

Tamás Kende:

Living and Fearing Together. Blood Libels and Pogroms in Modern Eastern Europe.

PhD Theses

Blood Libels in the East European History of Ideas on the Anti-Semitism. Methodological and Historiographic Approaches

I. Blood Libel and Blood Libel Cases

The present dissertation is based on an extended after-thought of the author's monograph¹ published in 1995. The book – whose arguments and conclusions were reaffirmed by post-publication research – was focusing on the *mechanism* of a particular kind of prejudice. It examined the processes of a prejudice, the blood libel, built up of several ahistoric elements, becoming a *case*, in other words: history.

During my research I have differentiated between blood libel as latent and ageless prejudice and actual blood libel cases. I have divided into three categories the cases of nineteenth to twentieth-century Eastern Europe:

- the “classic” anti-Jewish blood libel cases (Velizh 1825-1835, Saratov 1852-1860, Kutaisi 1878, Vilna 1901, Polna 1899-1901, Kiev 1911-1913)
- the non anti-Jewish blood libel cases (blood libels against Christian sects e.g. Pereyaslav 1774, and the big blood libel litigation against the Udmurt people in Starij Multan, which was also witnessed and recorded by a Russian writer in exile, Korolenko (1891-1892)
- and, finally, the “inverse” blood libel cases. These involve openly prosecuted Jews turning to court. The litigations well reflected the mechanism of blood libel hysteria. Such cases were recorded in Hungary, in Garam-Kis-Salló, in 1895, as well as in the Russian city of Smolensk in 1910-1913.

There are far too many repetitive motifs appearing in all three types of blood libel cases for us to not trying to establish a certain model with regards to the *workings* of prejudices. Examining the histories of modern blood libels, there might be three discernible levels or elements to consider:

- 1. The level of prejudices and subconscious fear. According to this common sentiment certain “aliens” may or do commit ritual murders. This passive knowledge is general and eternal.
- 2. The second element is a certain *mass psychosis*. For cases to break out, for the “enlightenment” of the witnesses, an intense spirit is necessary – as we have seen above, the knowledge is passive. We might as well call it “carnival mood” (after Bakhtin). Ever since the Middle Ages, most blood libel cases surfaced around the time of Easter. This carnival mood at Easter is intensified by the collective remembering of the crucifixion of our Lord (the killing of Him by the Jews). In the Middle Ages, certain locations saw blood libels become part of passion plays. At the end of the 19th century, in Hermann Strack's time, it was a living tradition that “every year around Easter resurrects the charge that Jews, if not all but at least some, are taking Christian blood for ritualistic purposes.”

¹ Kende Tamás: Vértűd. Egy előítélet működése az újkori Kelet-Európában. Osiris, Budapest, 1995.

- It needs to be mentioned here that mass psychosis triggered by crusades, reconquistas, the plague and the Counter Reformation provided some very wide background. Among these, we have the most records of mass psychosis invoked by crusades. S. W. Baron, creator of the greatest synthesis of Jewish History in the 20th century, also investigated the psychological background of medieval pogroms and blood libels. According to him, from the first crusades a dangerous and infectious element appears in the persecution of Jews which in times of great emotional pressures – stress – turns into mass psychosis and spreads through country borders. Having referred to the so-called “pogrom-paradigm” in Russian history, I have striven to show how an empire-wide feeling of stress, a mass psychosis invoked by quasi constant acts of revolution/counter revolution, leads, in a very similar way, to local acts of violence.
- 3. The third element is the (un)scientific literature on ritual murders and other godless practices. This “Literature of Mass-Characterology” dates back to a century, and it can even be, possibly, a millennium old tradition. This is the standard of the usual subjects of traditional anti-Semitic historical literature.
- The three elements listed above are insufficient to yield *any kind* of prejudice as per the first level, to become a case. One element is missing, the particular activating element which supposes the existence of the above mentioned intensified spirits, is the passive communal knowledge. From the point of view of the mechanisms of the blood libel cases (and any analogous case) it is this element, the missing, activating element is most crucial.

