

## *Preface*

Shylock: Thou call'dst me dog before thou hadst a cause;  
But, since I am a dog, beware my fangs.  
Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* 3.3.6-7

Works of history are supposed to be dispassionate, their authors detached, and the books they write judgmentally neutral. By these standards, this book is a failure. Engagement and emotion are visible on every page.

To produce such a book was far from my mind when I began to write. My intention was to perform a simple scholarly exercise contrasting the discussions of purported ritualistic murders by Jews of Christian children as these discussions appear in late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Jewish and Christian narrative sources. But a wrinkle soon appeared. I discovered that the key to understanding the medieval Christian narrative lies in the writings of the still little known Jesuit Bollandists of Antwerp and Louvain, or Leuven, the seventeenth-century authors of the multivolume *Acta Sanctorum*.<sup>1</sup> Theirs was the first attempt accurately to establish and report saints' lives; their purpose was to winnow the false from the true. Yet, in the process, and faithful to their own interpretative standards, they came to validate reports of ritual murder, giving these reports full, and sometimes, forceful credence. But why? My reading quickly became two-layered, and the result was historiography within historiography: to ask why, at least in this instance, medieval historical writing is so well interpreted through the lens of similar writing, and its underlying motivation, in early modernity, each of the two in its own time-specific context.

It then remained to ask whether the Bollandists had opened a window only on twelfth- and thirteenth-century writing and thought. Or does their perspicacity shed light on the actual experiences of twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Jews independently of contemporary

chroniclers and their biases? It does. In particular, their writings provide a direct path into the thinking—and policies—of King Philip II Augustus of France (1179–1223). To complicate matters, John McCulloh, who graciously read an early draft of this study, asked me whether the modern successors of the original Bollandists, still known by this name and still resident in Belgium, perpetuated their predecessors' outlook. With respect to the ritual murder charge, they most certainly did not. Rather, early twentieth-century Bollandist scholars forcefully repudiated the ritual murder accusations their predecessors thought they had validated. Even more forcefully, modern Bollandists locked horns with early twentieth-century proponents of the ritual murder charge, many of whom were members of the Bollandists' own Jesuit Order. Belief in ritual murder had been continuous over eight centuries.

This unbroken line says much about how Christianity, especially Catholic Christianity, confronted Jews over the *longue durée*, hence the subtitle *Continuity in the Catholic-Jewish Encounter*. Tracing the roots of this eight-hundred-year belief and following their continuity into the twentieth century became central to the study. These roots lie in the writings of Paul, although, more precisely, as we shall see, they lie in subsequent elaborations.

This is not to presage a blanket condemnation of Catholicism or of individual Catholics (nor does it serve as a pretext to censure the recently much discussed Pius XII, whose name will reappear but once in the entire book). On the contrary, this study has Catholic “heroes,” and, as is easy to guess, these heroes are the twentieth-century Bollandists (and Catholics of like mind), who not only denounced the ritual murder myth but continued to do so in the face of sometimes virulent censure. No papal denunciation of this accusation, beginning with that of Innocent IV in 1247, had ever been so blunt. Ironically, the source of the modern Bollandist denunciation was strict adherence to the traditions of rigorous hagiographic scholarship established by the first Bollandists. Bollandist sophistication had grown enormously over the centuries. To this irony and its effects, I shall devote considerable space.

The study originated with the question of how Jews perceived one instance of the ritual murder myth, that at Blois on the Loire in 1171.

And as research on occasion felicitously does, this study began in the classroom. My students and I had set out to read a group of Hebrew letters apparently related to the burning at Blois of about thirty Jews, who perished in a great bonfire ordered by Theobald, count of Blois, brother-in-law of King Louis VII, the father of Philip Augustus. It is commonly assumed that these letters were composed very shortly after the events, and, at the start, not expecting surprises, my students and I thought unraveling the letters would take no more than one or two classroom sessions. We spent nearly the whole year on the project. Each class meeting produced new questions and generated the need for ever-closer textual reading.<sup>2</sup>

Ostensibly, the principal actor in these Hebrew letters is King Louis VII. The subject is his reactions to the burnings. In fact, our classroom discussions brought us to agree that the king really meant is either Louis's son, Philip Augustus, or (less probably) the later Louis IX. This discovery prompted me, now independently, to investigate anew the texts relating to Philip Augustus's interaction with the Jews. The investigation confirmed the known picture, but it added an important detail, that Philip's demonstrable belief that Jews killed Christian children was not only important, but pivotal in his Jewry policies. Philip may also have thought Jews capable of "sacrificing and devouring little Christian children's hearts," the full-blown "blood libel," where the blood of the ritual murder victim is alleged to be used for ritual or magical purposes. Yet Philip would have imagined this alleged crime a full decade or more before the first actual accusation of murdering a Christian child to extract and use its blood was made at Fulda, in Germany, in 1235.

