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Blood Libels between Trento and the Bodensee

Heinrich Kramer's 1475 Mission

Abstract: This article examines a little-known event that took place in 1475. This year saw a well-publicized trial at which the Jews of Trento were falsely accused of kidnapping a Christian toddler named Simon and murdering him in a religious ritual. Pope Sixtus IV, abiding by the long-standing papal tradition of defending the Jews against such accusations of ritual murder (known as blood libels), sent an apostolic commissioner to Trento to investigate the legitimacy of the proceedings opened by the local prince-bishop, Johannes Hinderbach. To defend his version of the story, namely that the Jews were responsible for the crime and that the ritual killing of Christian children was a long-established Jewish practice, Hinderbach sent the Dominican friar Heinrich Kramer von Schlettstadt (later known for his role in the development of the witch hunt) on a mission to the Bodensee region to uncover reports of previous alleged Jewish ritual murders. During his journey, Kramer managed to obtain a bundle of written notarial documents that attempt to prove the thesis of the magistrates and the bishop of Trento. Kramer's mission is analysed by comparing the documents produced for him in southern Germany with other sources concerning the same cases and within the broader context of the blood libel of Trento.

1

The slander that attributes to Jews the kidnapping and ritual killing of Christian children to celebrate Passover rites – the so-called blood libel – is one of the most striking popular beliefs that shaped medieval and early modern anti-Judaism.¹ When in Trento, a small city on the banks of the Adige, on the route that connects Italy and Germany, a toddler named Simon disappeared on Maundy Thursday of 1475, and was subsequently found

¹ The blood libel and its role in the broader history of anti-Judaism has copious scholarship, therefore we will reference here only some of the most important and recent works: Magda Teter, *Blood Libel. On the Trail of an Antisemitic Myth*, Cambridge-London 2020; Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder. Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany*, New Haven 1988; Ruggero Taradel, *L'accusa del sangue. Storia politica di un mito antisemita*, Roma 2002; Furio Jesi, *L'accusa del sangue. La macchina mitologica antisemita*, Torino 2007; Susanna Buttaroni/Stanisław Musiał (Eds.), *Ritualmord. Legenden in der europäischen Geschichte*, Wien 2003; Alan Dundes (Ed.), *The Blood Libel Legend. A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore*, Madison WI 1991.

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dead in a canal that flowed under the house of Jewish money lender Samuel of Nurnberg, rumours started to spread insinuating that the boy had been a victim of a ritual murder.² Given its magnitude and importance in the fashioning of all later occurrences of the blood libel, the story of the death of Simon of Trento is generally well known and has been studied in depth in almost all of its aspects. Nonetheless, an interesting event, the mission of Heinrich Kramer von Schlettstadt in southern Germany in November 1475 with the goal of finding reports of previous cases where Jews were convicted of ritually killing Christian children, has not yet received a thorough examination.

The purpose of this article is to analyse Heinrich Kramer's mission. We will start with a brief summary of what was going on in Trento from March to November 1475; then we will take a closer look to the documents that Kramer brought back from Germany, and in the end, we will try to draw a balance of the mission and its significance to the case of Trento.

2

Between March 26th and 27th 1475, eighteen men of the local Jewish community were arrested;³ in the following weeks they were questioned under torture and, eventually, all confessed to the gruesome murder of Simon, the son of Andreas Unverdorben, a tanner who lived nearby the houses of the Jews, in the German neighbourhood of Trento.⁴ This was by no means the first time in medieval Europe that a similar accusation had been thrown against the Jews.⁵ Sometimes, the Jews had to face various forms of persecution on account of the blood libel, ranging from judicial trials, mob lynching or expulsion. To counter and prevent the violence they had to endure, Jewish communities often reached out to the authorities – both secular and ecclesiastical – to

2 For the moment will be sufficient to reference the works of Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, *Trent 1475. Stories of a Ritual Murder Trial*, New Haven 1992 and Wolfgang Treue, *Der Trienter Judenprozess. Voraussetzungen, Abläufe, Auswirkungen (1475–1588)*, Hannover 1996 (*Forschungen zur Geschichte der Juden* 4); further bibliography will be given in the following pages.

3 Anna Esposito/Diego Quaglioni (Eds.), *Processi contro gli ebrei di Trento (1475–1478)*, vol. 1: *I processi del 1475*, Padova 1990, pp. 112–114; 121.

4 The German community of Trento was centred around the parish church of San Pietro. Although the first German presences in town date back to the Twelfth century, the main body of German immigrants settled more recently, mainly after the Black Death. See Serena Luzzi, *Stranieri in città. Presenza tedesca e società urbana a Trento (secoli XV–XVIII)*, Bologna 2003 (*Annali dell'Istituto storico Italo-Germanico* 38), pp. 147–194.

5 The first full account of a blood libel is the life and miracle of William of Norwich, written by the Welsh monk Thomas of Monmouth around the half of the Twelfth century. See John M. McCulloh, *Jewish Ritual Murder: William of Norwich, Thomas of Monmouth, and the Early Dissemination of the Myth*, in: *Speculum* 72 (1997), pp. 698–740; E. M. Rose, *The Murder of William of Norwich. The Origins of the Blood Libel in Medieval Europe*, Oxford 2015.

obtain protection against the slander. From the early thirteenth century onwards, we have a number of papal and imperial bulls that denounced the accusation as false and prohibited Christians from accusing Jews of performing human sacrifices upon Christian children.⁶

Also in 1475, as the trial against the main defendants started and after rumours about legal irregularities began to circulate in the Roman Curia, the Apostolic See intervened.⁷ On August 3rd of that year, pope Sixtus IV issued a *breve* commanding Johannes Hinderbach,⁸ prince-bishop of Trento, to suspend the trials against the Jews; he also informed him that Battista de Giudici⁹ – a renowned theologian, canonist, and bishop of Ventimiglia – was on his way to Trento in the capacity of apostolic commissioner to enquire on the matter.¹⁰ On September 2nd¹¹ De Giudici arrived in town, where he was confronted with hostility and suspicion from bishop Hinderbach; after twenty days, in which he managed only to obtain a copy of the trial records, fearing for his own life, the bishop of Ventimiglia moved to Rovereto, only some twenty kilometres south of Trento, but in the territory of the Republic of Venice, where Hinderbach had no political authority. In this safer environment he was able to continue his task and to speak freely with the lawyers who defended the Jews.¹²

Why had Battista de Giudici encountered such a cold welcome in Trento? The answer resides in the fact that Hinderbach was utterly convinced that the Jews of Trento were guilty of the crime, and he was determined to have Simon acknowledged as a martyr.

6 Moritz Stern, *Die päpstlichen Bullen über die Blutbeschuldigung*, München 1900; Solomon Grayzel, *The Apostolic See and the Jews in the XIIIth Century. A Study of their Relations during the Years 1198–1254, Based on the Papal Letters and the Conciliar Decrees of the Period*, New York 1966.