Upon examining court materials of blood libel cases we always find players whose roles are more significant than it should be given the position they have taken up with regard to a specific case (“the game”). Depending on cases, sometimes they are present as witnesses or as experts or representatives of the prosecution. What binds them is the embodiment of the missing, activating factor and the bridging of constant levels we introduced above. But who are these game organizers? The most important common feature in them is that they are all intellectuals. This is relevant because they introduce as intellectuals the elements we label as “scientific” – literary in the blood libel cases which then get personified by them. It is the ownership of this knowledge that makes it possible for them to fill the position of a game organizer. Empowered by century old literary traditions they “help” people (with their subconscious fears and temporary “carnival” mood) consciously remember and bear witness. Again, they connect blood libel levels already listed above. I consider an intellectual game organizer the teacher and examining judge of the Velizh case just as I do the university student called Globev of the Beilis case who crops up in court records as a private investigator. Also intellectuals are the detective of Kutais, the gendarme and counsellor of Polna and the monks and priests of medieval blood libel cases. Belonging here is the head of the Tiszaeszlár village community, Gábor Farkas, and Géza Ónody, fellow fighter and agrarian expert of Győző Istóczy, landlord of farms near Tiszaeszlár who held sway over the examining judge, Bary – an ardent believer in the culpability of the Jews. Not only did he play as a self-appointed expert of Jews and blood libels but, together with Bary, he used to be a member of the local and informal committee, believing in the “usefulness” of ritual killings.

In court documents the role of game organizers often appears insignificant but without them there is no connection between conscious and subconscious or historic and non-historic. The justification of the above model is provided by the following circumstance: in modern Eastern and Central Europe from Kutais to Xanten blood libels surface in totally different cultural, political and social environments. The cases – both anti-Jewish and non anti-Jewish – seem so similar that the reasons for their outbreak should not be looked for in categories of traditional political or social histories.

Apparently, the connection between an anti-Semitic piece of writing and a slap on the face is evident. However, anti-Semitic works get written even in slapless times. And vice-versa.

So it seems that, staying with the example of anti-Semitism, a study on the Holocaust might as well be based on the works of church fathers, not to mention more examples from modern times.

But these types of explanations, prejudices – anti-Semitism – that can be labelled as traditional, have a certain conspiracy theory-like tinge. They discuss cross cultural continuity through time which are not necessarily results of conscious human actions. Followers of this tradition search human actions and determined intentions behind undoubtedly existing similarities and coherences and, often, they think they find them.

Their arguments resemble only too well the conspiracy theories they strive to refute or simply get past. Involuntarily, they see some kind of “deterministic” connection, some eternal “evil” power in the stories and in history itself. No doubt, there are connecting points through the ages but seeing a cause and effect relationship in, say, St Paul and Adolf Eichmann does not appear to be a manifestation of scientific decorum. If prejudice is given then its cause is hardly connective solely to the plottings of individuals, like, say, a church father or a Nazi ideologue.

Social sciences cannot be content with being perplexed at and with describing morally condemnable prejudices when dealing with the phenomenon. We have so far grasped very little of, for example, *how* prejudice works: how it transforms into a deed or intention to act against our fellow human beings. What follows from this is that it is not the *why* but the *how* that should be researched – with the hope that we will also find answers to the former in the research process. That is, and nothing more, what the historians’ trade demands.

As a historian I could not deal with prejudice *in general*, what I did instead was investigating the *particular*: blood libel. I then have attempted to arrive at certain conclusions with regard to its general workings and to find some answers to the above mentioned *how* question. I also included in my research the phenomenon of pogroms. The pogroms – the ones mostly taking place in early twentieth-century Russia – in which prejudice against various minorities and mass violence appeared with intermittent intensity.

Since blood libel cases, just as pogroms, cannot be attributed to one congregation, nation and/or peoples (or, to be more precise, to two adversaries), I was not interested in which nations were more anti-Semitic than others in any given era; I had no interest in historical attitudes of anti-Semitism. Unlike in a number of other works on the subject, classification of eras and peoples – say, with regard to anti-Semitism – was not my intention either.