To verify these findings, I set out, with some admitted serendipity, to investigate the fortunes of medieval ritual murder accusations as they are reported in the *Acta Sanctorum*. These reports are as sophisticated as they are disturbing—and they also influenced future thought. This last I realized thanks to the promptings of John McCulloh, but also to the good fortune of reading, at about this point in my research, the writings of Giovanni Miccoli and David Kertzer, now reinforced by the work of Tomasso Caliò. Everything came together. The Bollandists' representation of the fate of the alleged victims—victims they called

martyrs, for reasons we shall see below—adumbrates late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century imaginings, which are framed as a perennial Jewish assault on Catholic integrity and purity. The early Bollandists themselves portray this assault as a never-ending attack on the Eucharist. The victims (as was also the case with Catholics martyring themselves rather than submit to Protestant demands in the Bollandists' own day) were deemed eucharistic surrogates.

Almost consequentially, the ritual murder narratives of the *Acta Sanctorum* were the font from which Italian Jesuits of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries drew to publish essays (in *La civiltà cattolica* and similar journals) touting ritual murder as a fact. As Félix Vernet observed a century ago,<sup>3</sup> the Bollandists' early modern seventeenth-century narrations of supposedly true medieval events influenced the twentieth-century audience: the fideistic line adopted and the unswerving belief professed by twentieth-century Italian Jesuit writers (and by others, too) who launched the libels anew were identical to the positions espoused by medieval and early modern narrators. The message ritual murder tales conveyed to their audience had clearly remained constant over time. The only change was the message's reslanting to promote contemporary goals.

The key allowing succeeding layers of narrators to exploit tales of ritual murder for immediate needs may be a unanimity of credence. Unwavering faith in the veracity of the tales has, for over eight hundred years, facilitated interpreting—and reinterpreting—them in the light of what I would like to call the “authorial present.” In one way or another, those writing of ritual murder did so within their own temporal context. Discussing highly different events, Gabrielle Spiegel has called writing of the past in the present tense “Romancing the Past.”<sup>4</sup> The idea of the past interpreted in presentist terms also underlies Karl Morrison's portrayal of medieval historical writing, which he describes as the creation of “instruments of [aesthetic] cognition.” By visually and verbally stimulating readers to confront gaps that authors purposefully left in order to stoke the imagination, seal in memories, instill values, and “discipline the soul,” images were created in readers' minds that “opened . . . a multitude of speculative doors.”<sup>5</sup> Jean-Claude Schmitt goes a step further. Discussing the nature of medieval

“chronicles” and “histories,” he asks how “despite professing [their devotion] to truth [*vérité*], the [authors of these histories] willingly incorporate the most marvelous fictions.” His answer is simple: “For them [these authors], history is a discourse of *vérité*, par excellence, but their perception of history and *vérité* is quite different from ours.”<sup>6</sup>

With respect to tales of ritual murder, this definition and terms like “romancing the past” or “authorial present” are most apt. One would be hard pressed to find a better example than ritual murder of remolding historical materials to suit contemporary, even sectorial, needs.<sup>7</sup> We have just noted that the twentieth-century Jesuit heirs of the original Bollandists were repudiating the ritual murder libel at the same time that other Jesuits were fostering it, principally Jesuits living in Rome and writing in *La civiltà cattolica*. For the modern Bollandists, the charge of ritual murder was “inane.” This was their “authorial present,” and we shall see that what guided them was their ability to detach themselves, as scholars, from the theo-political issues of ecclesiastical self-confidence, and its absence, that plagued the ritual murder charge’s twentieth-century defenders. These latter feared for ecclesiastical purity, and they feared even more for the survival of the Church as they knew it, just as those who came before them had done in centuries past. Understanding the reasons for the firm stance of the twentieth-century Bollandists decrying the ritual murder charge—even when to do so meant openly clashing with their Italian Jesuit counterparts—has been one of the more intriguing, if not uplifting, aspects of the present study.<sup>8</sup>

A second result, important to me historiographically, is that my reading of the Bollandist work, as I had hoped from the start, allowed me to corroborate the interpretations my students and I had reached for the so-called Blois letters. For reasons of a more orderly presentation, these Hebrew texts are discussed second and the Bollandist material first. This editorial decision has not affected the conclusions.