7 Other trials related to the case of Simon of Trento are those against the Jewish women (published in: Esposito/Quagliani [Eds.], *Processi contro gli ebrei di Trento [1475–1478]*, vol. 2: *I processi alle donne [1475–1476]*, Padova 2008) and the trial against the priest Paolo da Novara, who was accused in 1476 of conspiring with the Jews to kill the bishop of Trento and other crimes. The only copy of this trial is still unpublished (Archivio di Stato di Trento, *archivio principesco-vescovile*, sezione Latina [= ASTn, APV, s. l.], capsula 69, nr. 68).

8 Iginio Rogger/Marco Bellabarba (Eds.), *Il principe vescovo Johannes Hinderbach (1465–1486) fra tardo Medioevo e Umanesimo*, Trento, Atti del Convegno promosso dalla Biblioteca Comunale di Trento, 2–6 ottobre 1989, Bologna 1992; Severino Vareschi, *Hinderbach, Johannes (1418–1486)*, in: Erwin Gatz (Ed.)/Clemens Brodkorb (Collab.), *Die Bischöfe des Heiligen Römischen Reiches 1448 bis 1648. Ein biographisches Lexikon*, Berlin 1996, pp. 295–298; Daniela Rando, *Dai margini la memoria. Johannes Hinderbach (1418–1486)*, Bologna 2003 (*Annali dell'Istituto storico Italo-Germanico* 37).

9 On De Giudici see Diego Quagliani, *Giudici, Battista dei*, in: *Dizionario Biografico Italiano* (= DBI), vol. 56, Roma 2001, pp. 657–660, and Battista de' Giudici, *Apologia Iudaeorum, Invectiva contra Platinam. Propaganda antiebraica e polemiche di curia durante il pontificato di Sisto IV (1471–1484)*. Edizione, traduzione e commento a cura di Diego Quagliani, Roma 1987, pp. 38–42.

10 The original *breve* of August 3rd, 1475 is in ASTn, APV, s. l., capsula 69, nr. 29b.

11 De' Giudici, *Apologia Iudaeorum* (see note 9), p. 16.

12 We have very interesting accounts of this tense situation between Hinderbach and De Giudici from both sides of the controversy in De' Giudici, *Apologia Iudaeorum* (see note 9), pp. 48–91, 140–161.

The bishop of Trento invested lots of effort to reach this goal, and he saw De Giudici as a potential obstacle. Hinderbach was right about that: the apostolic commissioner rapidly reached the conclusion that the Jews were innocent and that they had only confessed the ritual murder on account of tremendous torture.¹³

This strife between Hinderbach and De Giudici is pivotal to understanding the development of the case over the next three years. The examination of the case was then transferred by the pope to a commission of cardinals in the Roman Curia that worked from spring of 1476 to summer of 1478. Eventually, in 1478, the commission found a compromise solution, declaring that the trial had been fair and conducted according to the norms („rite et recte“), but refusing to acknowledge Simon as a martyr and a saint.¹⁴

As mentioned, during this time Johannes Hinderbach put remarkable effort in order to have ‚his‘ truth acknowledged, and he did so by deploying a conspicuous amount of different tactics and strategies. For instance, we know that he reached out to some important humanist poets, asking them to compose works to glorify the purported martyr;¹⁵ and he also extensively used the newly invented printing press to circulate devotional pictures and chapbooks that supported his version of the story.¹⁶

Because of the traditional papal and imperial defence of the Jews from the ritual murder accusation, Hinderbach found himself in a sticky situation: in order to prove that in Trento a ritual murder had indeed happened, he had to demonstrate that kidnapping and killing Christian children was an established Jewish practice. It is possible that this idea was indirectly suggested to him as early as August 6th, 1475, by Bartolomeo Paiarino, a doctor of law from Vicenza. On that day, Paiarino wrote a letter addressed

¹³ Ibid., pp. 48–91.

¹⁴ On the debate in Rome see Hsia, Trent 1475 (see note 2), pp. 117–131. After the decision of the cardinals' commission, on July 26, 1479, the now former *podestà* of Trento, Giovanni de Salis, submitted a request to the papal *poenitentaria* demanding to be absolved from any sanction and excommunication in which he may have incurred for his refusal to obey De Giudici's orders. See Repertorium Poenitentiarum Germanicum, vol. 6: Sixtus IV. 1471–1484, Tübingen 2005, tom. 1, nr. 2953.

¹⁵ See Stephen Bowd/J. Donald Cullington (Eds.), On Everyone's lips. Humanists, Jews and the Tale of Simon of Trent, Tempe 2012 (Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance 36) and Maria De Unterrichter, Il beato Simone e i verseggiatori suoi contemporanei, in: Studi Trentini di Scienze Storiche 2 (1930), pp. 187–193. We also know from a short letter addressed to Hinderbach by the famous humanist Pomponius Laetus that many were willing to write poems for Hinderbach, probably datable to 15 July 1476 (the year is not explicitly stated): ASTn, APV, s. l., capsa 69, nr. 157.

¹⁶ Ugo Rozzo, Il presunto „omicidio rituale“ di Simonino di Trento e il primo santo tipografico, in: Atti dell'Accademia udinese di scienze lettere e arti 90 (1997), pp. 185–223; Lamberto Donati, L'inizio della stampa a Trento ed il beato Simone, Trento 1968; Stephen Bowd, Tales from Trent. The Construction of „Saint“ Simon in Manuscript and Print, in: Alison K. Frazier (Ed.), The Saint Between Manuscript and Print. Italy 1400–1600, Toronto 2015 (Essays and Studies 37), pp. 183–218; Aldo Chemelli, Produzione libraria manoscritta e a stampa nell'ambiente trentino all'epoca del vescovo Hinderbach, in: Rogger/Bellabarba (Eds.), Il principe vescovo (see note 8), pp. 95–109; Matteo Fadini, La creazione del ‚caso‘ Simonino. Il ruolo della stampa, in: Domenica Primerano (Ed.), L'invenzione del colpevole. Il caso di Simonino da Trento dalla propaganda alla storia, Trento 2020, pp. 95–101.

„civibus tridentinis“ (that is, probably, to the governors of Trento) to which he attached an extract from the „Speculum Historiale“ of Vincent de Beauvais that relates of the alleged ritual murder that prompted in 1182 King Philip Augustus to expel the Jews from the kingdom of France.¹⁷

By the end of October 1475, the relations between Battista de Giudici and the authorities of Trento were irreparably compromised: all his diplomatic efforts to obtain the release of the Jewish women and children incarcerated had not yielded any result. Therefore, the bishop of Ventimiglia decided to return to Rome, where he arrived on December 1st, bringing with him a witness that could possibly exonerate the Jews.¹⁸

In this context Johannes Hinderbach decided to send Heinrich Kramer in southern Germany on a quest for precedents.

