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***Mobilis in mobili***  
**or What Blood Libel Legends are Made of**

That which historians label factographically relevant is not sufficient to understand the history of a nation. We must also concern ourselves with things that have the status of non-facts, with the imaginary and nonsensical, with rumour and invention. The status of these phenomena—subject to ridicule and unambiguous today—was quite different until the day before. As all post-war pogroms in Poland (save one) show, the rumour of the kidnapping of a Christian child could bring crowds into the streets practically yesterday. Even today these tales, still alive in Sandomierz, a small town in the Małopolska upland, Poland<sup>1</sup>, are not what we believe them to be. In order to understand them, we need to re-examine the tangled relationship between knowledge and belief.

When asked if they really believe in everything they recount, spokesmen of relict societies to which the belief in archaic mythologies is attributed—comprising the famous ethnographic toposes, such as that about Bororo Indians being descendants of parrots<sup>2</sup> or that about the voice of the forest spirit that comes out from the Pygmy *molimo* horn<sup>3</sup>--their reply is most likely to be that [in a quotation provided by Slavoj Žižek]:

"«Of course not—I am not that stupid. But I was told that some of our ancestors did in fact believe in it». In brief, they transfer their belief onto someone else (...) In a peculiar manner, some beliefs always function at a certain distance, when intermediated: to be operative, they always require some final guarantor, believer;

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<sup>1</sup> The author draws here on the ethnographic field research which she, together with a group of 40 university students, carried out in Sandomierz and its environs in the years 2005-2006 and also in the Eastern Podlasie region (areas surrounding Hajnówka) in December 2007 as part of *The Pole in the Closet* Project. That research (Sandomierz, 400 interviews, Roman Catholic parishes) demonstrated widespread survival of blood libel myth themes in the consciousness of informants across all age groups, as well as provided evidence of the presence of such themes in the religious, familial, social, and literary transmission. The report on Sandomierz research was published in a book by J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Legendy o krwi. Antropologia przesądu* [Blood Legend Myths: An Anthropology of Prejudice], Warsaw 2008. The Podlasie report (400 interviews, Christian Orthodox parishes) is under preparation for publication.

<sup>2</sup> This example is based on the ambivalent description in: K. von den Steinen, *Unter der Naturvolken Zentral-Brasiliens*, Berlin 1894, p. 352; which was subsequently adopted by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Gerardus Van der Leeuw, Robert Lowie, Lev Vygotski, Clifford Geertz, and Jonathan Smith. See Mary Douglas, by her *Edward Evans -Pritchard*, New York 1980, pp. 8-9.

<sup>3</sup> Zob. C.M. Turnbull, *Leśni ludzie* [The Forest People], Polish translation by H. Błaszczewicz, Warsaw 1990.

yet such believer is always somewhere else, always removed, never present in person"<sup>4</sup>.

This is precisely how the blood libel myth works in Sandomierz: Nobody seems to believe in those fairy tales any more, but nearly everybody knows somebody who can attest to their truth--a former parish priest, a bishop who is no longer alive, an old nanny, a retired nun, one's own parents or grandparents. With an alibi like this, the legend requires no belief at all. One is simply familiar with it.

The following conclusion may be drawn from the foregoing. To understand the history of a nation, the set of universally known ideological and ethical narratives forming the nation's symbolic tradition must be expanded to embrace the obscene Other, or the unacknowledged "spectral", fantasmatic history that effectively sustains the overt tradition<sup>5</sup>. The "daylight" history of the Poles, stuffed with poisonous martyrological clichés, will wane only if and when the "night-time" history of the Poles is revealed. In Poland, the latter comprises the story about "the Jew in a green hat", a figure familiar from the documents of the Kielce pogrom<sup>6</sup>, or "the spiked barrel" in which "Christian children" are being tormented<sup>7</sup>.

Blood libel myths, or narratives about "Jews-bloodsuckers" assaulting the most sacred things of Christianity, the host and a Christian child, established the secret kernel of European anti-Semitism. As the research carried out in Sandomierz and Podlasie during the last three years demonstrates, provincial Christian Orthodox and Catholic clergy quietly maintain their belief in Jewish ritual murders to the present day. Borrowing the categories of Žižek, we may call this irrational and blood myths' rooted kernel of the debate about the Jews the *Real* of the Polish anti-Semitic discourse, i.e. something that has never happened, but which is known to all, even when everybody, with the exception of "simple rural folk", is trying to hide that fact.

To reproduce meanings, there is nothing better than a well told story. The following tale, which I have reconstructed following Vladimir Propp<sup>8</sup>, rests on pillars that are only half-

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<sup>4</sup> S.Žižek, *Lacan*, Polish translation by J.Kutyła, Warsaw 2008, pp. 43-44.

<sup>5</sup> "We need to separate two things--writes Žižek--the *symbolic history*--the set of mythological narratives, ideological-ethical tales which constitute the tradition of a community, something that Hegel would call the ethical substance--from its obscene Other, from the unacknowledged «spectral», fantasmatic history which effectively sustains the overt symbolic tradition. For the former to be effective, the latter must remain hidden"; Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute or Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting for?* London – New York 2000, pp. 64-65.

<sup>6</sup> See Polish Ministry of the Interior Archives, AMSW, k.35, Antonina Biskupska court record, Walenty Błaszczak testimony, quoted after Bożena Szajnok, *Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach 4 lipca 1946*, Wrocław 1992, p. 33.

<sup>7</sup> The most common element of the Eastern-European blood-libel legends.