Yet once the task of corroboration and mutual corroboration was achieved, I began to ask whether John McCulloh’s question about the continuity of Bollandist thought from the seventeenth century to modern times might not be posed in reverse. Might reading Bollandist material also point backward, to help understand earlier periods,

and especially the thinking of those who lived well before the times of the imputed ritual murders in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries? The results of the inquiry were electrifying. I was carried back to Christian origins, and what finally emerged was a demonstrable continuity in attitudes toward Jews that has survived through not eight hundred years but nearly two thousand. In the words of my friend Robert Stacey, I had chanced upon an enduring “exegetical matrix.” There was no choice for me but to follow this matrix as it took its full course. Put otherwise, Bollandist thinking both forced and allowed me to put order into issues I had been struggling with for years. What I had at first imagined would be the end of the study turned out to be its beginning.

This book addresses a wide audience, or at least so it is hoped. I recognize that many readers will find parts of the book daunting, especially the technical discussions of the policies of King Philip Augustus of France and, perhaps more, the analysis of the Blois Letters. Nor will the discussion of martyrdom, particularly that of Werner of Oberwesel, found in Chapter 2, lack complexity. I ask forbearance. Readers may decide first to read rapidly, to follow the overall sense, and then to revisit sections most attuned to their personal and scholarly interests. They are asked also keep in mind that this book is *primarily a history of continuous and continuing mentality*, which seeks to explain, or at least to offer one plausible explanation for, why the subject of Jews has been so consistently problematic in the history of the Christian, especially the Catholic, West, and why a constant set of unchanging principles has underlain periodic variations. The roots of attitudes toward Jews are as deep as they have resisted decay. With this thought fixed in his or her mind, the reader’s compass will hopefully point always north.

The story will not be told conventionally, proceeding century by century. Instead, it will be set out principally by theme, beginning with an overall discussion, in the Introduction, of imagery based on interpretations of the scenario presented in Matthew 15:26: Matthew’s statement, put in the mouth of Christ, that “the bread” that he, Christ, has brought for “the children” should not be “thrown to the dogs”; in the text of the Latin Vulgate, “non est bonum sumere panem filiorum et mittere canibus.” Exegetically, this verse was transmogrified into an

image of Christian children hungering for the Eucharist, which “Jewish dogs” incessantly plot to steal, consume, savage, or pollute. This identification dates from no later than the fourth century.

Yet we have already indicated that often imagined Jewish plots against the Eucharist were expressed in later times in terms of ritual murder or the blood libel, the victims called martyrs, and every martyr considered a eucharistic surrogate. As though by definition, all imagined Jewish assaults against “innocent children” came to be identified as assaults against the Eucharist. It is the perennially perceived interchangeability of martyr-victim with eucharistic purity and its defense, or simply the idea of defending eucharistic purity from its pretended enemies, that unites centuries of thinking. It also is the line that runs through and unites the various sections of this book. Its chronological progression from ancient origins to modern ambivalence, back to medieval anxieties, and finally to modern and general thematic concerns should not confuse. The central question is always the Eucharist and those who are said to threaten it, the so-called “Jewish dogs”—and sometimes Jewish responses to this anxiety.

Two motifs are woven through the book, sometimes more, sometimes less visibly. The reader is urged to keep both constantly in mind. In one way or another, they are linked to the image of the “Jewish dog,” which itself often lies, or should I say lies in waiting, in the shadows of the discussion. One of these, as might be imagined, is purity and its maintenance in the face of suspected Jewish aggression. Achieving victory required adopting dual and often overlapping strategies. First, physical contact was proscribed. Contact with the perennially “unclean” Jews was called contaminating, especially sexual contact, but also the contact of common commensality. Second, special Jewish nefariousness was memorialized through purposefully concocted tales. These demonstrated the unexceptional triumph of martyrdom against all attempts at depredation, in this case, the triumph of the surrogate Eucharist, the victim of ritual murder; by survival, I mean of the victim’s eucharistic body, not the physical one.

