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Trent 1475
The Responses of a Pope and a Jewish Chronicler

Kenneth Stow, Haifa University, Israel

ABSTRACT: This presentation discusses two responses to the 1475 trial of Jews accused of ritually murdering a Christian boy, Simon, in the city of Trent. One comes from Pope Sixtus IV and another, a century later, from a Jewish chronicler, Joseph ha-Cohen.

This presentation is for the following text(s):

- Bull of Sixtus IV
- `Emeq haBakh'a



Kenneth Stow

Haifa University, Israel

Duration: 36:09

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Introduction to Bull of Sixtus IV

Kenneth Stow, Haifa University, Israel

Notes: See on these issues, Kenneth Stow, "Papal Mendicants or Mendicant Popes: Continuity and Change in Papal policies toward the Jews at the end of the Fifteenth Century" *Friars and Jews in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*. ed. S. McMichael. Leiden, 2004, 255-73, and the literature cited there, including references to texts noted here.

In Pope Sixtus IV's bull of 1478 and in Yosef Ha-Cohen's (1496-1575) *'Emeq ha-Bakh'a* (started in 1558, and finished in 1575, but not published till 1852), we see the incipience of an historical and an historiographical modernity. Though the text of Yoseph Ha-Cohen may seem principally a biblically stylized account of a ritual murder libel, in fact, it reveals an historian capable of divorcing the present from the past. Medieval historians who preceded him notably were incapable of making such a division. For Ha-Cohen, the past exists in its own right, not, as it was for medievals, the bearer of present-day values that require illustration. He carefully distinguishes between actors as individual with individual wills.

In looking at this text, our immediate interest is not to know what happened at Trent in 1475. There was a libel that the Jews had killed a boy named Simone and then drained his blood for ritual uses. So strong was the belief, so resilient, and so useful for the community of Trent, located on the Adige river about an hour North, by today's standards, from Verona in Italy (a town that was already part of the German Empire and whose Jews spoke German or Yiddish, not Italian), that it was not formally condemned until the mid-1960s, much to the regret, it seems, of late twentieth century Tridentine clergy. The entire Jewish community of Trent, its males, anyway, was burned at the stake, and the women were forced to accept Christianity and their children taken from them until the pope intervened, as well as his emissary, Bishop de' Giudici, who nearly paid with his life for condemning the trial, the executions, and the other happenings.

Yet, to understand the accusation of ritual murder made at Trent in that year, we have more than one trial transcript, which have recently been published by Ronnie Hsia, Diego Quaglioni, and Anna Esposito, flush with comments and large bibliographies. Ritual murder as a subject has received more studies than can be mentioned. We have the luxury, therefore, of being able to concentrate on how Ha-Cohen puts his materials together, which is highly stylized,

especially his recourse to biblical grammar and syntax. He is also most definitely tendentious. EMW 2004

However, Ha-Cohen is not monolithic. There are people associated with the Church, who may be positive or negative; they are not icons for set images. Humanists, like the bishop of Trent, who presses the libel forward, are dangerous. Ha-Cohen seems aware that the pope was highly angered. Depictions like this would not appear in earlier historical writing. Real individuals do not fit well with tales of the past that are purely illustrative of (supposedly) eternal values and truths. Moreover, what Ha-Cohen says is also verifiable. Pope Sixtus IV was indeed angered. This is clear from the (following) bull Sixtus issued in 1478. He seemingly acquiesces to a reality from which there is no return. Jews, whether innocent or guilty-and the pope seems to know they were innocent-had been judicially murdered. They could not be brought back to life. But the real message of the bull is that such incidents are not to be repeated. Jews might be convicted only following proper judicial procedures and incontrovertible proof. Innocent Jews were not to suffer. It is true that in taking this stance, Sixtus was also defending himself against political enemies. But this is secondary. The law was the law, and Sixtus insisted it be observed.

