

Simon of Trent: A Story of an Image

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Simon of Trent in Hartmann Schedel, *Weltchronik*, or *Nuremberg Chronicle* (Nuremberg, 1493), 254v.



Simon of Trent in the pirated edition of Hartmann Schedel, *Liber Cronicarum Cum Figuris et Imaginis Ab Initio Mundi Usque Nunc Temporis* (Augsburg, 1497), 285v.

The image of Simon of Trent from Hartmann Schedel's splendid *Weltchronik*, or *Nuremberg Chronicle* in 1493 (254 verso), has become one of the most iconic images of ritual murder, embraced as such by both antisemites and scholars. Although neo-Nazis operate in a separate epistemological community, reading and reinforcing their own "authoritative sources" through translations of Nazi publications, including the notorious newspaper *Der Stürmer*, troublingly, our own work as scholars might be coopted for hateful uses as well. By treating this image as the iconic image of ritual murder, we as scholars may be, unwittingly, affirming its importance in distressing agreement with the (neo-) Nazis. As Sara Lipton has noted, "Texts outlive people who write them, memory of their initial purpose fades, and words take on a new meaning and power"; the same applies to images.¹

Schedel's 1493 chronicle was indeed unprecedented, with hundreds of woodcuts of kings, popes, and cityscapes. It included several vivid images of Jews—some of the earliest iconographic representations of Jews in print—with the now iconic image of Simon of Trent as one of the most intricate. The book was magnificent, and very expensive. It thus was not reissued beyond the original 1493 printings in Latin and German.

In 1497 a pirated edition—smaller and cheaper—was published in Augsburg, crudely replicating the Nuremberg original (it was then republished in German in 1500 with the same illustrations). The Augsburg edition also had a woodcut of Simon of Trent, a smaller and much cruder mirror version of the one included in Schedel's *Liber chronicarum*. But the original 1493 image was never reused in any other publication, nor was widely copied. Indeed, other images were used, reused, and copied in Christian chronicles, but they are now forgotten.

While the now-iconic image from 1493 was not reprinted, or copied, other images of Simon of Trent were used and reused in different countries.

In 1698 this image was copied in Leiden, and appears as a mirror image in Johann Ludwig Gottfried, *Omstandigh Vervolgh Op Joh. Lodew. Gottfrieds Historische Kronyck* (Leiden, 1698), 1408.

And then in 1704, the 1698 image was reused in Nicolas Gueudeville, *Le Grand Theatre Historique*.

Yet, these representations of Simon of Trent are now forgotten, displaced by the 1493 woodcut from the *Nuremberg Chronicle*, which received a new lease on life when it was published in May 1934 in *Der Stürmer*, in the notorious issue devoted to "ritual murder."



Left: Simon of Trent in Johann Ludwиг Gottfried, *Historische Chronica* (Frankfurt, 1674), 689. Middle: Johann Ludwиг Gottfried, *Omstandigh Vervolgh Op Joh. Lodew. Gottfrieds Historische Kronyck* (Leiden, 1698), 1408. Right: Simon of Trent in Nicolas Gueudeville, *Le Grand Theatre Historique* (Leiden, 1704), vol. 4, 206. © <http://diglib.hab.de/drucke/lgb-2f-11-2b-2s/start.htm?image=00107>

This Nazi rediscovery of Simon in 1934 was not incidental. In 1933, the Nuremberg Chronicle, forgotten like the woodcut of Simon, was published in a gorgeous facsimile in Leipzig, no doubt drawing new attention to this woodcut. (In my study of the dissemination of the blood libel stories I found that the Nuremberg Chronicle was cited only once among hundreds of books—in the 1670 *Abregé du process fait aux juifs de Mets* by Abraham-Nicolas Amelot de La Houssaie.)

In 1943 and in 1944, the woodcut of Simon—along with several others from the 1934 issue of *Der Stürmer*—was included in the Nazi book by Hellmut Schramm, *Der jüdische Ritualmord*.ⁱⁱ

The influence of the 1934 issue of *Der Stürmer* was also palpable in Italian fascist publications. The March 5, 1942, issue of *La difesa della razza*, an Italian fascist biweekly magazine promoting racist ideas through “a scientific” approach, also devoted part of its issue to ritual murder and blood accusations, publishing select images from *Der Stürmer*, among them the 1493 woodcut of Simon.

And in 1943 the image appeared in a Polish-language Nazi publication on ritual murder, as well as in other languages, as part of the Nazi propaganda during the murderous phase of the “final solution.” Frederyk To Gaste, *Prawda o żydowskich mordach rytualnych* (Warsaw: Glob, 1943).