Moreover, unsullied Christian purity was a prerequisite to participate in Christian ritual acts, most particularly, to receive—or give—the Eucharist. It goes without saying that formal teaching holds unexceptionally

that nothing can affect the Eucharist itself, which is considered God incarnate, as was Christ himself. Informal belief was less sure, heightening fears. Purity also referred to the physical purity of holy spaces and objects. These, too, had to be defended. No less important was the desire to demonstrate purity's merits. Here, martyrdom and its commemoration played a particular role. So essential was the testimony of martyrdom to demonstrate eucharistic resilience and purity that martyrs were fictionally created. To this, the repetition of ritual murder tales over the centuries both contributed and unerringly attests.

The second motif is that of "supersession."<sup>9</sup> Christian teaching claims that Christianity is the bearer, actually, the sole legitimate possessor, of the divine promise and choice, and that it has inherited the mantle of *Verus Israel*, the True Israel, which the Jews once asserted was exclusively theirs (or so Christian theology has framed it). In Paul's candid words: "We [believers], my brothers, are we not like Isaac, the sons of the promise . . . [and thus] free? . . . The covenant . . . of Sinai [Judaism] gives birth to slavery" (Gal. 4:28/24, in that order). However, the Church sought authentication for "supersession" by demonstrating that the faith (faith, not deeds) of the newly chosen Christians was integral, pure, and unblemished, but, most of all, capable of withstanding challenge. This last was revealed best through the ability to repulse alleged Jewish aggression.

It is at this point that the motifs of purity and supersession meet; "fuse" might be a more precise word. For what Jewish aggression and wrongful contact most endangered was that highest form of Christian purity, unity in Christ, a unity that also bestows upon every Christian a eucharistic aspect. By partaking of the Eucharist, every Christian, individually, became a metaphoric limb of the Christian body, an integral member of the social unity constituted by Paul's Christian fellowship (as Paul defines it most precisely in 1 Cor. 10:16–18). Unity in Christ, as Paul explained it in Romans, also made the Christian into the spiritual child of Abraham, replacing the children of Abraham's flesh. But this coveted status and its purity might easily be corrupted. To paraphrase Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:6 and 6:15–16: A little leaven sours the whole loaf; do not eat with the sinful. Nor may one unite with a whore (literally or metaphorically understood), lest he or she destroy the bond

to, and unity in, Christ. In Galatians, Paul exhorts: “expel the son of the servant woman” (4:30), by which he meant avoid Jewish practice, even if the practitioners are Christians. Later, this would become avoid Jewish plots, which subvert. The concepts of supersession and the preservation of Christian purity had become conjoint twins.

Yet purity and its conservation is not a Christian invention. It has been a central theme throughout the human past. It featured already in Hittite conceptions of the Temple Gate as early as the second millennium B.C.E. But so, tellingly, did the dog. Who might pass through the gate? Neither pigs nor dogs, for they were considered foci of impurity. No attempt will be made here *directly* to trace the transmission of this Hittite concept to the future. Yet one cannot but note the parallel to the prophet Isaiah, who contrasts the antinomies of proper sacrifice, an ox or a lamb and incense, with the unclean sacrifice of a dog, a pig, or idolatry.<sup>10</sup> Adepts of the ancient Dead Sea Sect, too, may have used the canine image as a marker of impurity.<sup>11</sup> That members of this sect linked the sense of their own purity with the idea of being chosen goes without saying.

It is in these terms that the notion of dogs and pigs, but especially dogs, will be at the heart of this book; the arch-locus of impurity, dogs—read here, “Jewish dogs”—were to be kept from entering “the temple,” now, the Christian temple. They must especially be kept away from (Matthew’s [15:26]) “bread.” Were not Hittites admonished: “let not a pig or a dog stay at the door of the place [the temple] where the *loaves* are broken?” And were they not further told: “Since a dog approached the [altar] table and consumed the daily [sacrificial offering of] bread, they ‘consume’ [destroy] the table.” The near identity of Matthew and the Hittite texts is breathtaking. This sense Matthew 7:6 reinforces, warning believers not to give the holy to dogs, their “pearls” to swine. About the tenth century, this last verse was applied directly to Jews. The images of dogs (and pigs) and (Eucharistic) loaves (and regardless of Matthew’s original intention) seem almost destined to become focal in Christian confrontational teachings regarding Jews.