<sup>8</sup> See Władimir I. Propp, *Morfologia bajki*, translated into Polish by W. Wojtyga-Zagórska, Warsaw 1976 (hereinafter "MB"); the English edition is Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, translated by Lawrence Scott, rev. ed. by L.A. Wagner, Austin 2001. MB, 59: "By function we mean the behaviour of the dramatis persona as defined from the perspective of its relevance for the course of action". Janusz Sławiński: "Propp distinguished 31 components of the folktale plot ([so-called functions]: absence, interdiction and its violation, deception and complicity, villainy, departure, provision or receipt of the

visible. Seemingly, it is a tale about the defilement of Christ's blood flowing from the host and the tormenting of an innocent who serves as a "surrogate Eucharist" (Kenneth Stow<sup>9</sup>). Yet, in point of fact, this is a celebration of the tribe's own blood, the blood which the Jews are accused of spilling.

In relating what the blood libel legends are made of,

- I begin by describing their theological foundation that crystallised in the 13th century;
- subsequently, using the tools proposed by Vladimir Propp, I examine the mechanics of their movement,
- next, I trace a peculiar genealogy of these legends, running in a direct line from Passion-inspired imagery, long-forgotten by the Christians themselves and associated with uncanny Jewish savageness,
- finally, I examine the pivot of these legends, or that which is *immobile* in them.

### **I. Elite Folk Theology**

The "theology" of blood libel myths is not what it purports to be and which it would be convenient to assume it to be: It is not a folk creation, at all<sup>10</sup>. In reality, it is a sediment of high theological speculations, today forgotten and disavowed, which has built up over centuries in the layers of folk imagination.

In order to understand what body and blood was the target of the sacrilegious Jews when they attacked the host and "Christian children", we must backtrack to the realm of theology produced after the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) or even to an earlier era.

Beginning with the early Christian period and up to the 9th century, theologians and the faithful used the term *corpus Christi* to designate two directly observable and internally connected realities that were believed to constitute the body of Christ; namely, the Catholic Church and the consecrated mass wafer. In order to differentiate these realities, the term *corpus Christi* was used in two slightly different forms. When *corpus Christi* was mentioned without further qualification, the Church was meant; in contrast when people spoke about *corpus mysticum*, they referred to the wafer. Since circa the year 1000

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magical agent, struggle, victory, return, pursuit and rescue, unfounded claims, recognition and exposure, wedding). These functions form not only the repertoire of fictional elements, but also, and more importantly, determine the arrangement of the entire plot, because their sequence is also identical. Fables follow the same invariable scheme of the sequential ordering of fictional functions"; after: Michał Głowiński, Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska, Janusz Sławiński, *Słownik terminów literackich* [Dictionary of Literary Terms], 4th edition, Warsaw 2005, p. 170.

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Stow, *Jewish Dogs. An Image and Its Interpreters. Continuity in the Catholic-Jewish Encounter* [hereinafter: DOGS], Stanford 2006, pp. XIV-XV .

<sup>10</sup> "The accusations of blood crimes that were made from the 12th century onwards by Christians are eagerly thought to be a product of stupid «superstitions of the common people». In reality they are tightly bound with subtle theological speculations pursued in Late Middle Ages on the subject of Christ's Passion, piety, and the teaching on transubstantiation"; G.R.Schroubek, "Zagadnienie historyczności postaci Andrzeja z Rinn" [The issue of historicity of Andrew of Rinn], [in:]: S.Buttaroni, S.Musiak SJ, *Mord rytualny. Legenda w historii europejskiej* [Ritual Murder. The Myth in European History, Krakow – Nuremberg – Frankfurt 2003, p. 157:

[others insist that that only happened two centuries later<sup>11</sup>] there occurred a dramatic reversal in the way Christ, the Catholic Church, and the consecrated host were thought of. The term *corpus Christi* without qualifications now meant the wafer, whereas *corpus Christi* accompanied by the adjective *mysticum* began to be used to designate the collectivity of all Christians, or the Church<sup>12</sup>.

By virtue of their partaking in the Eucharist, each individual Christian now became not just a nominal but actually a mystical member of the body of Christ. Once the identification of the Group with God was accepted as a social reality, the theological idea, legitimate and fruitful so long as a soteriological ideal was at issue, became a threat to everything that was external to the Group, and subsequently provided the foundation for patterns of persecution. Since the moment an individual Christian becomes a member of the *corpus Christi* (and the more so, in the case of membership in the *corpus mysticum*), he is suddenly elevated to the rank of the Eucharist, which is given an almost identical name, anyhow. As always, language lays down here the tracks for thought: from that moment on, whenever a Jew harms a Christian—in real life or in a dream—the Christian community will experience it as if the Jew desecrated the host.

In the language of theology, this situation can be described as follows:

**Jews kidnap and maim a singular *corpus Christi* in the form of a wafer or child; then the collective *corpus Christi* (i.e., the *corpus mysticum*) takes bloody vengeance on the Jews.**

Indeed, this two-fold understanding of *corpus Christi* provides the morphological grounds for examining jointly<sup>13</sup> assaults on the host and those directed at the "Christian child", and thus also serves as the point of departure for the definition of the category of "blood libel legends" I use in this article. I heed the Proppian rule:

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<sup>11</sup> Sara Lipton seeks the causes of the diffusion of that term, which first appeared at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries, in the gradual narrowing of the chasm between clergy and the "common folk", which, in her view, came about due to, among other factors, "the spread of preaching, the insistence on the laity's receiving communion at least once yearly [the Fourth Lateran Council] (...), the birth of lay literary culture and the emergence of urban lay clergy, and subsequently of the mendicant orders"; see Sara Lipton, *Images of Intolerance. The Representation of Jews and Judaism in the "Bible moralisée"*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 1999, p. 140.