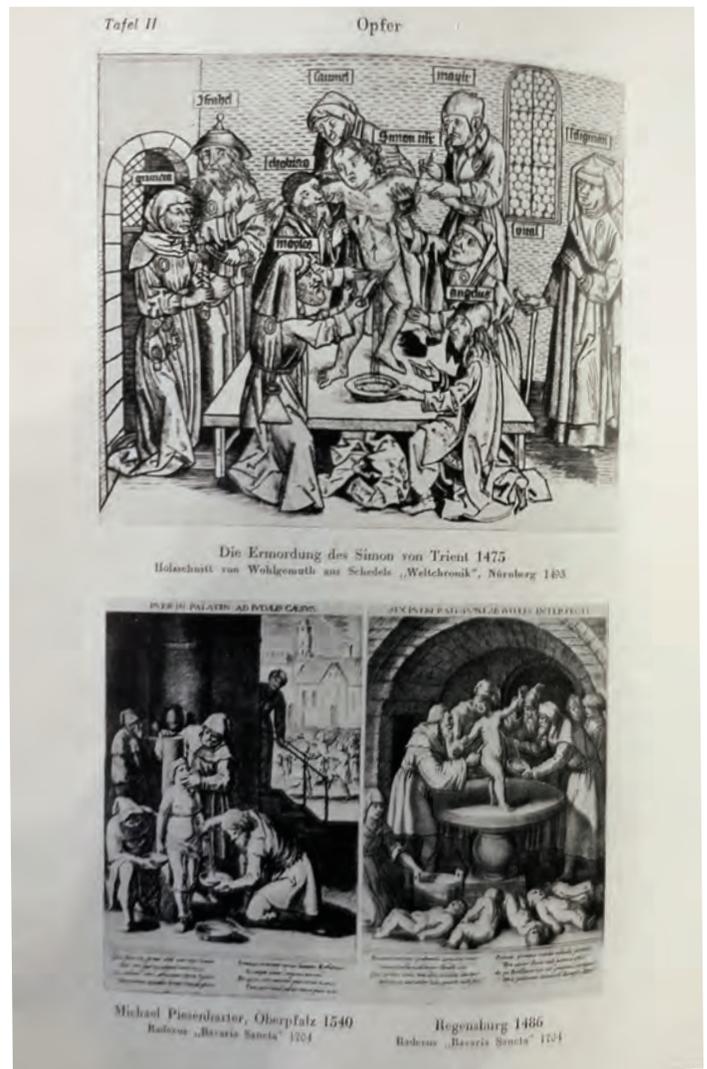
May 1, 1934, issue of *Der Stürmer*, front page.



May 1, 1934, issue of Der Stürmer, page with Simon of Trent.

in the visual documentation of Gothic sculpture, now ubiquitously used by scholars of Medieval Studies. Lisa Leff has gestured toward this question in another context—studying Zosa Szajkowski—noting that the documents Szajkowski obtained by removing them from their original archival context shaped the historiography of French Jewry.^{iv}

These are not trivial questions. By using sources that had been coopted by (neo-)Nazis we might be unwittingly amplifying their voices, and in today's world this can have deadly consequences. The impact that Simon of Trent's story and the iconic image have had cannot be more explicit than in the vitriolically antisemitic and racist manifesto written by the shooter of the Poway synagogue near San Diego, "you are not forgotten Simon of Trent, the horror that you and countless children have endured at the hands of the Jews will never be forgiven."



Since then the image became widely used not only by antisemites, including the neo-Nazis of our own time, but also by scholars studying antisemitism, blood libels, and ritual murder accusations. And there is little reason—aside from its intricate nature or the study of Schedel's chronicle—to use this particular image. It was not the most influential or most reproduced. The broadsides and chapbooks published during and in the immediate aftermath of the Trent trial were far more significant in developing, as Laura dal Prà has argued, the iconographic vocabulary of ritual murder.ⁱⁱⁱ Disturbingly, it seems that the reason we scholars have used it is because the Nazis popularized it as one of the most emblematic representations of ritual murder. And now, just as emblematic it was for them, so it is for us.

The troubled history of the now-(in)famous woodcut from Schedel's Nuremberg Chronicle raises broader questions about our own sources. We modern scholars have sometimes used primary sources without examining how and why these texts and images entered circulation, or what conversations they were a part of. Jacqueline Jung, a medieval art historian, has begun to examine the role that Nazi aesthetics and ideology have played



Martirio del fanciullo Simonino da Trento (da una xilografia di Vohlgemuth).

Una delle suggestive ed ormai uniche xilografie della Classense di Ravenna mi dà occasione di rievocare un fatto criminoso, che ebbe nei suoi tempi la più clamorosa eco come il più efferato delitto ebraico ed originò una sua propria letteratura. È la storia secondo alcuni, la leggenda secondo altri, del beato Simonino da Trento.

La rozza xilografia, unica superstite del suo genere, si ricollega a quella messe infinita d'immagini, che sul martire trentino furono popolarissime ed ovunque diffuse. Come ebbe a notare Corrado Ricci, la rappresentazione grafica è quanto mai efficace. Il fanciullo, nudo, è fissato, a mo' di crocifisso, su una tavola verticale ed ha attorno quattro brutti ceffi di giudei che lo torturano: due, ritti, gli pungono il volto; altri due, in ginocchio, gli scorticano le gambe; e il sangue, che cola abbondantemente dalle piaghe aperte, ha ricominciato una scodella. Fu alto della stampa, disegnata da uno dei soliti anonimi del Quattrocento, vediamo gli strumenti della tortura: un coltellaccio ed una tanaglia. Ma al Ricci fece effetto, soprattutto, l'espressione sadica degli ebrei, perfettamente resi nel tipo razziale, soddisfatti per l'opera meritoria voluta dal loro rito. Da questo lato la vecchia xilografia è tutto un racconto. All'interpretazione del Ricci si

prestava, d'altronde, il disegno arcaico lineare, che mette in rilievo il fanatismo con cui è compiuto il misfatto. E se la prese, l'illustre studioso, con il preziosissimo foglietto, che in fin dei conti non rappresenta che un'idea divenuta simbolo, sembrandogli essa documento di odio di razza e di antica cretola.