3

There are many doubts and gaps in the biography of Heinrich Kramer, a Dominican friar from Schlettstadt, in Alsace. He is mostly known for the publication, in 1486, of his notorious „Malleus Maleficarum“, which was to become the most important manual for witch-hunters.¹⁹ In 1478 he was conferred the title of inquisitor of Tyrol and in the subsequent years he conducted the persecution of witchcraft in the region. But in 1475 Kramer had not yet become famous, although he already bore the title of professor of theology.²⁰

¹⁷ The original letter is now lost, but we have two full copies made by Hinderbach's secretaries (ASTn, APV, s. l., capsula 69, nr. 11, cc. 1r–5r and nr. 13, cc. 1r–2r). On these letters and the influence on Hinderbach of the „Speculum Historiale“ see also Rando, *Dai margini* (see note 8), pp. 472–475. On the expulsion of the Jews from France during the reign of King Philip Augustus see Gavin I. Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, Berkeley 1996, pp. 142–146.

¹⁸ De' Giudici, *Apologia Iudaeorum* (see note 9), p. 20.

¹⁹ On Kramer's biography see Oscar Di Simplicio, *Kramer, Heinrich*, in: Adriano Prosperi/Vincenzo Lavenia/John Tedeschi (Eds.), *Dizionario storico dell'inquisizione*, 2 vols., Pisa 2010, vol. 1, pp. 864 f.; Friedrich Merzbacher, *Institoris (Krämer), Heinrich*, in: *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 10, Berlin 1974, pp. 175 f. On the *Malleus Maleficarum* see Wolfgang Behringer, *Heinrich Kramers „Hexenhammer“. Text und Kontext*, in: Andreas Schmauder (Ed.), *Frühe Hexenverfolgung in Ravensburg und am Bodensee*, Konstanz 2001, pp. 83–124. The essay of Tamar Herzi, *Heinrich Kramer e la caccia alle streghe in Italia*, in: Dinora Corsi/Matteo Duni (Eds.), „Non lasciar vivere la malefica“. *Le streghe nei trattati e nei processi (secoli XIV–XVII)*, Firenze 2008, pp. 167–196, does not mention Heinrich Kramer's involvement in the *affaire* of Trento.

²⁰ He is indicated as *theologiae professor* in the documents that he gathered in Germany that will be discussed later on.

In the extensive documentation concerning the blood libel of Trento,²¹ we don't have any written instructions that Johannes Hinderbach might have given to Heinrich Kramer, but all the documents that he collected during his journey²² report that he had some letters of instruction („litterae commissoriales“) from the bishop of Trento.²³

When the Dominican returned from his mission, he brought with him six manuscripts, through which we can reconstruct the itinerary that he followed. On November 3rd and the next day, he was in Ravensburg, where he got three notarial acts;²⁴ the following week, on November 12th he made a stop in the nearby village of Pfullendorf²⁵ and five days later in Überlingen; in Überlingen he was not able to obtain a written testimony, but we are informed of his passage by an annotation in the *Ratsprotokolle* of the city.²⁶ The last stop of his journey, November 21st, was the town of Emdingen where an important trial for ritual murder was held in 1470.²⁷ Finally, we know that by January 16th, 1476, he was back in Trento, since on that day he baptised Jof and Moses, two of the convicted Jews in the trial for the death of Simon, before they were executed.²⁸

Since this documentation has been often overlooked by historians,²⁹ it is worth taking a closer look at the stories they contain, so that we might better understand Hin-

21 Most of the original documentation concerning the blood libel of Trento is in ASTn, capsas 69, also known as „capsa del Simonino“; a description of the *capas* with *regesta* of all the documents is in Giuseppe Ippoliti/Angelo Maria Zatelli, *Archivi principatus tridentini regesta. Sectio latina* (1027–1777), vol. 2, Trento 2001, pp. 1262–1303.

22 ASTn, APV, s. l., capsas 69, nr. 44, 45, 46, 48, 54, 58.

23 The letters given to Kramer by Hinderbach are now lost, but Benedetto Bonelli, *Dissertazione apologetica sul martirio del beato Simone nell'anno MCCCCLXXV dagli ebrei ucciso, Trento 1747*, pp. 245 f. gives the Italian text of what he asserts to be one of them and that he claims to have translated from a German original. However, we should bear in mind that Bonelli is an incredibly factious and biased author, and therefore the letter may also be a forgery.

24 ASTn, APV, s. l., capsas 69, nr. 44, 45, 46.

25 *Ibid.*, nr. 54.

26 Published in Moritz Stern, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Juden am Bodensee und in seiner Umgebung*, in: *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland* 1 (1887), pp. 297–308, at p. 303. See also Treue, *Der Trienter Judenprozess* (see note 2), pp. 93 f.

27 ASTn, APV, s. l., capsas 69, nr. 58; this one is now lost but was seen by Ippoliti and Zatelli around the half of the XVIII century; they wrote the following *regestum*: „Anno 1475, die 21 novembris, Emdingen constantinensis Dioecesis. – Magister civium Emdingens authenticum documentum dedit fratri Henrico ordinis praedicatorum delegato a domino Iohanne episcopo tridentino de occisione duorum infantum a iudeis facta in eodem loco in odium Christi, eos variis vulneribus afficiendo, ut sanguinem pro eorum pascha colligerent“ (Ippoliti/Zatelli, *Archivi principatus tridentini regesta* [see note 21], p. 1275). Nonetheless, we have a full copy of the document (Trento, Fondazione Biblioteca San Bernardino (= FBSB), ms. 237, pp. 751–754) made by Benedetto Bonelli in a manuscript volume in which he collected documents and notes for the publications of his *Dissertazione apologetica* (see note 23).

28 ASTn, APV, s. l., capsas 69, nr. 63.

29 The most complete survey so far is Treue, *Der Trienter Judenprozess* (see note 2), pp. 91–94, which does not delve too much on the documents.

derbach's strategy and uncover what role it played in the construction of the narrative he tried to promote about what happened in Trento.

The documents relate about four different alleged Jewish ritual murders, of which three are also known from other surviving sources,³⁰ while concerning the case of Pfulendorf 1470 the only existing source is the manuscript written for Heinrich Kramer.³¹ As we should see below, when it is possible to compare the manuscripts crafted for the Dominican with other sources, some important differences emerge. We will analyse these cases one by one before drawing our conclusions.