<sup>12</sup> G.I.Langmuir, *The Tortures of the Body of Christ*, [in:] Scott L. Waugh i P.D. Diehl [eds.], *Christendom and Its Discontents. Exclusion, Persecution and Rebellion, 1000 – 1500*, Cambridge 2002.288. References are to H.de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum. L'Eucharistie de l'Eglise au moyen âge*, Paris 1949, s. 34, 276.

<sup>13</sup> In historical literature, blood libels (BL) and host profanations (HP) have almost always been dealt with separately, just as was the case with sacrilegious attacks against holy paintings. Even more complicated typologies were sometimes proposed; see, for example, the division of accusations into *blood libels* and *ritual murder libels* in the entries written by Norman Roth, "Blood Libel" and "Ritual Murder" [in] *Routledge Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, vol. 1: [N.Roth, editor], *Medieval Jewish Civilisation*, New York – London 2003, pp. 119-121, 556-570. In contrast, Kenneth Stow follows the rule of joint examination of the varieties of HP and BL; op. cit..

"as long as there is no correct morphological analysis [of an issue], no proper historical analysis is possible"<sup>14</sup>.

Just as Propp did for the morphology of a folktale, for my study of blood libel myths I selected one hundred original narratives about Jews kidnapping children for matzoth and defiling Christian sacred symbols. Blood is central to all these tales: the host or a holy painting bleeds, blood also flows from a child pricked with fleams, awls and needles. Blood flows here "generously" here, blood triumphs here, and the collective *corpus Christi* erects chapels to honour this blood on the rubble of synagogues<sup>15</sup>.

As the one hundred tales that I have collected show, this blood is indeed the legendary Magical Agent for which the Jewish Antagonist competes with the Christian folk.

This is what the plot of blood libel legends looks like in the outline: two groups, Christians and Jews, are locked in the fight over the Magical Agent, which is in possession of the former. The other group, being impaired ontologically—we allude here to the topos of Jewish failings: infertility, blindness, scabies, *foetor judaicus*, "male menstrua", female bleedings, and post-circumcision wounds that won't heal, and, for the post-Holocaust period, to the topos of the Jews' having bled to death—craves it infinitely, convinced that it cannot survive without that elixir.

The history of religions knows many similar images. In the 1920s, G. Dumézil described, in *Le festin d'immortalité*<sup>16</sup>, the rivalry among Indian gods and asurs for amrita, the nectar of immortality. In other themes of Hinduism and Buddhism, amrita permutates into a fruit on the tree of wishes. In a similar vein, the Ases, builders of Asgard, competed with the Wanen, builders of Wanheim; the object of contention was "Gullweig, with the body of living gold", the incarnation of indestructibility and unlimited riches. Other objects of rivalry included golden apples bestowing eternal youth, and also the "magical honey of inspiration", the honey of the Skalds with an admixture of the blood of the "wisest creature in the world", the gentle Kvasir, an expert on the crafts, medicine and spells.

However, once Christianity arrived in Europe, the magical agent came to be represented not by the apple or the nectar, but exclusively by the image of the Eucharist, the partaking in which was to guarantee eternal life to the faithful. The notion of drinking the blessed blood and eating flesh became even more entrenched after the Fourth Lateran Council, which adopted the dogma of the Real Presence of the divinity in the Eucharist.

It was just a question of time when that sacrament of the Group—profoundly ambivalent, since it made use of the symbolism of the three taboo acts of cannibalism, vampirism and paedophagy, would be attributed to the Antigroup, which was accused from then on of sacrilege and blood crimes.

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<sup>14</sup> MB 12.

<sup>15</sup> Detailed analysis of the narration in my book, J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Legenda o krwi*, op.cit.

<sup>16</sup> G. Dumézil, *Etude de mythologie comparée indo-européenne*, "Annales du Musée Guimet", Paris 1924.

## II. Mechanics of Movement

In contrast to the magical folktale where, according to Vladimir Propp, the circle of *dramatis personae* is made up by seven individuals, to wit:

- the Antagonist
- the Supplier of the Magical Agent
- the Hero's Assistant
- the king's daughter/her father
- the person who sends the Hero away
- the Hero
- the False Hero
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in the blood legends under examination here that circle narrows down to four characters:

- the bleeding Hero who is simultaneously the Magical Agent being kidnapped;
- the Antagonist, or the Jew who kidnaps and torments that Hero;
- the Antagonist's Assistant who is a bad Christian (male or female), and often times is employed by the Jews and, as a consequence of maintaining the proscribed contacts with them, sells a host or child to the Jews for defilement;
- the Hero's Assistant, that is someone who recognizes or reveals the miracle of the bleeding host or discovers the crime of infanticide—this role is frequently played by children, animals (e.g. dogs, cattle, swine, butterflies), "devout women", "good Christians", "herdsmen", "nuns", "priests", etc; occasionally, the Hero's Assistant" is replaced by voices of unknown origin, "heavenly lights", "self-igniting candles" or "blood streaming down the street".

For the purposes of describing the blood libel narrative, from the 31 functions of the folktale identified by Propp, I have selected four principal functions and two accessory functions. They describe the vicissitudes of the Hero of blood libel legends, who himself is also the Magical Agent.