The traditional political historical approach of the phenomenon I investigate is always focused on the phenomenon of anti-Semitism and supposes explicit actions – conspiracies – of modern politicians. This otherwise natural intellectual reflex is called by Edgar Morin a counter-myth in his book of sociology analysing the social (micro and macro) outcome of a specific case in 1969 in Orléans where anti-Jewish rumours and charges of white slavery (human trafficking) cropped up. He describes the transformation processes of a providential rumour into a counter-myth as it makes its way to Paris. According to this “counter-myth”, the indictment in Orléans surfaced as a result of actions of far-right, anti-Semitic politicians: the accusation was that in the upscale boutiques of the City unsuspecting customers (young ladies) get stunned, kidnapped and then sold in the Middle-East. While demonstrating that the accusation is not a folk belief without antecedents, Morin also depicts expressively how, out of this spontaneous, ephemeral folk “movement”, emerged the counter-myth supposing anti-Semitic conspiracy by liberal leftist intellectuals of Paris. A team of sociologists, led by Morin, arrived promptly at the scene, however, an investigation of several weeks was not able to trace down evidences for conspiracy behind the events. What turned out, however, was that the formation of the “counter-myth” was a natural process by the intellectual élite: it was through this that they were able to rationalise the surfacing of a Middle-Age prejudice in the modern era. In other words, there is a certain ambition for rationalisation hidden behind explanations of conspiracy, but it is Morin’s book that shows why the researcher has to apply strong criticism when investigating such explanations. These explanations crop up behind traditional political historical analyses as well.

Arnold Paucker, German historian, used the expression of anti-anti-Semitic counter propaganda (*anti-antisemitistische Gegenpropaganda*) in connection with anti-Semitic movements and Jewish press reactions to them in late 19th Century Germany.

Linked to the above mentioned features is an observation by Michael Aronson analysing the 1881 pogrom wave in Russia in his historical monography about the conspiracy theories discussed in the monography’s historiographic introduction. The author never used Soviet archives and most contemporary Russian periodicals remained unavailable to him. His book, based on remembrances and published sources, convincingly argues against conventional pogrom explanations of “conspiracy theories”. Researching and discussing his subjects he emphatically avoided biblical pictures and high political conspiracy theories of Jewish history; the focus was on Russia and the Russian historical context. He writes:

“This book is about a conspiracy, or more precisely, about the absence of a conspiracy. It sets out to disprove the widely held assumption that the Russian government, or elements within it or close to it, supported the pogroms of 1881.”

In his great and empathic documentary novel on the blood libel in Tiszaeszlár, Gyula Krúdy, the famous Hungarian writer has this to say:

"This was an untrue piece of news on the death of Eszter Solymosi, and this fabricated news stopped the heartbeat of people all over the world – everywhere where hearts feel, minds think and children are raised. If their religion dictates to kill people what is there to be done against the laws of the Jews? Their religion is five thousand years old it cannot

be changed. Religion is eternal; it will last as long as Jews walk the Earth. The only solution is to exterminate Jews, rid them of the world, so their religion would disappear as well."

II. Blood Libel Cases in the History of Ideas of anti-Semitism

The quotation got published first in 1931. With these lines, Krúdy was poking fun at the irrationality, unconceivable to modern minds, of blood libels. At the end of the novel, he wrote derisively that if we believe in blood libels then the extermination of Jews is indispensable. This thought to Krúdy meant the parody of the impossible, insensible irrationalism; he meant to ridicule and make fools of contemporary anti-Semites. This intention was served by the impossible notion of Jewish extermination. His lines were published in Hungarian in Hungary in 1931. Was Gyula Krúdy a clairvoyant? Hardly. What he did was to take a train of thought to a logical conclusion. His aim is horrification, to make readers see the absurdities of the then popularized anti-Semitic charges. After Auschwitz we read Krúdy's lines in a different light. What appeared to him sheer absurdity has, in one decade, come to be reality: the above things got thought through by those who approached Krúdy's derisive "either-or" question as a problem to solve. It is no thanks to the Nazis and their Hungarian counterparts that they were not able to dissolve with disciplined consistency Krúdy's dilemma. They did everything they could for the cause.