The first document that Kramer was able to get (ASTn, APV, s. l., caps 69, nr. 44) is also the longest one. It is a five pages long notarial document that contains the summary of some trial records („quendam libellum iudicarium“) against a poor Christian family, the Samins, accused of having helped a Jew named Jacob³² to kidnap and murder a boy, Little John („Johanninus“), son of a certain Conrad Schmidt („Conradus Faber“, sometimes „Cunradus Smit“). It starts with a letter of Friedrich III, at the time king of the Romans, to the prefect of Schwaben Jakob Truchsess von Waldburg in which the former entrusts the latter with the task of enquiring about the alleged murder of Little John Schmidt „a iudeis, ut asseritur, occisus“. ³³ Then, it contains the confessions of the Samins: Heinrich, his wife Margaretha and their son Jacob.³⁴ The story they tell in their depositions is that one day, in the marketplace of Meersburg, Margaretha was approached by Jacob the Jew (in the manuscript „Jacob Judeus“³⁵) who offered her some twelve florins in exchange for help in the kidnapping of Little John. She told her husband about the deal, and they agreed to assist Jacob the Jew. On May 1st, 1443, while they were shepherding cattle, Jacob the Jew arrived and lured Little John behind a bush, where he and the Samin adults circumcised, repeatedly stabbed the boy, and collected

³⁰ ASTn, APV, s. l., caps 69, nr. 44 (case of Meersburg/Überlingen/Ahausen 1433); *ibid.*, nr. 45, 46 and 48 (case of Ravensburg 1430); FBSB, ms. 237 (case of Endingen 1470).

³¹ ASTn, APV, s. l., caps 69, nr. 54 (on this source see also Treue, *Der Trienter Judenprozess* [see note 2], pp. 93, note 90).

³² About this man, a merchant and money lender originally from Feldkirch (in the Austrian region of Vorarlberg) whom the sources often refer to only as Jacob Jud (Jacob the Jew), see Karl Heinz Burmeister, *Die Juden in Vorarlberg im Mittelalter*, in: *Schriften des Vereins für Geschichte des Bodensees* 94 (1976), pp. 1–18, at pp. 6 f.

³³ ASTn, APV, s. l., caps 69, nr. 44, c. 1r.

³⁴ The Samins' confession is *ibid.*, nr. 44, cc. 1v–2r.

³⁵ It is interesting to note that three people named Jacob are present in the text (Jacob the Jew, the prefect of Schwaben Jakob Truchsess von Waldburg and Jacob Samin) and while two of them are written in the Latin form „Jacobus“, in the case of Jacob the Jew someone, after the document was penned, erased nearly all the desinences from his name. It is not clear why someone would have done this; one possible explanation is that this correction serves the purpose of marking Jacob the Jew's difference, alongside with the specification of his religion. On this tendency of Christian writers to mark religious alterity by adding the adjective „Jew“ to the names of their subjects see Roberto Bonfil, *Tra due mondi. Cultura ebraica e cultura cristiana nel medioevo*, Napoli 1996, pp. 296 f.

his blood in a bottle. Heinrich Samin declares that he was so horrified that he left the scene when Jacob started to stab Little John, so that he did not know whether the child had died or not.³⁶

After the Samins' confessions, we have the transcript of fifteen brief depositions of witnesses dated May 31st, 1444.³⁷ It would be too long to dwell on every one of them; all fifteen revolve around the same theme: the witness says to have seen Margaretha Samin and Jacob the Jew talk together in the marketplace of Meersburg, and therefore they are absolutely sure that Jacob killed the boy, with only minor variations.³⁸ However, some of the witnesses are quite interesting for reasons of their own. For instance, although we do not get to read what Jacob may have said in his defence directly, some of the accusers give us a hint that, at some point, he must have protested his innocence, declaring that he had never seen Little John.³⁹ Some others declare in their testimony that they only heard rumours: „Iohannes Boler hocdem asseruit medio iuramento ... quod ipse audivit a pluribus quod iudeus ipse puerum interemit“; „Iohannes Villici ... asseruit quod ipse tanta audivisse a fidedignis, et ex litteris percepisset, quod sibi certissimum esset quod iudeus Iacobus puerum occidisset“.⁴⁰ Such assertions in what is supposed to be the summary of a trial record are quite odd. Hearsay testimony (*de auditu*), in fact, could not be admitted as evidence in a medieval trial: witnesses were bound to refer only on facts of which they had direct knowledge.⁴¹ Nonetheless, we should note that also in the trial against the Jews of Trento in 1475 the magistrates resorted to the same tactic and decided to admit the testimony of one Giovanni da Feltre, a Jewish apostate who at the time was incarcerated for unspecified crimes.⁴²

In the final part of the document, the judges and the prefect of Schwaben, return the matter in the hands of Friedrich III, because they feel that the pronouncement of

³⁶ ASTn, APV, s. l., capsula 69, nr. 44, c. 1v: „Et cum iterato in collum vulnerasset puerum, ego pro horrore hoc cernere non valens abscessi et ad pecora mea redii relicta uxore cum iudeo. Quid autem ex post puerum acciderit ignore.“

³⁷ Ibid., nr. 44, cc. 2r–v.

³⁸ For instance, one Bernhard Eberhart declares that it was Margaretha to first approach Jacob the Jew, while he was having breakfast in his tavern, and not the other way around (ASTn, APV, s. l., capsula 69, nr. 44, c. 2r), while one Nicholas Don reports that he saw Jacob the Jew threaten Margaretha with a knife (ibid., nr. 44, c. 2v).

³⁹ The first witness, Conrad Langerswiler refers of the meeting between Margaretha and Jacob the Jew in Bernhard Eberhart's tavern (see the previous note), and then adds that „Hoc denique falsissimus est quod iudeus Jacob asserit se iuvenem numquam agnovisse, quia vidit seque quod idem iudeus eidem puero sepe denarios ... dedit“; this seems to be the response to something that Jacob the Jew might have actually said in his defence, but that we have no record of.

⁴⁰ ASTn, APV, s. l., capsula 69, nr. 44, c. 2v.

⁴¹ Quagliani, *Il processo inquisitorio contro gli ebrei di Trento*, in: Esposito/Quagliani (Eds.), *Processi*, vol. 1 (see note 3), pp. 1–51, at pp. 34 f. On the inadmissibility of hearsay testimony see Alessandro Giuliani, *Il concetto di prova. Contributo alla logica giuridica*, Milano 1971, p. 181.

⁴² The testimony of Giovanni da Feltre is in: Esposito/Quagliani (Eds.), *Processi*, vol. 1 (see note 3), pp. 124 f.

the verdict exceeds their powers.⁴³ This document does not contain the final sentence, and we may presume that it was omitted for a pretty compelling reason: eventually, Jacob the Jew was acquitted of all charges in 1448.⁴⁴ To admit the final acquittal of the main suspect would have been embarrassing for the magistrates of Trento, since this would have proven that, once again, the imperial authority had taken a stance against the blood libel.