The most important of these events are as follows:

- the sequence begins with VILLAINY, as represented by the host or a child's being kidnapped and then tortured/put to death
- it unfolds through the VICTORY of the host/little martyr, as represented by blood flowing out of the host, painting or child [*in hoc signo vincit*]
- it continues through the PUNISHMENT being inflicted on Jews,
- and it ends with MERRIMENT ("wedding" in Propp's terminology) which in most cases consists in the Jewish district or synagogue's being destroyed and a church being erected in its place.

The sequence:

**villainy—victory—punishment--merriment (wedding)**

defines the theme<sup>17</sup> of blood libel legends.

That sequence includes also hidden functions, such as the initial paired function of interdiction and its violation.

In a folktale, such paired function has to do with the interdiction directed against a princess, little pigs or children, to leave the house, peek into a forbidden chamber, etc., and "special characters are called upon to perform this function (of interdiction / violation), such as a sorcerer, a witch, treacherous servants, animals or thieves."

In the blood libel legend, such interdiction pertains to maintaining contacts with Jews, and it is violated by the weakest chain in the Group:

- "a very poor woman" (*tenuissimae fortunae*)<sup>18</sup>,
- "a wretched lady", "a dishonourable lady" – a female drunkard<sup>19</sup>,
- "a certain uncommonly wicked woman"<sup>20</sup>,
- "a female schismatic"<sup>21</sup>,
- "the Devil's female servant"<sup>22</sup>,
- "a certain woman, damned among Christians"<sup>23</sup>,
- "a hag [who] delivered the Child to the Jews"<sup>24</sup>,
- "an old hag who is a Christian / not a Christian in this case (...), and who is a street trader as greedy for money as the Jews are for blood"<sup>25</sup>.

In addition to a woman, the role of the Assistant of the Antagonist is occasionally performed in blood libel legends by:

- "a man who hangs around in the tavern, where he feasts with Jews"<sup>26</sup>,

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<sup>17</sup> The theme—"the set of motifs constituting the centre of the world of a work being presented, its principal component, the highest-level unit in the hierarchy of structural units identifiable in that work (...) a component that is essentially invariable in any abridgments, paraphrasies or summaries of a given work. (...) In fiction (utwory) the theme is in most cases the same as the principal storyline" ([in:] Jean-Paul Roux, *Krew. Mity, symbole, rzeczywistość* [Blood: Myths, Symbols, Reality], translated into Polish by M.Perek, Cracow 1994, p. 577

<sup>18</sup> *De miraculo hostiae a Judaeo Parisiis anno Domini MCCXC multis ignominiis affectatae*, [w:] *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France* (reprint 1968), XXII, p. 32: "...gratis redditurum se Judaeus pollicetur, si rem illam, quam mulier Deum suum asserebat, afferet".

<sup>19</sup> Szymon Aleksander Hubicki, *Zydowskie okrucieństwa nad Najświętszym Sakramentem y dziełkami Chrześciańskimi*, Cracow 1602, p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Cantipratanus, *Bonum universale*, Donay 1627, p. 303.

<sup>21</sup> Hubicki, *Zydowskie okrucieństwa*, op. cit., p.4.

<sup>22</sup> Stefan Żuchowski, *Process kryminalny o niewinne dziecię Jerzego Krasnowskiego*, Sandomierz 1713, p.47

<sup>23</sup> Jan Chryzostom Sikorski, *O cudzie Trzech Hostii W Poznaniu (Historia Sacrissimi Corporis Christi Miraculose Reperti Posnaniae In Polonia Anno Salutis 1399*, Cracow 1604), quoted after „Kronika Miasta Poznania” (Legenda Bożego Ciała), no 3-4: 1992, Anna Pawlaczyk [ed.], p. 15-16.

<sup>24</sup> Żuchowski, *Process*, op. cit., p. 85-86.

<sup>25</sup> Matthaeus Raderus, *Bavaria Sancta*, München 1627, quoted after Heinz Schreckenberg, *The Jews in Christian Art. An Illustrated History*, transl. by J.Bowden, London 1996, p. 271.

- sexton, caretaker--"doorman of a nearby church"<sup>27</sup>,
- "married blackcoat"<sup>28</sup>,
- sheepman<sup>29</sup>,
- malt maker<sup>30</sup>,
- municipal bailiff<sup>31</sup>,
- coachman<sup>32</sup>,
- vagabond<sup>33</sup>,
- "shabbatgoy"<sup>34</sup>,
- convert<sup>35</sup>, or
- thief<sup>36</sup>.

The breaking of the prohibition unleashes a magical pandemonium, and the violator himself or herself becomes the Antagonist's Assistant. Assisted by the "weakest link", the Jewish Antagonist slips through the porous boundary inside the community. His infiltration of the Body Social is depicted by images of "pricking" and sucking—the draining of blood, the stealing of the Magical Agent. The pricking, the penetration and the emptying of the inside, as a result of which there remains only the empty shell, are recognised in anthropology as universal attributes of a sorcerer<sup>37</sup>. That is why the epithet of "bloodsucker"--the oldest and most durable term describing the villainous activities of the Jews, which covers usury, the craving for the blood of children, the host and holy paintings, the lusting after the virtue of Christian servants, and, in more contemporary manifestations, also the activities of Jewish tenement landlords and bankers—is always accompanied by a discrete, invisible but just as unending, allusion to sorcery and vampirism. Rev. Bazyli Wąglicki expressed that allusion four hundred years ago as follows<sup>38</sup>:

[Bazyli Wąglicki (Vaglicius), *Swawola wyuzdana Żydowska* [Jewish Lascivious Licence], b.m.w., 1631, p. 3]: "I found, upon my arrival there, only one Jewish house in Oleszyce, and even that house was very quiet; nowadays

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<sup>26</sup> *De B. Andrea puero a Judaeis trucidato in valle Oenana prope Oenispontum in comitatu Tyroliensi*, [in] *Acta Sanctorum. Operam et studium contulit Godefridus Henschenius. Editio novissima curante Joanne Carnandet*. Parisiis 1863-[hereinafter: AS], *Julii* vol. 3 (30), 1867, p. 438-445

<sup>27</sup> *De expulsione Judaeorum*, W.Semkowicz [ed.], [in:] *Monumenta Poloniae Historica*, vol. III, Lwów 1878, p. 785-789.

<sup>28</sup> *De persecutione Judaeorum Vratislaviensium A.1453*, W.Kętrzyński [ed.], *Monumenta Poloniae Historica*, vol. IV, p. 1-5.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>30</sup> Żuchowski, *Process*, op.cit., p. 97

<sup>31</sup> *De persecutione Judaeorum Vratislaviensium A.1453*, op. cit.

<sup>32</sup> *De B. Ludovico puero Ravensburgi in Suevia a Judaeis occiso*, AS, *Aprilis* t. 3 (12), 1866, s. 986-988

<sup>33</sup> Zenon Guldon i Jacek Wijaczka, *Procesy o mordy rytualne w Polsce w XVI-XVIII wieku*, Kielce 1995, p. 73. Also *Ein wunderbarlich Geschichte*, quoted after Heiko A. Oberman, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism. In the Age of Renaissance and Reformation*, Philadelphia 1981, p. 147 – 149.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 34 i 104

<sup>35</sup> Hubicki, *Żydowskie okrucieństwa*, s. 4, Żuchowski, *Process*, op. cit., p. 46.

<sup>36</sup> Żuchowski, *Process*, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>37</sup> M.Douglas, *Symbole naturalne* [Natural Symbols], Polish translation by E.Dzurak, Cracow 2005, p. 151.

<sup>38</sup> [Translator's note: The following and subsequent citations of texts written in archaic Polish are rendered in modern English.]

there are already fourteen or more homeowners, and there are [as many] children as [there was] locust in Egypt, who having rented lodgings with Burghers in corner and other finer houses in the market square, like ugly spiders set up their usurious webs on the poor bees of Your Grace, so that they could, once these are ensnared by treacherous helpfulness, suck them out and destroy, and then come into possession of their work and property without any haggling or payment”<sup>39</sup>.

### **The fairy-tailish and the non-fairy-tailish**

The first thing we note when we read blood libel legends is their folktale syntax. A typical figure is the fattening of a child. This example comes from Kolberg's work:

"One day Jews caught a man, put him into a shop [cellar], and fattened him with nuts. And in that shop they kept their idol made of sugar...”<sup>40</sup>

However, we must not be deceived by the fairy-tailish formulas of these legends. In contrast to the magical fable, where the beginning of the plot is situated in unreal time and space—"once upon a time", "beyond the seven seas/mountains/hills"—in a blood libel legend there is no doubt as to where and when the story takes place and whether it has happened in fact. Here are several typical incipits [opening lines]:

"It came about in Paris in the year 1290 that one woman, having been incited by a Jew who promised to give back to her without charge the things she had pawned, obtained the Sacrament and delivered it to the Jew”<sup>41</sup>.

"In the year 1316 on *Hannoniy* in the Town of Cambronne, a Jew-convert stabbed a Painting of the Mother of God in her Face four times with a dagger (...)"<sup>42</sup>

"In the year 1434. In Dekendorf Talmudists having pricked the Holy Host...”<sup>43</sup>

Because of the specificity of time and place given at the outset of its plot, the blood libel legend resembles the exemplum, the chronotope<sup>44</sup> of which was described by Aron Gurewitsch<sup>45</sup>. Whereas "the action of a fable takes place in a fictitious time-space and the

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<sup>39</sup> Bazyli Wąglicki (Vaglicius), *Swawola wyuzdana Zydowska*, 1631, p. 3

<sup>40</sup> In the vicinity of Kościan, the region of Poznań; Oskar Kolberg, *Lud. Jego zwyczaj, sposób życia, mowa, podania, przysłowia, obrzędy, gusta, zabawy, pieśni, muzyka i tańce*, t. 1-84, Wrocław – Poznań 1961-2002, t.14, s. 297.

<sup>41</sup> Przemysław Mojecki, *Zydowskie okrucieństwa, mordy y zabobony przez X.Przemysława Moieckiego, O. y W. Kan. spisane w Krakowie w Drukarni Já. Sibenecherá Roku Páńskiego 1598*, Cracow 1598, p. 16.

<sup>42</sup> Żuchowski, *Process*, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem, p. 45.

<sup>44</sup> "A significant interdependence of temporal and spatial relations that have been mastered artistically by literature", E.Czaplewicz, E.Kasperski [editors], *Bachtin. Dialog – język – literatura* [Bachtin: Dialogue-Language-Literature], Warsaw 1983, p. 309.