Krúdy's novel strengthens the tradition of Jewish history writing from the outside; in its centre has been, and still is, the continuous persecution, the martyrology of the Jewish diaspora. After the Holocaust the tradition appears to be even stronger and true. All this, from the point of view of the *tradition* is unquestionable. When posterity strives to rationalise the catastrophe of the European Jewry, to historically explain the unconceivable and to place it into the historical stream and tradition, then in pre-Holocaust Jewish history, it is the pogroms and modern libels of Europe that are the premises and antecedents of what was to follow. In the latest Hungarian language book on blood libels the author, in his argument, brings up Holocaust and its characteristic East-European outcome to explain why blood libels have deserved attention:

"Holocaust and its characteristic East-European outcome yields many unanswered questions. This unparalleled genocide, with its more than six million Polish, Ukranian, Baltic, Slovak, Hungarian and Balcanian victims – of which some half million children – is rationally unexplainable."

Whenever we posteriorly want to place the "rationally unexplainable" in history, we strive to reconstruct the way from prejudice to genocide, then we often reach back to modern blood libels in Eastern and Central-Eastern Europe and consider them historic events behind which we find the premises and antecedents of later catastrophies, and may even identify the road to those catastrophes. This seems to be valid even if we know from one of our critics that the phenomenon of blood libel is not exclusively "Jew-specific". According to the official and traditionalist Hungarian Jewish historian György Haraszti the blood libels even if they are not solely Jewish-specific were and are (most probably will be) as he put it the „privilege” of „the” Jewry...

Studying the literature concerning our subject, blood libels and pogroms, we traditionally come across "prejudices" and "conspiracy theories".

We are familiar with its embedded, century old practices. In the same literature, on certain ages and regions – countries and peoples – we might discover a kind of

asymmetry. I intended to focus on this latter phenomenon with regards to the historiography of East-Central-European, more particularly, the Czech Jewry.

In his voluminous essay on the early modern Jewry, John Edwards used the word *lacrimoso* to describe the traditional narrative of Jewish historiography. Edwards describes Jewish historiographers dealing with Christian-Jewish history from Graetz to the contemporaries as ones applying passive approach to “outward” Christian history. Due to the introspective view of the traditional Jewish historiography, he was not concerned with the coexistence of Jewish and, non-Jewish societies: the history of the outside world interested him only in as much as it violently interfered – as it did in most cases – in the independent, and curious, inner history of the Jews.

Yael Zerubavel, Israeli historian, talks, in his monography analysing traditions and modern forms of appearances of contemporary Jewish – mostly Israeli – collective historical psyche, about the “binary” (Zionist) models of Jewish history. According to Zerubavel’s analysis, the great nineteenth- and twentieth-century historical summaries forming modern Jewish national psyche (by Graetz, Dubnov, Baron) and Jewish view of history were born out of political Zionism and are overwhelmingly characterised by extremism. Hence, antiquity – as basis of historic continuity – is a “golden age” to which, after centuries (millennia) of scattering in discontinuity returns Jewish history as a fulfilling “happy ending”. Yet, there is nothing admirable about the phenomenon that – contrary to the golden age of antiquity – the history of centuries of exile appears, unequivocally and in unison, as a negative and tragic history in the Jewish psyche. The authors of the unparalleled works summarizing the history of historiography of East-European Jewry touched upon blood libels and pogroms while also discussed the evaluation and judgement of these events by contemporaries as well as by Soviet history writers.

The sources of the subsections discussing pogroms, expulsions and blood libels are of the works by Simon Dubnov, Alekszander Tager, Maurice Samuel and Hans Rogger. To Hans Rogger the historiographic tradition that narrowed down the phenomenon in question to the context of a newfound, early twentieth-century, political discourse appeared rather general and unaltered despite the infamous Beilis case, and was considered a novelty when the volume was being completed, along with the publications focusing on the “Jewish Policies” of the Russian Empire. It does not take much to discover Jewish martyrology besides the – broadly conceptualised – revolutionary traditions intending to criminalise the Tsarian system. This tradition ignored century old coexistence and its *possible* history.