The following group of documents contains three manuscripts⁴⁵ which bear testimony about the alleged ritual murder of Ravensburg of 1429–1430.⁴⁶ Given the number of notarial acts that he was able to get, and his probable acquaintance with a notary in Ravensburg named Franz Sproll,⁴⁷ it is possible to suggest that Heinrich Kramer's original intent was to gather information about this specific case and possibly Emdingen, which is not far from his native Schlettstadt (he might have had direct knowledge of what happened in Emdingen in 1470), and only later, once in Ravensburg, he might have eventually come to know about other cases of ritual murders in the same region; but we must admit that we do not have quantity of evidence to confirm this hypothesis.

Anyways, Kramer got the testimonies he wanted in Ravensburg. Two of them are very brief and do not tell much; one is a deposition of the *magister civium*⁴⁸ and the other one is the transcript of a letter from Johann Truchsess von Waldburg (the son of Jakob, former prefect of Schwaben) who recalls facts that happened when he was a child and in which his father had played a role.⁴⁹ The third document is a deposition of the notary Franz Sproll himself, which tells the story more in detail. According to Sproll, in 1430 the Jews of Ravensburg celebrated a wedding and many of their coreligionists came to the city from the neighbouring towns. A young student named Ludwig, around fifteen years of age, served as a waiter during the feast and slept that night in the

⁴³ ASTn, APV, s. l., caps 69, nr. 54, c. 2v: „deliberavimus causa istam ex nunc plenarie remittere serenissimo domino nostro romanorum regi, quia vires nostras excedit, ad ipsamque iudeorum causa singulariter pertinere noscitur“.

⁴⁴ See Leopold Löwenstein, *Geschichte der Juden am Bodensee und Umgebung*, Geilingen 1879, pp. 44–47, 131–138; Aaron Tänzer, *Die Geschichte der Juden in Tirol und Vorarlberg*, voll. 1–2: *Die Geschichte der Juden in Hohenems und im übrigen Vorarlberg*, Meran 1905; Burmeister, *Die Juden in Vorarlberg* (see note 32), p. 7.

⁴⁵ ASTn, APV, s. l., caps 69, nr. 45, 46, 48.

⁴⁶ The most comprehensive study of the case of Ravensburg is Stefan Lang, *Die Ravensburger Ritualmordbeschuldigung von 1429/30. Ihre Vorläufer, Hintergründe und Folgen*, in: *Ulm und Oberschwaben* 55 (2007), pp. 114–153 (now republished with the title *Die Ravensburger Ritualmordbeschuldigung von 1429/30 und ihre Auswirkungen*, in: Andreas Schmauder/Jean-Friedrich Mißfelder [Eds.], *Kaftan, Kreuz und Kopftuch. Religiöse Koexistenz im urbanen Raum [15.–20. Jahrhundert]*, Ostfildern 2010, pp. 21–64), although, as we shall see, he does not consider in depth the documents in the Archivio di Stato di Trento.

⁴⁷ We also know that in 1470 Sproll was in Trento; on this and his probable acquaintance with Kramer see Treue, *Der Trienter Judenprozess* (see note 2), p. 93.

⁴⁸ ASTn, APV, s. l., caps 69, nr. 45.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, nr. 46.

Jews' house, where he was killed. The following day, since he did not come back home, rumours started to spread that he had been the victim of a ritual murder; therefore, the Jews tried to dispose of the corpse by paying a carter named Knoll to ditch the body in a stream near the city. As the horses stood still for what seemed like supernatural intervention, they decided to hang Ludwig's cadaver to a pine tree in the forest, which was then discovered by some bird hunters a few days later. In the final passages, Sproll says that Jakob Truchsess ordered the body to be brought to the chapel of his castle, where a miracle started to manifest. Eventually, „non post multum tempus“, emperor Sigismund entered the city of Ravensburg, and ordered to tear down the pine tree from which Ludwig was hanged, „ne minima frequentatio populi in preiudicium aliorum ecclesiarum et sacrorum locorum insurgeret“, and that the body should be kept in the chapel of the castle where it could be shown to pilgrims.⁵⁰

Also this time, when we compare the narrative given by Heinrich Kramer's documents with other sources about the same event, we find out that the picture that emerges is quite different and more nuanced. For instance, while Sproll is quick to inform that the wounds in Ludwig's corpse, including a wound on his foreskin,⁵¹ confirmed the suspicion that a ritual murder had occurred, he doesn't mention that many people thought that the boy had hanged himself, including some physicians who did an autopsy.⁵² The role of emperor Sigismund in the matter is not wholly clear, especially concerning the devotion they started to develop about Ludwig. What Franz Sproll says about this, for instance, does not quite square with what is reported by a contemporary chronicler, Andreas of Regensburg, who wrote shortly after the facts, namely that Sigismund burned down the pine and some sort of shrine that was built around it with the clear purpose of interrupting the flow of pilgrims – it seems also because the clergy and the bishop of Konstanz did not like the developing devotion.⁵³

With the case of Pfullendorf we are confronted by a different set of problems since, as mentioned above, this manuscript constitutes the only source about this alleged ritual murder. In the document,⁵⁴ the *magister civium* (whose name is not given) of the town of Pfullendorf introduces five witnesses who had seen the dead body of fifteen years old Johannes Fuchs („Johannes Vulpis“) in the year 1471.⁵⁵ The testimonies do not

⁵⁰ All of this is in *ibid.*, nr. 48, c. 1r.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, nr. 48, c. 1r: „plurimum notabilis illa extremitas fuerat abscissa“.

⁵² Lang, *Die Ravensburger Ritualmordbeschuldigung von 1429/30* (see note 46), pp. 125 f.

⁵³ Andreas of Ravensburg, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Georg Leidinger, Aalen 1969, p. 572: „episcopo Constanciensi et presbiteris renitentibus et [id] fieri prohibentibus tamquam ad innocenter occisum confluxus populi fieret magnus. Sigismundus autem rex, ut huiusmodi concursus prohiberet, edificium ibidem quasi ecclesiam factum, in cuius medio abies illa, in qua scholaris suspensus fuerat, stabat, combussit, et sic concursus ille cessavit“.