<sup>45</sup> A.Gurewitsch, "Kultura elitarna i kultura ludowa w średniowiecznej Europie" [Elite Culture and Folk Culture in Medieval Europe], translated into Polish by W.Krzemień, [in:] M.Aymand and others [editors], *Biedni i bogaci. Studia z dziejów społeczeństwa i kultury, ofiarowane Bronisławowi Geremekowi w*

audience are not expected to believe that it narrates something that actually occurred", Latin exempla and blood libel legends describe events that are often times strictly bound with specific dates and locations, and are in general true events, as their authors are at pains to assure us.

The linear narrative of a historic concretum is overlaid with the cyclical nature of the Christian ritual year, characterised by a heightened sense of distrust towards the Jews during the Easter season. During that period, Jews who find themselves in the field of that distrust suddenly cease to be neighbours, with whom Christians have relations that are good or bad, but which are based, in any case, on everyday interactions. Now, they are transformed into "the Jews who crucified Christ". Jews are affected by this particular situation each year during the Holy Week<sup>46</sup>, around the time of Christian Easter Sunday, which usually coincided with the Jewish holiday of Pesach.

[72M, a broadside about Simon of Trent, 1475] "Simon, a little child of holy memory from Trent, was slayed on the 21st day of March 1475 after Christ, during the 8th Holy Week in the town of Trent, and became a martyr of Christ, because the Jews living in that town wanted to celebrate Easter according to their own custom, and they did not have any Christian blood for their unleavened bread..."<sup>47</sup>

### III. *Unheimliche*

Freud believed that the bizarre, odd and grotesque are clear signs of repression. The researcher's role is to determine what was denied, suppressed and forgotten, what mental or cultural content is brought back here from being elsewhere.

"The uncanny [*das Unheimliche*] is actually nothing new or strange, but something that has been known to the mental life for long, something that has become estranged from it as a result of the process of repression"<sup>48</sup>.

In the context of blood libel myths, we can think about Freud's hypothesis, about the *Uncanny* which originates with ourselves, but which we always attribute to the Other, at three levels:

- at the level of elementary psychological inversion, where the image of the Other in our own eyes is equipped by us with the energy of our own hostility<sup>49</sup>,

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*sześćdziesięciolecie urodzin* [Poor and Rich: Studies in the History of Society and Culture (...)], Warsaw 1992, p. 210.

<sup>46</sup> The earlier incidental placement of the blood crime at Christmastide (Norwich 1144 and Fulda 1235) was subsequently abandoned in favour of the Easter season.

<sup>47</sup> I follow here John Marrow's method of exegesis, originally applied to Passion texts of Late Middle Ages; see his *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance. A Study of the Transformation of Sacred Metaphor into Descriptive Narrative*, Kortrijk 1976.

<sup>48</sup> S.Freud, *Pisma psychologiczne* [Psychologische Schriften], translated into Polish by R.Reszke, Warsaw 1997, p. 253.

- at the theological level, in the form of Christian sacramental metaphors that are attributed to the Jews<sup>50</sup>,
- at the rhetorical level, in the form of long forgotten Christian Passion figures that are attributed to the Jews<sup>51</sup>.

The realisation that blood libel accusations are based essentially on the projection inversion is a very old one. The first to notice this relationship were medieval Jews themselves.

In the 13th-century liturgical poem, commemorating the persecutions in Erfurt in 1221, Rabbi Shlomo ben Avraham says: "You yourselves eat the Man!"<sup>52</sup>. In *Nizzahon*, a Hebrew text from the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries, we read:

[Christians] "hold us in contempt and claim that they themselves have no sacrifices and immolations such as those that existed once among Jews [i.e. that they have no sacrifices other than spiritual]. But in reality they do have sacrifices and immolations, as they offer and eat the body of the hanged one [the traditional medieval Hebrew epithet for Jesus]"<sup>53</sup>.

We will now discuss five theological and social motifs from the Christian context, which, after they had been given a suitable reworking, were attributed by Christians to Jews.

These motifs are:

- the Mill of the Host,
- the custom of distributing the relics,
- the matter of child kidnapping,
- the spiked barrel
- and the use of the bodies of dead people.

### **[the Mill of the Host]**

In the image of matzoth with the addition of blood, which the Jews were alleged to prepare after killing a "Christian child", and which was gaining currency from the 13th century onwards, we can discern the transposition of a medieval allegory of the Eucharist known as the "Mill of the Host" (which subsequently metamorphosed into a German folk motif of *Pressbaum* and the Mystic Wine Press). The Mill of the Host mills flour for bread to be made with Christ's blood. There are images depicting Christ "being held by God the Father by his foot and pressed into a mill"<sup>54</sup>. Claudine Fabre-Vassas mentions a

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<sup>49</sup> This approach to the interpretation of blood legends was pioneered (without clarifying that such projection relates to the passion context) by Jesuit Peter Browe, a scholar whose contributions are outlined by Kenneth Stow (op.cit, p.120 and following). Browe believed that blood legends are grounded in a projection because the sins of Christians were attributed to Jews in them (op.cit., 120, note 3).

<sup>50</sup> See footnote 10.

<sup>51</sup> See John Marrow, *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance. A Study of the Transformation of Sacred Mataphor into Descriptive Narrative*, Kortrijk 1976.

<sup>52</sup> I.J.Yuval, «They Tell Lies: You Ate the Man», dz. cyt., [w:] AB2, 86-106; the definite article in "the man" (= Jezus) Yuval identifies as Jewish polemics with the Eucharist as the "body of God".

<sup>53</sup> *Nizzahon Yashan*, bibl. [in:] DOGS, note 26 to p. 140.