Historical works entail classification and selection. This is particularly true of general, all-encompassing collective accounts: the subject I have been researching – overwhelmingly Jewish or Jew-specific for obvious reasons – conform to that notion as well. The author of the greatest comprehensive work of modern Jewish history of the late Twentieth century applied selection as well – but in a natural way. In his grandiose summary of public history and history of ideas, David Vital, approaching, treating and continuing multi-century Jewish history and one and a half century of scientific history writing tradition with modern applications, all historic and scientific topoi relating to East-Central European blood libels and pogroms are fairly summarised. While the work is treating a

unilineal history of European Jewry from the times of the French Revolution to World War II and includes Russian pogroms, blood libel cases, Tsarian jurisdictions and legal codes limiting Jewish rights, or the blood libel case of Tiszaeszlár, blood libel cases with non-Jewish subjects and non-Jewish pogroms, even though more numerous than those of Jews and are close in both time and geographical space as well as being of similar outcomes, get all abstracted (in fact, are never touched upon). In Vital's analysis similar fate fell upon the only blood libel case of the modern era that had the accused – tried for ritual murders – sentenced to death by the relevant Czech (Austrian!) court. Into this unilineal conception of history neither the modern blood libel litigations that ended with legally binding sentences, nor anti-Jewish blood libel cases cannot forcibly fit. In the introduction of his fascinating synthesis he touched upon the reasons of selection and, at the same time, referred to its roots in terms of the *history of ideas*. The author intended to write up a tragic ending phylogeny in a *traditional* way; blood libels, blood libel cases interested him not as autonomous *phenomena*, but as *possible* auxiliaries to his setting up of the phylogeny.

American historian Robert Chazan, in his thorough and witty book, wrote about the relationship between medieval stereotypes and modern anti-Semitism and discussed the reasons why the story of Jews and the history of Jews focused and focuses on the partitioner and those partitioned rather than on the normal and the integrated:

Chazan – to whom the 12th century in the history of the stereotypes of European Jewry and the European Jewry itself (the coexistence of Western Christians and Jews) is an important caesura – generally deems the overwhelmingly sad picture that (mainly Jewish) sources and historical literature have painted about coexistence not only far-fetched but historically untenable.

Further, regional reasons for selection, admitted by Vital also, might be the fact that the topic of blood libels and pogroms is systematically treated in the literature as being in correlation with the given state (state politics) and the history of Jews subjected to it. Typical of all this is a modern Polish historical account of the modern history of Jews in Poland. The comprehensive, and representative, synthesis treating the period between the partitioning of Poland and the 1950s omits blood libels and pogroms from the late Eighteenth to the early-middle Twentieth-century in Polish areas due to focused state politics. For the absence of proper Polish statehood such cases cannot make part of the synthesis mentioned. The subject of anti-Jewish pogroms sweeping through Polish territories crops up only in the chapter after 1945, in the subchapter titled “The Problem of the Safety of the Jewish Population”.

For the absence of statehood, anti-Jewish movements on Polish territories from the late Eighteenth century to the early-middle Twentieth century were not integrated into Polish or Polish-Jewish history. Although, for instance, anti-Jewish pogroms in Poland during the first Russian revolution are parts of the history of (local) Polish society rather than that of the Russian state. Strangely, most of the blood libel cases of the late Middle Ages and the Early Modern period were recorded to have taken place in Poland. This circumstance is not a highlighted part of the history of Polish Jews nor is it part of the – unilineal – history of the Eastern European Jewry. Particularly high number of blood libel cases was recorded

in the second part of the Eighteenth century when the crisis of the Polish state began to appear constant. It is typical that the enlightened state of Hungary could always prevent the sentencing and the execution of Jews charged with ritual murders. Meanwhile in Poland, the lack of an enlightened state power yielded to the blossoming of blood libel practices. Mention must be made of the fact that the theses in contemporary historical literature, to date, seem to be valid in saying that the huge number of blood libel cases in eighteenth-century Poland – as anti-Semitism in general – can be traced back to economic reasons. Hillel Levine, in his monograph on the economic roots of anti-Semitism based on early modern history of Poland, projected imbalanced and low rural productivity, underdeveloped industry, and monetary crisis as possible propelling force behind blood libel cases. Based on the 1753 blood libel in Zhytomyr, Levin's conclusion was that blood libel as such served the easing of the conscience of Polish serfs struggling with the prospects of overpopulation due to the economic crisis.