Ma di questo parere non era, ad esempio, la «Civiltà Cattolica», ospitando lunghe corrispondenze, che mi aiutano a rievocare la triste e clamorosa vicenda: la quale ebbe l'onore, come ho detto, di una vasta letteratura, iniziata dal rarissimo poemetto (1475) del poeta bresciano Giovanni Ruffinoni (Calphurnii poetae Brix. mors et apothosis Simonis infantis novi martiris: ad Johannem Laderlacchiun pontificem tridentinum et dominum praestantissimum) e dal poema «Simonidos» (1475) di Ubertino Puscolo.

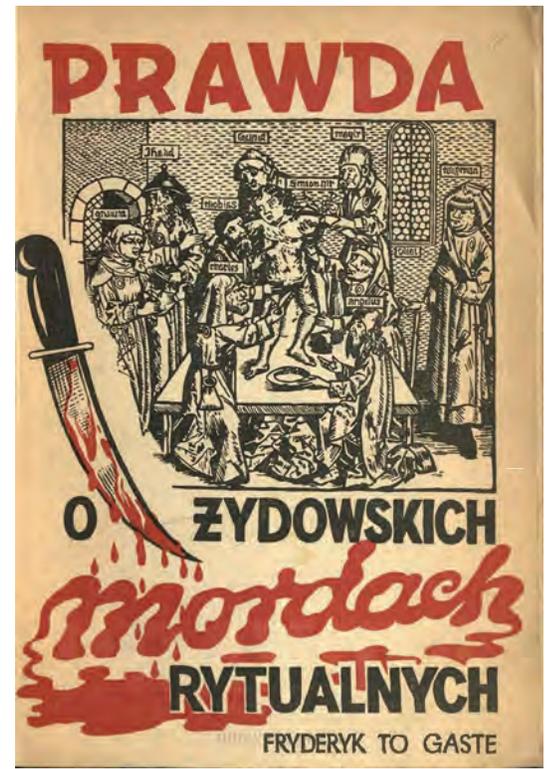
È noto come la reazione della razza giudaica contro le altre genti, specie cristiane, sia non solo religiosa e politica (invenzione di domini e di preconcetti falsi e perniciosi, maledizione, inganno, usura, mutilazione di libri, ecc.), ma anche criminosa: con la consumazione di veri e propri delitti contro la proprietà e le persone, delitti considerati dagli ebrei doveri di religione e manifestazioni di devozione e di fede.

LE "PASQUE" IL MARCHIO DI SAN SIMONINO

Il processo di Trento - La confessione dei giudei imputati



Simon of Trent in March 5, 1942, issue of *La difesa della razza*. Inset: *Frederyk To Gaste, Prawda o zydowskich mordach rytualnych* (Warsaw: *Glob*, 1943).



osserva la sua legge con rigore e è naturalmente portato all'odio per esso, fomentato dal Talmud e dai suoi, che predicano essere fratello del solo soltanto il giudeo e tutti gli altri miseri. Il Talmud non obbliga, ma mente, ad uccidere i cristiani, ma per così dire la licenza; e la feccia laica, cioè i più fanaticamente re i più colti, ha dimostrato — come provano tanti fatti e processi — pochi scrupoli. Quando, poi, sarà il Messia, l'ebreo comanderà il cristiano e guai a chi non si farà e non si circoncederà!

Sui riti ebraici del sangue, ci sono una lunga catena, ha già su queste pagine (II, n. 22, pag. 2) Carlo Alberto Masini; ed è stato pubblicato un elenco documentato di uccisioni di cristiani, redatto da d'Adria. L'ebreo convertito Algran il suo romanzo e Nella tribù di Ma il martirio di Simonino va particolarmente.

Parechi e famosi sono gli assassini cristiani, di cui la storia

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- i Sara Lipton, "A Terribly Durable Myth," *New York Review of Books*, June 27, 2019.
- ii Magda Teter, *Blood Libel: On the Trail of an Antisemitic Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).
- iii aura dal Prà, "L'immagine di Simonino nell'arte Trentina dal XV al XVIII secolo" in *Il Principe Vescovo Johannes Hinderbach* (1465-1486), ed. Iginio Rogger and Marco Bellabarba (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1992). Also, David S. Areford, *The Viewer and the Printed Image in Late Medieval Europe* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2010).
- iv Lisa Moses Leff, *The Archive Thief: The Man Who Salvaged French Jewish History in the Wake of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).