<sup>54</sup> See: Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi. The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*, Cambridge 1991, p. 313; G.I.Langmuir, *The Tortures of the Body of Christ*, [w:] Scott L.Waugh i P.D.Diehl [red.], *Christendom and*

painting at Norms in France, which represents the Mother of God who is putting Jesus into a mill, while the finished hosts come out into the hands of the faithful<sup>55</sup>. If my conjuncture is right, the Mill of the Host would constitute a classic source of the Uncanny, that is a Christian source of the alleged Jewish blood crimes. Here the Jews were accused of doing something that the Christian eye failed to see, despite its occupying the very centre of a Christian ritual. Against this context, Fabre-Vassas' remarks on the substitutes of the body of God that the faithful consume in the form of Easter blessed Easter fare are quite telling<sup>56</sup>.

### **[distribution of relics]**

In blood libel legends over and over again we come across the motif of matzoth mixed with blood being distributed among Jewish communities. This image was regularly called upon when entire regions were cleansed of Jews—it served as proof for the charge of conspiracy levied against communities located even hundreds of kilometres away from the trial's venue (as in the case of Trent in 1475 when the Nuremberg community was cleansed at the same time). Yet the practice of distributing a body among Christians can be found already in, for example, Jacob de Voragine, from whom it was copied by, among others, Piotr Skarga:

[6aM] "And that blood [which sprung from the painting of Christ desecrated by Jews in 'Beryt'], divided into many parts in a vessel especially prepared for that purpose, the Archbishop sent away to churches across the world, giving an account of those miracles that had occurred"<sup>57</sup>.

In 1453 in Wrocław, John of Capistrano handled the relics of little martyrs in a similar fashion:

[The Life of John of Capistrano in *Acta Sanctorum*, The Publisher's Introduction]: "[A converted Jewess] told me that they [Jews] had kidnapped a Christian child, fed it the best fare, and then killed him, rotating him in a vat spiked with nails. They blessed his blood and sent it out to nearby synagogues, while depositing the body inside a house. When Capistrano sent people to investigate the matter, the bodies were found, and he divided them and sent them out as martyrs' relics".<sup>58</sup>

### **[the kidnapping of children]**

The kidnapping of children is another among the most traditional accusations directed against Jews. During several centuries, children in Poland used to be frightened with Jews who snatched children. In Sandomierz everyone remembers such stories. Yet it is sufficient to consult any of the collections of supplications of Polish kehilla's (Jewish

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*Its Discontents. Exclusion, Persecution and Rebellion, 1000-1500*, Cambridge 2002, s. 294, and P. Browe, *Die eucharistischen Wunder des Mittelalters*, Breslau 1928, s. 95-128

<sup>55</sup> C. Fabre-Vassas, *The Singular Beast. Jews, Christians and the Pig*, transl. by C. Volk, New York 1997, chapter 8.

<sup>56</sup> Vassas, *The Singular Beast*, op. cit., p. 247.

<sup>57</sup> Piotr Skarga, *Zywoty Świętych Starego y Nowego Zakonu, na każdy dzień przez cały rok*, Cracow 1610.

<sup>58</sup> Nicolaus de Fara, *Vita clarissimi viri fratris Joannis de Capistrano*, AS, Octobris t. 10 (58), Bruxellis 1861, p. 467

communal self-government bodies) from the 17th century or the history of the 19th century Italian houses of the catechumens<sup>59</sup>, to find out how many Jewish children were kidnapped by Christians and baptised under duress.

#### **[the barrel spiked with nails]**

Perhaps the most grotesque prop in the blood libel legends is a barrel spiked with nails, in which Jews roll the child. The folkish, and by no means Jewish, traces of that motif can be found in the Grimm Brothers' *The Goose Girl*, where the treacherous female servant is thrown into a nail-spiked barrel. The motif of criminals' being locked up in the belly of a spiny monster is also found in two other contexts. The first case, in the 16th-century criminal context, concerns the punishment meted out to a witch by English Christians. Here the reference is made to "to nails that were stuck in a barrel, which was rolled down the hill in order to inflict additional torture to the witch"<sup>60</sup>. The second example, as reported by Michel de Montaigne, was recorded in Rome in 1312, and has to do with Jews' paying ransom to free themselves from a nail-spiked barrel in which they were to be pushed down a steep slope. After a Jew bought his freedom, a cat was placed in the barrel<sup>61</sup>.

#### **[the use of the bodies of dead people]**

Fabre-Vassas reports that in the folklore of French pig farmers (hence, unlikely to have been Jews), there survived until the 19th century a belief that it was useful to "make stronger their feed" by adding human blood<sup>62</sup>. According to a contemporary report of Mariusz Wilk, blood, albeit no longer human blood, is a frequent component of Siberian (and also Great Russian [i.e. ethnic Russian] recipes for blinies<sup>63</sup>. A distinguished student of blood legends, Hermann Strack wrote an important study about the use of human bodies that was widespread in Europe<sup>64</sup>. We can read there about a belief held among 19th-century Russians, Macedonians and Germans that a candle made of baby tallow can one find treasure or about a "corpse candle" that effectively prevents dwellers of a house that is being robbed from "sleeping through" the robbery. If anyone had doubts as to the presence of similar prescriptions within Poland, they should study the following contemporary material from the Ożarów region as recorded by an ethnographer:

"There lived in our village some fellow who knew how to cast spells, as well as to lift them. But before he could gain such powers, he first had to fetch himself a Jewish corpse. Therefore, he set out at night to Ożarów's kirkut (Jewish cemetery) and there he dug up a recently buried body of an Israelite inhabitant of Ożarów. Having removed the dead body from the ground, he would fling it over his back and carry it for several kilometres. When he was walking, he could not look back even once. Once he brought that baggage to his house, he

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<sup>59</sup> See David I. Kertzer in *The Popes against the Jews*, chapter 2.