To determine the accurate chronology and the exact number of blood libel cases in Poland – according to the authors of the most modern scientific account of the subject – “further research is needed”. The duo of authors, Guldon and Wijaczka, has dissolved a long drawn out disinterest with their thorough study. The subject of blood libels in Poland has been a popular research target since early Twentieth century, mainly Russian language, Jewish Russian history writing. The sources of the authors were not the original lawsuit records. For lack of sophisticated basic research they, alongside sporadic and not always trusted literature, used eighteenth-century Polish anti-Jewish literature on blood libels as sources of their study.

It is in the second half of the Nineteenth century that blood libel next crops up in Eastern Poland, in areas annexed to the Russian Empire. It is interesting to note that in the Western regions, then under Prussian authority, it gets reborn in the late Nineteenth century, during times of the German “Kulturkampf”. With the ending of Polish statehood, blood libel did not disappear from Polish territories. Peculiarly, this fact does not continue to form (it never did) Polish, or Polish Jewish history as parts of the construction.

The condition that Czech and Czech-Jewish historical accounts generally lack the so-called *Hilsneriada*, the sole blood libel case of the modern era that has the accused Jew found guilty of (ritual) murder and is sentenced to capital punishment points to reasons of selection rooted in certain national historiographies. It cannot be emphasized enough that after the abolishment of the institution of torture, nowhere, not even in the Russian Empire was a blood libel case where a charged Jew had been sentenced. The only exception was the 1900-1901 case of Polna in the Czech Lands where the litigation took place in Kutna and Pisek. Considering the fact that in the *lacrimoso* Jewish historical tradition blood libels play a central, explanatory role, it is no exaggeration to talk about a kind of Czech-Jewish reconciliation and its twentieth-century derivative: the “well meaning” century long silence(ing) of the Hilsner case. First, mention must be made of three anatomical works. One is an account of Czech modern political history by Otto Urban, published in Czech first in 1982. The 1994 German translation lacks the subject just as it does the original.

More up-to-date than Urban's, it discusses the so-called “Polna affair” in a few lines doing injustice to the issue by using a clichéd phrase of “drop in the sea” (the author is talking

about the Jews' sea of suffering both in the Czech Lands and elsewhere in the world), while the issue, I cannot stress enough, is the only modern era blood libel case that saw the accused getting sentenced to death for ritualistic murder.

The Hungarian reader does not need explanation about the asymmetric nature of the Czech (Czech-Jewish) and the Hungarian (Hungarian-Jewish) historiography. While the blood libel of Tiszaeszlár has ample literature and it is an organic part of the Hungarian (and the Hungarian-Jewish) public awareness as well as the political historic synthesis, the blood libel of Polna seems to have been faded from the Czech (and Czech-Jewish) historical memory. From the memory that is, after all, shaped by historians.

For reasons mentioned above, the immortal monograph on anti-Semitism by Jacob Katz, now available in Hungarian also, can be considered anatomical. The book of Katz, exploring different plateaus of West-European anti-Semitism from prejudice through genocide to Auschwitz, discusses in detail late nineteenth- century political anti-Semitism in Central-Europe and Hungary. And, in this regard, the blood libel of Tiszaeszlár as well. However, out of the same "phylogeny" – in a characteristic but not very unique way – omitted are the analogous Czech phenomena and blood libel cases of the Czech Lands.

Russian history, and the history of Jews in Russia – as *the* Jews in general – is unimaginable without the "proverbial" history of Russian anti-Semitism, the Jew policies of the Russian state or that of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century blood libels and pogroms. Late nineteenth-, early twentieth-century Russian, emphasis must be made: solely anti-Jewish, pogroms, and, to a lesser degree, the more famous blood libel cases have become "paradigms" of Russian history itself.