Yet a legalist stance would also have been medieval. Many might not realize this, but it is absolutely true, certainly in terms of theory, with but one or two exceptions over the centuries. Innocent III, as Sixtus' texts notes, had said that only Jews who violate the law merit sanctions. What made Sixtus modern, or portending modernity was something else, which, in fact, was the truth he had to face that the medieval attempt to maintain a balance between restricting Jews, as the Church most certainly had ordained, and guaranteeing basic rights, was no longer viable. Too many forces were militating against it. In the Papal States, the solution would be a ghetto, a kind of limbo where Jews would reside unless they consented to conversion, which, of course, the vast majority did not.

Others, however, those who rejected the medieval equilibrium just described, saw the Jews as potential polluters of a pure Christian society, in just these terms. The Jews were "dogs," they said, who sought to "steal the children's bread," meaning the Eucharist, which they wished to contaminate. The Eucharist, however, was also synonymous with the martyr. Simon of Trent was a Eucharistic martyr, the body of Christ, the Church itself, incarnate. The ghetto established to prevent Jewish pollution, therefore, was a "kennel." Did not Pope Pius IX, in 1871, the year after the ghetto was abolished by the rulers of the new secular Italian State, say that "Jews were now barking (latrare) up and down the streets of Rome.

Against this view, Sixtus IV represents a last gasp to reestablish the old medieval way of doing things. It failed.

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Bull of Sixtus IV Pope Sixtus IV, 1478

Translated by Kenneth Stow, Haifa University, Israel

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Sixtus, servant of the Servants of God. To our venerable brother, Johannes bishop of Trent, greetings and apostolic benediction. Divine piety has made us solicitous to provide for the safety of souls and to ward off danger to the extent possible. Some time ago, the praetor¹ of your city of Trent, whose fame precedes him, opened an investigation against some Jews then dwelling in your city who were said inhumanely to have murdered the Christian child named Simon. He carried out the investigation as the gravity of the affair demanded, and as was incumbent upon his office, and those found guilty he condemned to the ultimate penalty. But many people began to complain loudly; and in various locales, they began to interpret the matter with considerable suspicion. We, in order to remove all such suspicions, and in such a manner properly to perform our pastoral duty, and so that the truth should be made known to the faithful, have diligently had examined and inspected the closed² transcript [of the trial] held by this praetor against the Jews. This transcript, protected by our seal, was sent to us by you and your [official]. The examination was carried out by a number of our venerable brothers Cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church, and also archbishops, legal experts, and the auditor of trials of our apostolic palace.³ They met frequently, and after examining with great care each phase of the trial, they reported to our consistory that the trial itself had rightly and properly been concluded. We, accordingly, sharing the sentiment of our brothers [just mentioned] regarding the account [of the trial], commending as well the zeal and diligence of your brotherhood in God [Hinderbach], nonetheless, wish and enjoin upon your brotherhood that in the pious devotion now commenced, you do not allow, following the decree issued in the General Council by our predecessor Pope Innocent III, of blessed memory, anything illicit to be done that might result in injury to God or contempt of the Apostolic See, or which might be perceived as potentially and inexcusably contravening canonical sanctions¹. And the observance of this injunction we entrust to your conscience, concerning which we trust in God.

You must carefully ascertain that no Christian, on the pretext of the foregoing matter [of Simonino] or for any other pretext, barring the judgment of an earthly power, should presume to kill, mutilate, wound, or unjustly extort monies from them [the Jews], or prevent them from observing their rites, permitted by law. In addition, we wish and enjoin upon your authority, that you apply all diligence, to restore the children of the condemned Jews, to their baptized mothers, along with their mothers' dowries, wherever they may now be held. Those who oppose this decree or rebel against it will feel the weight of ecclesiastical censure and other [pertinent] laws. This letter is effective notwithstanding other apostolic letters or prescriptions in contradiction. Dated at Rome, at St. Peter's, in the year of the Incarnation of the Lord, one thousand and seventy eight, the twelfth of the Kalends of July, in the seventh year of our pontificate.

Endnotes

[1] A judicial official.

[2] I.e. secret, confidential

[3] An administrative judge of very high standing.