<sup>60</sup> George Lyman Kittredge, "Image Magic And The Like", [In:] *Witches of the Atlantic World. A Historical Reader and Primary Sourcebook*, E.G.Breslaw [ed.], New York – London 2000, p.129.

<sup>61</sup> After: Fabre-Vassas *The Singular Beast*, op. cit., p. 162.

<sup>62</sup> Fabre-Vassas, op. cit.

<sup>63</sup> Mariusz Wilk, *Tropami rena* [On the Tracks of the Rheindeer], Warsaw 2007, p. 25.

<sup>64</sup> Hermann Strack, *The Jew and Human Sacrifice. Human Blood and Jewish Ritual. An Historical and Sociological Inquiry*, transl. by H.Blanchamp, London 1909

buried the corpse under the stone threshold of his house, but now in the sitting position. It was only after he performed that action that he gained power over spells"<sup>65</sup>.

#### IV. That which is immobile

As historians who report on these tales following a different formula know very well, nearly every aspect of the blood legends has been subject to flux and conversion: the character of Jewish crimes; the legitimisation, verification and validation of persecutions; or the person who initiated, sustained, and confirmed the blood libel narratives with the help of documents from trials or chronicles recording pogroms<sup>66</sup>.

Differentiation is the fundamental principle of the critical examination of history. The study of anti-Jewish violence must also abide by the same rule. Contrary to how it was registered in Jewish memory, manifestations of such prosecutions were neither uniform, immutable nor quasi-natural, but

"a historically produced cultural category, which should be understood as an activity that is primarily symbolic, as an action vested with specific meaning"<sup>67</sup>.

Nevertheless—and here the ethnographer may take the liberty to disagree with the historian--it is hardly possible to ignore the repetitions.

The stubborn disregard of repetitions by historians Georges Dumézil attributed to their misconstruction of the second rule of Descartes<sup>68</sup>. The rule: "to divide each of the difficulties I examined into as many parts as possible and as may be required to in order to resolve them better" is replaced by the following precept: "to divide them into as many parts as necessary so that it [i.e. the difficulty] is not visible"<sup>69</sup>. Dumézil used to say that: "a badly applied second rule of Descartes obscures [here] the crux of the matter– the structure".

In her monograph on the development of anti-Jewish ideology in the 13th-century *Bible moralisée*, Sara Lipton, after having confronted the anti-Semitic use of metaphors that re-emerges again and again in consecutive centuries of the Middle Ages, concludes that: "similarity of the form in no way entails the identity of meaning"<sup>70</sup>. While correct, this conclusion of the expert medievalist bears no relation to the problem at hand, since

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<sup>65</sup> Statement of Henryk Wójcik from Tomina, recorded by Józef Myjak ("Z zasobów ożarowskiego folkloru. O takim, co rzucał uroki", *Ożarów. Samorządowe pismo społeczno-kulturalne*, no. 12: 2002, p. 22)

<sup>66</sup> Miri Rubin, *The Gentiles Tales. The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews*, New Haven – London 1999, p. 48.

<sup>67</sup> A.Blok, *Honour and Violence*, London 2001, p. 113.

<sup>68</sup> R.Descartes, *Rozprawa o metodzie właściwego kierowania rozumem i poszukiwania prawdy w naukach* [Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason, and Seeking Truth in the Sciences], Polish translation by W.Wojciechowska, Warsaw 1970, p. 22.

<sup>69</sup> *Na tropie Indoeuropejczyków. Z Georgesem Dumézilem rozmawia Didier Eribon* [On the Track of Indoeuropeans. Didier Erbon Talks to George Dumézil], Polish translation by K.Kocjan, Warsaw 1996, pp. 124-125.

<sup>70</sup> S.Lipton, *Images of Intolerance. The Representation of Jews and Judaism in the «Bible moralisée»*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 1999, p. 141.

the stubborn return of metaphors in blood legends rarely results in the identity of meanings. It certainly does, however, confront us with the question about the meaning of a stubbornly recurring form / formula in a situation where meanings change. Such form as "bloodsucker" meant a usurer in the Middle Ages, subsequently a kidnapper of children, seducer of maids, and a landlord, and today—in the eyes of residents of the Sandomierz backcountry—a banker or representative of the "world government". Or let's take the formula such as the "blood of Christ"—"Polish blood", the slogan shouted by the people who stood on the staircase of the building at 7 Planty Street in Kielce, where the principal part of the tragedy of 4 July 1946 unfolded:

„[there] stood a young girl who yelled: «You liked the blood of Christ!«. One of the soldiers who entered the building remarked similarly to Chil Alpert, vice-president of the Jewish committee in Kielce: «So how did you like Polish blood?»”<sup>71</sup>.

What does such stubbornly recurring form mean in the context of changing meanings? Among all *mobilis in mobili* – things that vary in blood legends, that single immobile thing certainly deserves our attention, too.

English translation by Paweł J. Kotwica

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<sup>71</sup> *About Our House Which Was Devastated*, Shtokvish [ed.], Tel Aviv 1981, p. 201.