The drama of the hermeneutic was also going to be applied to supposedly real confrontations. In the ritual murder story of Simonino of Trent in 1475, the Jews are said literally “to bark.” In 1870, Pius IX

would use this same word to speak of Jews liberated from the Ghetto, now free, he was implying, to wander about like dogs and befoul the city of Rome. However verbalized and whatever the context, the image of the contaminating “Jewish dog” seems to have been one that facily reached the tip of the tongue. This was so even as the modes of confrontational expression evolved over time, even when they became politicized within the framework of the modern state, and even when they were framed in terms of race. What often seems to have been qualitative change is really “the old in a new container,” or so I believe.<sup>12</sup>

Apprehension about Jews began with the founding of the Church itself, and it has endured, and still endures, to the detriment of all. Some express their apprehension with reserve, and still others through words of excruciating hate. However, for all, the source of apprehension, the fear of being compromised and of losing pride of place, is in refusing to accept the idea perhaps first put forth by the Italian Jew David de Pomis, who wrote, as early as the late sixteenth century, that “nothing is more a matter of individual will than belief.”<sup>13</sup> By definition, there are no hierarchies, no preferences, no belief that is better than another, certainly none that guarantees. God, de Pomis, may have been thinking, has no preference, but desires only mutual human respect.

De Pomis may also have been reflecting on the words of Isaiah about the nature of fasting. The fast, Isaiah said, must be accompanied by care for one’s neighbor—by itself fasting yields nothing—for only then “will your dawn break forth” (Isa. 58:8). Dismiss haughtiness, Isaiah was saying. Do not vaunt yourself to claim that your way is better than mine. That is sin, and as the Gospel would later say, “the wages of sin are death.” Yet even in the early twenty-first century, there are some who refuse to accept this message. They claim theological preeminence and broadcast hate. And they do this both on the Internet, as will be amply illustrated below, and on the cinema screen. They have produced cinematic blood libels in reverse, in which the ritual murder victim is Christ himself. For such people, as I see it, the “light of the dawn” will never break forth.

As I said at the start of this Preface, I did not embark on writing this book to make a statement like this. My intentions were purely scholarly, in the strictest sense of the term; and my hope is that what I have said will be judged by the strict scholarly standards that determined my every written word. I most definitely did not intend, therefore, to end by calling for the cessation of all supersessionist teaching, nor was my purpose to urge quashing its motivating fears; it matters little how this teaching is framed or the manner in which the fears are expressed. This call came on its own, the day after I wrote the closing words in the last chapter. By the time the reader presses through what is not always a neat thicket, I hope he or she, too, will agree that this call needs to be made, even in this work of rigorous historical study. Or perhaps just because of it.

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The research on this book has sometimes been unconventional. The libraries of the University of Haifa and Columbia University have served me well, as have those of Smith College, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and Amherst College. And, of course, the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. But the Internet, too, has been a fruitful source, and not only for ready information such as dates or for on-line texts. The “Net” is one of the best (read, worst) places to find scurrilous libels and reprints of earlier attacks. These sites will be referred to more than once. Happily, the noxious Melvig.org now vends consumer products, not lies; one suspects a change of domain. Holywar.org, the most salacious of these sites, is still going strong. Its condemnations of the late Pope John Paul II for heresy, alongside so much more that it contains, should make Catholics shudder.

I thank those who have made this book possible. Friends have read the manuscript in whole or in part, including John McCulloh, David Malkiel, John O’Malley, Haym Soloveitchik, Ronald Florence, and Kevin Madigan, who reviewed the central medieval chapters and gave important advice. William Chester Jordan helped in matters pertaining to French history, as only he knows how to do, and Esther Cohen shared with me her limitless knowledge of medieval ways. The full manuscript was read and vetted in detail and to my profit by Johannes

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HAIFA, ISRAEL