Besides the Beilis case of Russia, the world's most famous blood libel case was that of Tiszaeszlár. Similarly to the legal dispute in Kiev, the litigation in Nyiregyháza, Hungary, was being followed by world press.

The blood libel of Tiszaeszlár receives a highlighted treatment in the single best account of the history of anti-Semitism in Hungary. This is only natural since infightings around the blood libel case of Tiszaeszlár resulted in the foundation of the Antisemitic Party and the systematised appearance of anti-Semitism in Hungarian politics and in the Hungarian parliament. Prior to 1882 also, there had been attempts to create a systematic framework to political anti-Semitism in Hungary then being born but the necessary spark came with the experiences of the Tiszaeszlár blood libel. The author of the book mentioned writes:

"Between 1881 and 1882 there were many ways by which the Hungarian champions of anti-Semitism tried to succeed. Though their attempts yielded some results initially, the movement was not able to grow into a Party proper. Editors of the *12 Pamphlets* often released clandestine messages about the application of a radical method whose time, however, 'was not yet due'. It cannot be stated with full certainty that the anti-Semites were referring to blood libels behind the intentionally vague use of the word "method" but this assumption is reaffirmed by some of the articles appearing in *12 Pamphlets*: the

article titled 'Talmud' has everything from stipulations suggesting this through the most imbecile slanders and hostile hints to open accusations."

At this point the author only assumes that Hungarian politicians badly needed a blood libel case, yet the next page provides a factual treatment of the assumption that the Tiszaeszlár blood libel case had been the result of the actions of said politicians.

"The days of the anti-Semites has come. The blood libel case of Tiszaeszlár, as a terrible fireball, was carried around the country. Blood libel has been recalled, a mystic, superstitious idea of the Middle-Age, which, during centuries, took many lives of those accused. (...) Primal fear, alienation, hostile sentiments, superstitious ignorance was used by the agitators..."

So, our quoted author and modern authors re-discovering addenda ad addenda of political Anti-Semitism's history have taken over without criticism the tradition started by one of the attorneys of the Tiszaeszlár case, Károly Eötvös, according to which the case was a direct result of the anti-Semitism yet in its infancy of the then political movement perpetrated by harmful actions of its leaders.

Russia may be the example that there is not necessarily a correlation between the headway of Jewish emancipation, the Jewish policies of the State, and the frequency of blood libel cases. The standard of living among the Jews of East-Central Europe living in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy had been significantly higher than that of Jews in Russia. The former group enjoyed a never before seen freedom in all areas of life by the end of the Nineteenth century. The period after 1867 is considered by the collective memory of the region's Jewry as the Golden Age of Central Europe. In spite of all this, the era and the area saw the emergence of more blood libel cases than during previous centuries when Jews were regularly subjected to discrimination and derogatory legal regulations. When describing developments after 1867, modern science of history uses expressions like modernisation and the emergence of a civic society. Correctly – although a little simplifyingly – studies the science of history what appears to be the Golden Age of Jewish history in the context of the two basic movements.

Works on the history of the Russian Jewry amply discuss Jewish persecutions and blood libels. Standard works of the subject are unimaginable without a detailed treatment of the Beilis case. Obviously, the relevant historical tradition – *History* – assumes particular, paradigmatic if you will, importance to pogroms and blood libel. Cases mentioned are one of the most important lines of argument of the Russian chapters of Jewish history based on martyrology. In this historical concept pogroms and blood libel cases are the materialisations of the original anti-Semitism of Russian politics and of *Russians*. This is how these cases are integrated at the same time in both Russian and Jewish history traditions.

Publications discussing the history of Hungarian Jews are never without an account of the blood libel case of Tiszaeszlár but its "place" is nowhere near as central in the historical tradition as are similar cases of Russia. It has never been a central *issue* of the Hungarian historical and historiographical tradition but has never lacked from them. In comparison

to the Russian traditions, its weight has always been smaller but has always been there. The relation of Jewish historical tradition to Hungary – in contrast with Russia – is ambivalent. This is where the undeniable liberalism of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy is faced with the strongest European Jewish emancipation and assimilation, an obvious social and political rise, and, on the other hand, with the waxing and waning anti-Semitism of post 1919, and finally, at the end of the era, with the unthinkable horror, the termination of half a million Hungarian Jews. When we attempt to rationalise the unthinkable we often go back to the Tiszaeszlár case that stands as the one event, a *tradition*, which planted the seeds of later day horrors. And there is nothing wrong with this.