[4] In other words, the decree of the Fourth Lateran of 1215, but in fact the full text of Sicut Iudaeis non issued by this pope in 1198 and then edited into the 1234 Decretales via the Council, with the significant clause intended by Sixtus IV elided, namely, that the protection of the bull applies only to Jews who do not machinate against the Church: which is to say, in this instance, that Hinderbach had violated this rule at Trent, since, as bishop de' Giudici had reported, the whole story was a fiction and there was no plot; but after the fact, there was nothing to be done but to ratify the trial, for the proceedings technically were correct, even if the results were unjust, and then to warn against repetition; hence, the enormous circumlocution, a master diplomatic stroke, but one that Hinderbach unquestionably, as a legist himself, understood.

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SIXTUS IV 1471-1484

Rome, 20 June 1478

Sixtus episcopus, servus servorum Dei. Venerabili fratri Iohanni, episcopo Tridentino, salutem et apostolicam benedictionem . Facit nos pietas divina sollicitos animarum saluti consulere, et illarum, quantum in nobis est, periculis obviare. Cum itaque pridem pretor civitatis tue Tridentine, fama publica referente, contra nonnullos Iudeos, tunc in ipsa civitate commorantes, qui Christianum infantem, nomine Simonem, occidisse inhumaniter dicebantur, prout rei gravitas exigebat, et suo incumbere officio, ad inquisitionem descendisset, et repertos culpabiles ultimo supplicio deputasset, multique propterea viri graves murmurare, et sinistra quadam suspicione in diversas partes rem ipsum interpretari cepissent, nos, ut suspicionis huiusmodi omnis tolleretur occasio, et in tanta re debitum nostri pastoralis officii servaremus, utque facti veritas cunctis fidelibus innotesceret, processum clausum per ipsum pretorem contra Iudeos predictos habitum, et ad nos postea per te destinatum, tuoque et nuntii nostri sigillis munitum, per nonnullos ex venerabilibus fratribus nostris Sancte Romane Ecclesie cardinalibus, archiepiscopis quoque, referendariis nostris, et causarum palatii apostolici auditoribus, inspici et examinari fecimus diligenter, qui super hoc sepius congregati, ac singulis ipsius processus partibus accurate inspectis, tandem processum ipsum rite et recte factum in nostro consistorio retulerunt. Nos igitur, una cum eisdem fratribus nostris per relationem supradictam idem pariter sentientes, necnon studium et diligentiam eiusdem tue fraternitatis in Domino commendantes, nihilominus volumus, et eidem fraternitati tue per presentes iniungimus, ut in hac pia fidelium inchoata devotione non permittas, iuxta decretum felicitatis recordationis Innocentii pape III predecessoris nostri, in concilio generali editum, aliquid illicitum attemptari, quod in Dei iniuriam, aut sedis apostolice contemptum cedat, vel

alias contra canonicas sanctiones inexcusabiliter factum fore deprehendatur, super quo tuam, ^{EMW 2004} de qua in Domino confidimus, conscientiam oneramus . Attente quoque provideas, quod nullus Christianus, premissorum vel alia occasione absque iudicio terrene potestatis, Iudeorum aliquem occidere, mutilare, aut vulnerare, sive ab eis pecunias indebite extorquere, sive eos quominus ritus suos a iure permissos continuare valeant, impedire presumant. Preterea volumus, et eadem tibi auctoritate iniungimus, quod omnem adhibeas diligentiam, ut infantes Iudeorum damnatorum filii, eorum baptizatis matribus, una cum dotibus matrum eorundem, apud quoscunque reperiantur deposite, omnino restituantur; contradictores quoslibet et rebelles per censuram ecclesiasticam, et alia iuris remedia compescendo. Non obstantibus quibuscunque litteris et ordinationibus apostolicis forsitan in contrarium editis, ceterisque contrariis quibuscunque . Dat. Rome, apud Sanctum Petrum, anno Incarnationis Dominice millesimo quadringentesimo septuagesimo octavo, duodecimo Kalendas Iulii, pontificatus nostri anno septimo.

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Introduction to `Emeq haBakh'a

Kenneth Stow, Haifa University, Israel

In Pope Sixtus IV's bull of 1478 and in Yosef Ha-Cohen's (1496-1575) *`Emeq ha-Bakh'a* (started in 1558, and finished in 1575, but not published till 1852), we see the incipience of an historical and an historiographical modernity. Though the text of Yoseph Ha-Cohen may seem principally a biblically stylized account of a ritual murder libel, in fact, it reveals an historian capable of divorcing the present from the past. Medieval historians who preceded him notably were incapable of making such a division. For Ha-Cohen, the past exists in its own right, not, as it was for medievals, the bearer of present-day values that require illustration. He carefully distinguishes between actors as individual with individual wills.

