of ritual murder from the 1920s and 1930s, this paper will examine the endurance and the permutation of the accusation in the Soviet Union, in the context of a system that categorically opposed antisemitism as emblematic of the defeated Tsarist regime. The rich Soviet anti-religious propaganda literature and the press, show that the persistence of the ritual murder accusation in the Soviet Union was also determined by the nature of the Bolshevik experiment itself. Most notably, the anti-religious propaganda that attacked Judaism (and in particular, the Jewish “rituals of blood” such as circumcision and ko-

sher slaughtering), inadvertently reinforced anti-Jewish stereotypes. This analysis will reveal the depth of powerful anti-Jewish myths among segments of the Soviet population until the German invasion, and will explore the metamorphosis of the blood libel in the secular postwar Stalinist USSR. ■

ELISSA BEMPORAD is associate professor of history and the Jerry and William Ungar Chair in Eastern European Jewish history and the Holocaust at Hunter College (CUNY). Her research focuses on the social and cultural history of the Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union. Bemporad is the author of *Becoming Soviet Jews: The Bolshevik Experiment in Minsk, 1917-1939* (Indiana University Press). Her new book, *Legacy of Blood: Jews, Pogroms and Ritual Murder in the Lands of the Soviets*, which will be published by Oxford University Press, is a social history of the two greatest legacies of Tsarist antisemitism, the pogroms, and the blood libel accusations, from 1917 to the 1970s. Together with Joyce Warren, she is co-editing the forthcoming volume *Women and Genocide* (Indiana University Press) about the multifaceted roles played by women in different genocidal contexts during the twentieth century.

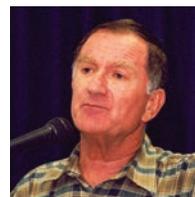


THE BLOOD LIBEL IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD

— RAPHAEL ISRAELI

Since its inception, the blood libel was based within Christian theological concepts regarding the mystery of blood as a type of religious representation of Christ. In the wake of the 1913 Mendel Beilis Trial in Russia, the blood libel largely disappeared in the West, because it was understood to be not only deeply antisemitic, but unbelievable as a religious rite. In the Islamic world, however, the blood libel continues to appear with great frequency and has developed new contextualizations, changing Passover to Purim and its vehicles from matzos to cakes. This presentation will explore the more recent transmissions of the blood libel from the West to the East and the variations created by its purveyors. ■

RAPHAEL ISRAELI is a Professor of Islamic, Middle Eastern, and Chinese history at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Professor Israeli is the author of 15 books and some 80 scholarly articles in those domains. A member of the Steering Committee of the Ariel Center for Policy Research (ACPR), his work in Hebrew, French, and English frequently appears in leading international publications including *Nativ*.



UPCOMING YIVO PROGRAMS

WED.
NOV 2
7:00pm

Young Jewish American Composers

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A concert of new classical works by young Jewish American composers, featuring conversations with the composers exploring how Jewish history and identity informs the creation of new works of art music. *Co-sponsored by the American Society for Jewish Music and American Jewish Historical Society.*

WED.
NOV 16
6:30pm

Out of the Ghetto: Struggle, Resistance and the Human Spirit. The Ringelblum Archive Publication Project

RUTH GAY SEMINAR IN JEWISH STUDIES

Historian **Eleonora Bergman** (Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw) discusses the monumental project to publish the entire *Oyneg-Shabes* Archive, secretly gathered in the Warsaw Ghetto by Emanuel Ringelblum and colleagues. With **Samuel Kassow** (Trinity College), Moderator and Respondent, and **Robert Shapiro** (Brooklyn College), Panelist.

TUE.
NOV 22
6:30pm

Norman Manea Celebration

WRITER RETROSPECTIVE

With the occasion of his 80th Anniversary, YIVO organizes a festive celebration of **Norman Manea**, Holocaust survivor and one of the most important contemporary Jewish-Romanian-American writers. *Co-sponsored by the Romanian Cultural Institute and the Romanian Consulate in New York.*

THU.
DEC 8
7:00pm

Yiddish Open Mic

OPEN MIC EVENT

We want your talent in Yiddish! Join celebrated host, actor, and singer **Shane Baker**, and special guests for a fun, intimate night of Yiddish performance. Bring your instruments, poems, monologues, manifestos, and films in Yiddish. **Sign up starts at 7:00pm, open mic starts at 7:30pm.**

TUE.
DEC 13
3:00pm

The Yiddish Theater in America and Poland Between the Two World Wars

RUTH GAY SEMINAR IN JEWISH STUDIES

YIVO's Vilna Collections Scholar-in-Residence, **Alyssa Quint**, will share her impressions of YIVO's vast Esther Rachel Kaminska Theater Museum Archive and will offer insights about the colossal achievement of the trans-Atlantic interwar Yiddish stage, focusing on the most important theater centers in New York, Warsaw, Lodz, and Vilna.

WED.
DEC 21
7:00pm

Yuval Waldman 70th Birthday Concert Celebration

CONCERT

On the occasion of his 70th birthday, violinist and champion of Jewish music **Yuval Waldman** will play a recital-lecture of works by Jewish composers which he commissioned or gave the premiere performance of. *A reception will follow the concert.*

► For tickets and more information, visit yivo.org/Events.



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THANK YOU.



YIVO wishes to thank an anonymous donor for their generous support in underwriting the reception for today's conference.



YIVO's mission is to preserve, study, share, and perpetuate knowledge of the history and culture of East European Jewry worldwide through our educational programs and our global outreach. As the leading center for East European Jewish Studies in the world, YIVO specializes in Yiddish language, literature and folklore, the Holocaust, and the American Jewish immigrant experience. YIVO's Archive and Library hold 23 million documents and more than 385,000 volumes, including the world's largest collection of Yiddish-language materials. YIVO offers public and educational programs, exhibitions, symposia, publications, and fellowships.