⁵⁴ ASTn, APV, s. l., caps 69, nr. 54.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, nr. 54, c. 1r: „Quidam fidedignos vobis (i. e.: to Heinrich Kramer) adducimus testes, qui eundem iuvenem sic interfectum et sanguine exhaustum viderunt.“.

illuminate too much on what might have happened; they only say that they have seen scalpel wounds on the boy's corpse;⁵⁶ none of them reports having seen some Jews interact with Johannes Fuchs – only the last one says that a few days before he had seen some generic Jews „circa illum locum ambulantes et perlustrantes ubi iuvenis ille boves patris pascebat in campis, et quod ad quatuor miliaria prope eundem locum iudei in certis terris morabantur“.⁵⁷

It is apparent that the witnesses already believed that Jews kill and extract blood from Christian children,⁵⁸ and when they found the wounded corpse of a young boy, the stereotype immediately rang a bell in their mind and imagination. We see a similar dynamic in place in Endingen in 1470, which was Heinrich Kramer's last stop before making his way back to Trento. This blood libel is particularly important since it is the first instance in which we have the transcriptions of the Jews' confessions.⁵⁹ Three documents – kept in Freiburg im Breisgau, Strasbourg and Frankfurt am Main respectively⁶⁰ – contain the depositions, to which we shall add the document penned on Heinrich Kramer's request,⁶¹ which seems to be highly dependent on the Freiburg transcript.⁶²

In Endingen around Easter 1470 the charnel of the local parish church had to be renewed; during the works, four bodies were found – a man, a woman and two headless children, male and female. Some unspecified inhabitants of the hamlet then recalled that eight years back, in 1462, a family of wandering beggars was hosted by a Jew named Elias and they were never seen again. Eight years later, after the gruesome discovery, the Jew Elias and his two brothers Eberlin and Mercklin were arrested and charged with the murder of the poor family.⁶³ Once again in this case, the *vox populi* is the only

⁵⁶ Ibid.: „Wulnera ... ac si per instrumentum cum quo medici venas corporis solent aperire pro minucione sanguinis.“

⁵⁷ ASTn, APV, s. l., capsula 69, nr. 54, c. 1r.

⁵⁸ Take for example the second witness in *ibid.*: „Vidit masculum illum sic occisum ... unde, cum iudei solent sanguinem cristianorum, ut asseritur, taliter fundere, sibi constat certissime quod ipsum interfecerunt.“

⁵⁹ Taradel, *L'accusa del sangue* (see note 1), p. 79.

⁶⁰ On the surviving sources see Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder* (see note 1), p. 18, note 13.

⁶¹ As mentioned above, the original document written for Heinrich Kramer is now lost, but we have a XVIII century copy made by Benedetto Bonelli (FBSB, ms. 237, pp. 751–754); I will quote from this exemplar.

⁶² Although the prologue of these two documents is different, this hypothesis is grounded in the fact that the structure and the content of the two documents are almost exactly the same; moreover, the Freiburg document is the only one that does contain only the confession of the three main defendants (Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder* [see note 1], p. 18, note 13). Another plausible hypothesis is that both Kramer's copy and the Freiburg copy may be derived from a common third document, now lost.

⁶³ Taradel, *L'accusa del sangue* (see note 1), pp. 77–81; Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder* (see note 1), pp. 14–41.

thing that pinpoints the whole investigation, which in typical inquisitorial fashion,⁶⁴ is only aimed to confirm the inquisitors' hypothesis; being unable to find any other form of evidence, and, most likely, unwilling, since confession was considered the most compelling type of evidence,⁶⁵ the magistrates would then seek to obtain a full admission of culpability, often resorting to torture. In the end, Elias and his brothers confessed to partaking in the slaughtering of the family, alongside with other Jews.

Since the blood libel of Endingen has already been studied in depth and the contents of the document copied by Bonelli does not seem to have meaningful differences with the other sources of the Endinger *affaire*, we will limit our examination to a quick overview of the confession of Mercklin,⁶⁶ the last of the three brothers interrogated, which will allow us to showcase some characteristics of inquisitorial questioning.

After Elias and Eberlin had confessed the murder, the magistrates turned to Mercklin; at first, he says that, since his brothers have already confessed, there is no need for him to repeat what happened.⁶⁷ Since the judges insist, Mercklin goes on to confess that he killed the woman slitting her throat using a „Sechmesser“⁶⁸ in his brother's barn while an unspecified foreign Jew killed the man; then, he goes on describing the killing and beheading of the children and the concealment of the corpses in the charnel.⁶⁹ The most interesting part is when, towards the end of the interrogation, Mercklin is asked about what do the Jews use the blood for. It's worth to quote the passage at length:

„Et cum finaliter interrogaretur ad quem usum puerorum sanguinem verterent, respondit primo quod pro quadam medicinam ipsorum, quoniam multum medicinalis eis existeret. Et cum sibi obiiceretur quod frater suus Eberli alium usum exprimisset, respondit quod uterentur illo sanguine contra lepram. Et cum iterum sibi fuisset obiectum cur filius suus effectus fuisset leprosus, respondit quod illo sanguine uterentur contra fetorem ipsorum, sicut judei fetorem quandam retinent. Cum autem fuit sibi obiiceretur quod frater suus alium usum expressisset, respondit: modo dicam vobis veritatem, cerno quod aliter fieri non potest. Utimur illo sanguine in nostra circumcissione pro crismate. Et cum obiiceretur cur talis in eis pertinacia perseverarent, cognoscentes sanguinem cristianum tam salutiferum, respondit quod diabolus ita operaretur.“⁷⁰

⁶⁴ The terms inquisitor/inquisitorial here employed are not to be confused with the Church institution of the Inquisition; an inquisitorial trial is any trial where the same person acts both as prosecutor and judge, proceeding *ex officio* (that means, without the need of a formal complaint being filed) against someone who was publicly suspected of a crime.

⁶⁵ Elena Brambilla, *Confessione Giudiziaria*, in: Prosperi/Lavenia/Tedeschi (Eds.), *Dizionario storico dell'inquisizione* (see note 19), vol. 1, pp. 372 f.

⁶⁶ In FBSB, ms. 237, p. 753 Mercklin is erroneously called Eberlin, in confusion with his brother. We do not know whether this error was already present in Kramer's manuscript or if it was occasioned by Bonelli during the transcription.

⁶⁷ FBSB, ms. 237, p. 753.

⁶⁸ The „Sechmesser“ is in all probability the knife used for the ritual slaughtering; see also Francesca Mancini (Ed.), *Das Endinger Judenspiel – Il dramma sugli ebrei di Endingen*. Dall'edizione del 1883 di Karl von Amira. Testo tedesco a fronte, Padova 2017, pp. 450 f.

⁶⁹ FBSB, ms. 237, p. 753.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 753 f.

As we can see, the judges are not satisfied with Mercklin's answers, therefore they keep insisting in order to have the defendant confirm their version and make his confession match his brother's – although, it should be noted, in the documents that we have Elias and Eberlin do not say what do they need the blood for. We do not have the exact wording of the questions, but it would not be too implausible to assume that they in some way oriented what Mercklin said. It is also noteworthy that the 'wrong' answers cover almost the whole spectrum of the possible uses of the blood that crop up in the traditional blood libels, namely some form of medicament, especially for the treatment of leprosy, a cure for the *foetor judaicus* (Jews' stench),⁷¹ as well as a form of unguent employed to stop the bleeding of the circumcision.⁷²

In its very last lines, the document informs us that Sigismund, the duke of Austria, ordered the margrave Karl von Baden to carry out the sentence against the Jews, who were then burned at the stake.⁷³ As we could expect, our source makes no mention whatsoever of the following intervention of emperor Friedrich III, who disavowed Karl von Baden's actions and fined him.⁷⁴

Now that we have shown the contents of the documents that Heinrich Kramer brought to Trento from Germany in November 1475, we will attempt to see what role they played in the case of Little Simon and what prince-bishop Johannes Hinderbach hoped to achieve with their aid.