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However, Ha-Cohen is not monolithic. There are people associated with the Church, who may be positive or negative; they are not icons for set images. Humanists, like the bishop of Trent, who presses the libel forward, are dangerous. Ha-Cohen seems aware that the pope was highly

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**`Emeq haBakh'a
Yosef Ha-Cohen, 1575**

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The moon was dressed in darkness [a lunar eclipse, boding evil] on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan in the year 5235, the year of 475 and 1000. On those days, during the Passover holiday, the villain [Enzo; a misreading by Letteris]^[1] struck down a two year old lad named Simon, in Trent, which is in Italy.^[2] Unseen, he placed the boy in a cistern near the house of Samuel Balt [di Bonaventura of Nuremberg] the Jew. As expected, the Jews were blamed.

At the bidding of the bishop [Hinderbach], the Jew[s]' house[s] was/were entered [and searched], but they did not find the boy. The search party left. But the next day they found him. The bishop then ordered that they go and see the child where he [actually] was. In addition, all the Jews were to be seized. Their lives were then embittered. They were tortured with the cord (hoisted in the air with their arms tied behind their backs), so that they confessed to what they had not plotted [let alone done]. One very old man named Moshe, and he alone, did not admit to this great lie. He died under torture. May the Lord requite his righteousness.

Then two learned Christians came from Padua men^[3] who knew both theology and [canon] law. They came to investigate [the real facts]. This investigation infuriated the locals, who wanted to kill the Paduans.

The bishop condemned them^[4] and embittered their lives with [hot] pincers and burned them [to death]. Their pure souls flew heavenward. The bishop confiscated their possessions, as he had planned, and he filled his chambers with mangled flesh [lit., *tarefah*].^[5]

Then they said in Trent: the boy is holy, and, behold, he performs wonders. The bishop spread the "good news" to all the provinces. The people virtually fell over one another in their zeal to see the boy; nor did they come with empty hands. The people, all the peoples, hated the Jews, wherever Jews lived, and spoke to them only meanly.

The bishop wrote to the pope and asked: Make a saint of this boy, canonize him, for he is holy. The pope then sent a Cardinal, a legate [the Bishop of Ventimiglia Battista de' Giudici], to investigate thoroughly. Which he truly did. He saw the whole affair was nonsense.^[6] He

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examined the boy [the corpse], too, which he discovered had been embalmed in spices and perfumes, as is done to the dead. And then he chided them [the bishop of Trent and his entourage], saying publicly that it was all a lie. This infuriated the people, and the legate had to flee. He set himself up in Rovereto, the city near[est] to Trent [and under Venetian rule, unlike Trent, which the Emperor nominally controlled], and then he asked for the transcript that recorded all that the unfortunate ones [the suffering Jews] had said, as well as the sentence that had been passed on them. Following which, he arrested a domestic [or just employee] of the villain [Schweitzer] who had [really] killed the boy. And the villain indeed confessed. He said that this was all the bishop's doing, who had put it into his mind to finish off the Jews. This domestic, this man, the bishop [de' Giudici] brought to Rome, where they spoke to the pope. And the pope did not canonize the boy as the bishop had petitioned, in fact, had petitioned over and over, almost daily. They called him Beato Simone, but saint he is not called to this very day.

And now, Lord of Hosts, righteous judge, remove the blindfold from the uncircumcised of heart^[7] who believe such lies, who validate deceit. For because of this lie, we have been killed time and again, like sheep for the slaughter. Save us for your name's sake.

Endnotes

[1] Johannes Schweitzer, in fact.

[2] The Empire, in fact.

[3] Likely the ref. is to Antonio Capodilista, who defended the Jews. Notable here is that so many Paduan legists, in opposition to the Perugian tradition of Bartolus and Baldus, were among the strongest opponents of Jews, including Bishop Hinderbach himself and G. F. Pavini.