4

Being able to demonstrate that killing Christian children for ritual purposes was, in effect, somehow crucial to Johannes Hinderbach in order to have his version of what happened in Trento widely accepted.⁷⁵ We know for a fact that the shrewd bishop sent the documents to his agents and representatives in Rome to be shown to the commission of cardinals that was put in charge of examining the trial records of Trent: on the back

71 The myth that the Jews have a peculiar distinguishable stench is old in Christian anti-Judaism; see on this Pierluigi Lanfranchi, *Foetor judaicus*. Archéologie d'un préjugé, in: *Ékklesia. Approches croisées d'histoire politique et religieuse* 104 (2017), pp. 119–133.

72 On the alleged uses of Christian blood in blood libel legends see Taradél, *L'accusa del sangue* (see note 1), pp. 41–46. Partly outdated, but still worth reading on the subject: Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews. The Medieval Concept of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Antisemitism*, Philadelphia 1995, pp. 124 f.

73 FBSB, ms. 237, p. 754.

74 Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder* (see note 1), pp. 34 f.

75 Willehad Paul Eckert, *Il beato Simonino negli „atti“ del processo di Trento contro gli ebrei*, in: *Studi Trentini di Scienze Storiche* 64 (1965), pp. 193–221, at p. 193 (formerly *Beatus Simoninus – Aus den Akten des Trienter Judenprozess*, in: id./Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich [Eds.], *Judenhass – Schuld der Christen?! Versuch eines Gesprächs*, Essen 1964, pp. 329–357).

of each of our documents Hinderbach's secretary Johannes Menichen wrote „XXI marcii productus“⁷⁶ (we do not know for sure of what year, but possibly 1477), referring to the day they were shown to the cardinals. Unfortunately, we have no records of the proceedings of the commission established by Sixtus IV, therefore we are unable to ascertain what role they might have played in its decision to declare the formal correctness of the trials against the Jews of 1475.

On the other hand, however, we have hints that these cases from southern Germany might have been in some form popularized by the homilies of the Observant Franciscan Michele Carcano da Milano. This zealous preacher was vigorously engaged in contemporary anti-Jewish polemic, especially concerning usury; he was also a staunch proponent of the so-called *Monti di Pietà*, that is, charitable financial institutions where poor people could borrow money at little interest rate which were conceived as an alternative to Jewish credit.⁷⁷ In the years 1476–1478 Carcano and Hinderbach exchanged letters which testify the Franciscan's involvement in the preaching of the devotion to the ‚blessed‘ Simon.⁷⁸ While Carcano's letters are usually very concise, Hinderbach wrote more extensively, in such a fashion that seems to provide his correspondent the blueprint for a possible homily. On April 11th, 1477, the bishop of Trento wrote a long epistle to the preacher where at one point he starts to enumerate other cases in which Jews were said to have committed ritual murders of Christian children, among them

„in Alemania et in partibus Svevie super Rheno multi scholares et pueri occisi memorantur ..., et novissime, etate nostra in oppidis Ravensporg et Uberling, Constantinensis diocesis, tempore quondam felcis recordationis Martini pape quinti et Sigismundi imperatoris, et aliis pluribus locis, ut in processu constat, ac novissime, infra paucos annos, in opido Endingen et Phorzheim sub marchione Karolo Badensi, quamplures iudei utriusque sexus pro simili necatione duorum coniugum christianorum ac duorum filiorum ultimo supplicio puniti fuerunt et alia multu similia homicida in pluribus partibus facta fore constat, que nimis longum esset omnia commemorare“.⁷⁹

Every case about which Heinrich Kramer gathered documents (with the exception of the case of Pfullendorf) is included by Johannes Hinderbach in the narrative that he wanted Michele Carcano to foster. This shows the extrajudicial strategy of the bishop: given

⁷⁶ In September 1475 Johannes Menichen was in Rovereto, where Battista de Giudici fled from Trento; then, in early 1476 we find him in Rome where he received letters written by Hinderbach that bear many Menichen's autograph margin notes (ASTn, APV, s. l., caps 69, nr. 6 contains some thirty letters from Hinderbach to Johannes Menichen, which the latter brought back to the bishop when he returned to Trento).

⁷⁷ On Carcano and the *Monti di Pietà* see Rosa Maria Dessì, *Usura, caritas e Monti di Pietà. Le prediche antiusuarie e antiebraiche di Marco da Bologna e Michele Carcano*, in: *I frati Osservanti e la società in Italia nel secolo XV. Atti del XL convegno internazionale in occasione del 550° anniversario della fondazione del Monte di pietà di Perugia*, 1462, Assisi-Perugia, 11–13 ottobre 2012, Spoleto 2013, pp. 169–228.

⁷⁸ Some of these letters are edited, however partially and not always correctly, in: Paolo Sevesi, *Il beato Michele Carcano da Milano O. F. M.*, in: *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 4 (1911), pp. 36–43.

⁷⁹ ASTn, APV, s. l., caps 69, nr. 96, c. 1v.

that he had no direct control about what was happening in the cardinal commission in Rome, he tried to control the narrative and defend the historical ‘truth’ and reality of Jewish ritual murders. If this was his goal, he eventually achieved it. Later polemicists like Benedetto Bonelli in his influential⁸⁰ „Dissertazione apologetica“, a book that was written to rebut those who had questioned the reality of such crimes, also made use of these sources to affirm that Simon had indeed been murdered by the Jews, and that this was not an isolated incident.⁸¹

We shall note, however, that the narrative that emerges from the confession of the tortured Jews in Trento and the one portrayed in the manuscripts that Heinrich Kramer got from the Bodensee region often contradict. For example, let’s consider one aspect to which the judges of Trento paid great attention: the age of the purported victim. This detail was considered of great importance, since the model of sanctity of the victims of alleged Jewish ritual murders entails a close relation with the „Innocent saints“, that is, the children massacred by order of Herod in his attempt to kill baby Jesus.⁸² Therefore, a boy in his teenage years could impair the parallel.⁸³ In Trento on June 10th, 1475, after he had been tortured to the point that, according to the physician’s evaluation, he could not bear any longer without risk for his own life, Moses the Old („Moses antiquus“) started to deliver a long and detailed confession about the murder of Little Simon.⁸⁴ The *podestà* of Trento Giovanni de Salis, who was in charge of the interrogations, wanted also to know about more general aspects of Jewish ritual murder; one of them concerned age and gender of the victim. Moses is explicit in his confession to say that the child should

⁸⁰ The *Dissertazione apologetica* for one, influenced Prospero Lambertini (later pope Benedict XIV) on the matter of the *pueri a Judaeis necati*. See Teter, *Blood libel* (see note 1), pp. 310 f. See also Nicola Cusumano, *Ebrei e accusa di omicidio rituale nel Settecento. Il carteggio tra Girolamo Tartarotti e Benedetto Bonelli (1740–1748)*, Milano 2012.

⁸¹ For instance: Bonelli, *Dissertazione apologetica* (see note 23), pp. 29, note a, 33 f., note b.

⁸² On the Innocent saints and the connections between sanctity and childhood see Francesco Scorza Barcellona, *Magi, infanti e martiri nella letteratura cristiana antica*, Roma 2020; Elena Zocca, *Infanzia e santità. Un difficile incontro alle origini del cristianesimo*, Roma 2020. With special regard to Simon of Trento and the victims of alleged ritual murders: Tommaso Calì, *Il „Puer a Judaeis necatus“. Il ruolo del racconto agiografico nella diffusione dello stereotipo dell’omicidio rituale*, in: *Le inquisizioni cristiane e gli ebrei, Atti della Tavola rotonda nell’ambito della Conferenza annuale della Ricerca*, Roma, Accademia dei Lincei, 20–21 dicembre 2001, Roma 2003, pp. 471–501 and Anna Esposito, *La morte di un bambino e la nascita di un martire. Simonino da Trento*, in: Anna Benvenuti Papi/Elena Giannarelli (Eds.), *Bambini santi. Rappresentazioni dell’infanzia e modelli agiografici*, Torino 1999, pp. 99–118.

⁸³ Consider, for instance, the criticism that in the early Fifteenth century was addressed to the cult of eighteen years old (some other sources say fourteen) Werner of Bacharach, allegedly murdered by the Jews 1287. See André Vauchez, *Antisémitisme et canonisation Populaire. Saint Werner ou Vernier* († 1287), *enfant martyr et patron des vigneron*, in: *Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 126 (1982), pp. 65–79, especially pp. 71–73.

⁸⁴ Esposito/Quagliani (Eds.), *Processi*, vol. 1 (see note 3), pp. 353–359.

be male and not older than seven years of age.⁸⁵ It is true that, in Endingen, Mercklin affirms that the Jews only use the blood of children and not of adults⁸⁶ – although in that case the children were one male and one female and he does not express any explicit preference for the boy's blood –, but the age of the young victim is not specified. In the other cases the victim is significantly older: Johannes Fuchs was said to have been „XV annorum vel circiter“,⁸⁷ the same age of Ludwig, the student allegedly murdered by the Jews of Ravensburg.⁸⁸ The age of Little John Schmidt is not explicitly given, but it is said that he was helping Jacob Samin in shepherding the cattle,⁸⁹ therefore we might assume that he was not an infant anymore.

Another striking difference is the involvement of Christians as participants in the crimes of the Jews. As we have shown, the longest document of our bunch contains the trial against a family of alleged Christian accomplices of Jacob the Jew, and in the case of Ravensburg an important role is played by the carter Knoll. We do not have anything like that in the case of Trento, where the physician Tobias was suspected of having carried out the kidnapping due to his familiarity with the other residents of the neighbourhood.⁹⁰

Although it is important to point out the differences between the stories contained in the documents provided by Heinrich Kramer and the narrative that was formed around the case of Simon of Trento, a purely narratological approach to this kind of sources would be highly misleading. In many cases, and the one we have dealt with in this study is one of them; although those who wrote about the Jews killing Christian children did not doubt that what they were writing was somehow the historical truth, they did not shy from eliding details that could impair their narrative. Therefore, it seems more pertinent to ask whether the accusers did care at all about the little divergences that we notice in the stories, and the answer might well be that they simply did not care. Up to 1475, it seems that existed a general belief that Jews killed Christian children for ritual purposes, and only later, also with the contribution provided by the birth of a

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 357: „Interrogatus an alius sanguis humanus sit bonus ad usum ipsorum iudeorum, ut supra dixit, et an magis requiratur quod sit sanguis masculis vel femine, et an iuvenis vel senis, respondit quod *necesse est* quod talis sanguis sit sanguis pueri Cristiani masculi et non femine, et qui non sit maioris etatis 7. annorum“ (emphasis added).

⁸⁶ FBSB, ms. 237, p. 753: „Et cum iterum interrogaretur an sanguinem parentum etiam in aliquem ipsorum usum vertirent, respondit quod non, sed solum puerorum sanguinem. Et cum obiectum fuisset quare tum parentes illo interfecissent, respondit ut sic pueros habere possent.“

⁸⁷ ASTn, APV, s. l., caps 69, nr. 54, c. 1r.

⁸⁸ Ibid., nr. 48, c. 1r.

⁸⁹ Ibid., nr. 44, c. 1v.

⁹⁰ In Trento a Christian tailor named Roper, who was in friendly relationship with the Jews, was arrested on March 31st, 1475, because he was suspected of being involved in the crime. After he was interrogated under torture, he was eventually acquitted and released on April 18th of the same year (Esposito/Quaglioni [Eds.], *Processi*, vol. 1 [see note 3], pp. 405–410).

distinct hagiographic model, the *puer a judaeis necatus*, the details and minutiae in the tale gained more and more importance and tended to converge.⁹¹

The history of the blood libel stretches across a long period of time, during which the accusations of this kind thrown against the Jews are so many that historians struggle to count them.⁹² Since its first appearances in its modern form around the half of the Thirteenth century up to recent times, the „legend of the killer Jew“⁹³ has gone through many changes and has seen many variations surface in the narrative pattern. As we have mentioned in the beginning, it was only after the case of Trento 1475 that the narrative consolidated, in large part due to the introduction of printed pictures and accounts of the story of Simon.

The group of documents we have examined in this study is a testimony of some of the possible variants that were circulating in the years immediately preceding the great *affaire* of Trento. But to Johannes Hinderbach and his supporters these manuscripts did not contain mere stories, but facts, and this is why they put so much effort in the cause and why to them the discrepancies in the narratives and procedural flaws (of which Hinderbach was well aware⁹⁴) were ultimately of secondary importance.

91 Calìò, Il „Puer a Judaeis necatus“ (see note 82).

92 For instance, Christopher Ocker, *Ritual Murder and the Subjectivity of Christ. A Choice in Medieval Christianity*, in: *The Harvard Theological Review* 91,2 (1998), pp. 153–192, at p. 155, counts some ninety episodes of blood libel; Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews* (see note 72), p. 125 contends that more than 150 cases have occurred.

93 Tommaso Calìò, *La leggenda dell'ebreo assassino. Percorsi di un racconto antiebraico dal Medioevo a oggi*, Roma 2007.

94 Diego Quagliioni, *La parola „data“ e la parola „presa“. Le donne nel processo*, in: Esposito/Quagliioni (Eds.), *Processi*, vol. 2 (see note 7), pp. 1–25, at pp. 15–17.