[4] The subject switches back to the Jews; did something fall out of the text?

[5] Nahum 2:13: "[Where is] the lion that tore victims for his cubs and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his lairs with prey and his dens with mangled flesh? 14: I am going to deal with you--declares the Lord of Hosts." Clearly Ha-Cohen has this whole section in mind.

[6] Hebr. *Ta'atu'im and hevel*.

[7] A clear retort to Christian claims first made by Paul.

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‘Emeq haBakh'a Yosef Ha-Cohen, 1575

Prepared by Kenneth Stow, Haifa University, Israel

94-95:

ותלבש הלבנה קדרות בליל ט"ו לחדש ניסן בשנת רל"ה וה' אלפים, היא שנת תע"ה ואלף (1475) בימים ההם בחג המצות הכה אינצו [איש] הבליעל בטרנטו אשר באיטליאה ילד קטן בן שנתיים, שימון שמו, ויתן אותו בברכת המים אשר אצל בית שמואל היהודי בלט, ואיש לא ראה. ויעלילו על היהודים כמשפטם. ויכלו בדבר ההגמון אל ביתם ולא מצאוהו, וישובו איש לביתו. ויהי היום וימצא, ויצו ההגמון ויכלו לראות את הילד באשר הוא שם. ויצו ויתפשו את כל היהודים וימררו את חייהם, ענו בכבל נפשם ויתודו את אשר לא יזמו לעשותו. רק זקן אחד בא בימים משה שמו לא הודה את השקר הגדול הזה וימ[ו]ת תחת השבט, כצדקתו השב לו אלוהי.

ויבאו שנים אנשים חכמים נוצרים מפאדובה יודעי דת ודין, להבין פשר דבר, ויחר אף יושבי הארץ עליהם וביקשו להמיתם. וירשיעם ההגמון, וימררו את חייהם בצבתיים וישרפום באש, ותעל נשמתם הטהורה השמימה, ויקח ההגמון את כל קנינם כאשר זמם וימלא מעונותיו טרפה (נחום ב' י"ג).

ויאמרו: קדש הילד והנה הוא עושה נפלאות [והננו עושה פלאות]. וישלח ההגמון לבשר בכל המדינות, ויהרסו כל העם לראות ולא נראו פניו ריקם [ן], וישנאו כל עמי הארץ את היהודים במושבותם בעת ההיא, ולא יכלו דבר אתם לשלום [לשלום].

וישלח ההגמון אל האפיפיור לאמר: קדש את הילד (הזה) כי קדש, וישלח האפיפיור שמה אחד מחשמניו אשר יקראו ליגאטו לחקור את הדבר באר היטב. ויהי כבואו ויחקור את הדבר, וידרוש היטב, וירא כי הבל המה מעשי תעתועים, וגם [את] נבלת הילד דרוש דרש. והנה חנטו אותו בבשמים ובתמרוקי המתים, ויהתל בהם ויאמר לעיני העמים, כי שקר המה. ויחר אף עמי הארץ עליו ויברח מפניהם, ויחן בעיר הקרובה אל טרינטו, וישלח להביא את אשר הודו האומללים ההם ואת אשר נגזר עליהם. ויתפוש אחד מעבדי האיש הבליעל אשר הרג את הילד ויתודה, ויאמר אליו: בדבר ההגמון נעשתה הרעה הגדולה הזאת, אשר נתן עיניו ביהודים לאבדם. ויוליכנו עמו רומתה, וידברו אל האפיפיור, ולא קדש את הילד כאשר בקש ההגמון מאתו דבר יום ביומו, ויקראו (את) שמו ביאה שימון, וקדש לא נקרא עד היום הזה.

131:

פצחו הרים רנה, כי מת יוליו די מונטי, האפיפיור אשר דמה להדיחנו, אשר שרף ספרי תפארתנו, בכ"א יום לחדש מארצו בשנת שט"ו וה' אלפים, היא שנת תקנ"ה ואלף (1555). אנא ה' אלהי הרוחות לכל בשר, תולעתו לא תמות, ואשו לא תכבה והיה דראון לכל בשר.