The judgement of Hungary in the Jewish historical tradition is not unequivocal. It is better than Russia's but undoubtedly worse than, for example, the Czech Lands's. The reason for this almost certainly lies in the differences of the two countries' political system and their Jewish policies between the two world wars. The Czech Lands rightly appeared, between the world wars, as an island of peace and tolerance for the Jews of Central Europe. According to the Czech historical myth established about the same time, such liberal tolerance had been idiosyncratic to the pre-independent Czech nation as well. In return for the two decade calm and tolerance, the Czech history received the same feedback from Jewish history writing as well. In this case we must assume some kind of unconscious Czech-Jewish historical pact. It is this reason why Historical accounts of Czech Jews completely lack, or just mention fleetingly, cases of blood libel.

The most comprehensive Czech political history dealing with the period of 1848-1918 did not mention either the case of Polna and the blood libel (anti-Jewish) history around it. From this point of view Jacob Katz's immortal work describing the road "from prejudice to destruction" must be considered as an anatomical one. Katz studies and revails in details the Western-European and Hungarian Anti-Semitism of the late Nineteenth century (leading to Auschwitz) and in this context the blood libel case of Tiszaeszlár. In the Bildungsroman of Katz, the similar Czech cases are missing again. It is natural that from the *Geistesgeschichte* of Anti-Semitism the only blood libel case that ended with a "positive" verdict is still missing. In the above mentioned *Geistesgeschichte* the Polnauer Prozess and the mass (often bloody) history around it, is irrelevant.

This hypothesis is linked by the most eminent researcher of the history of Czech Jews, Hillel Kieval, to a pamphlet published in 1863 with the title "Die Juden und die Nationalen". According to a general interpretation of it that came about by the 1880s, Czech Jewry got "ethnically reoriented" or was in the process of reorientation by the end of the Nineteenth century. Among rivalling nations in the Czech Lands – Czechs and Germans – the stakes of being a Jew was placed on the former. Retrospectively, they had created a community of the past among Czechs and Jews – the Czech community of past: based on patterns of national historical concepts – which, unequivocally, were anti German. The conception supported by Masarykian liberalism reflected antiquity and medieval tolerance of Czech Jewish policies, which – in a natural way, aligned with German intolerant, anti-Jewish historical Jewish policies. Considering this historical reconciliation it is clear that modern blood libels do not play a central role in the *History* of the Czech Jewry as opposed to their counterparts' in Hungary or Russia. Accordingly, neither political anti-Semitism nor blood libel cases are emphatic chapters in the Czech historical concept. It is only remarkable because the sole case of modern blood libel which

lead to the rightful sentencing of the accused to 15 years of captivity took place in the Czech Lands. The above mentioned “chaste” silence may appear even more interesting bearing in mind the fact that multiple blood libel cases had been tried in the 1890s in the Czech Lands prior to the one in Polna. That these late nineteenth-century Czech blood libel cases did not, or did just barely, become integral parts of the historical consciousness – even professionals have limited knowledge about them – may be attributed to the fact that the science of history was not able to place the phenomenon of blood libel cases among or combine with the clichés of late nineteenth-century Czech Lands, and *the Czechs in general*. This sad observation may seem particularly true when considering the afterlife of similar Russian and Hungarian cases.

Roughly speaking it is that in the – not just Jewish – histories of Hungarians and Russians modern blood libels have central, construed function while into the modern history and, historical mythology of the Czechs these cases simply could not fit. In the mid 1990s it was the acclaimed expert of the Czech-Jewish reconciliation, Henri Kieval, who published an intriguing study on Central European blood libels in the prestigious *Annales*. In his remarkable work the author analyzes local and outer – anti-Semitic political – levels with regards to the Tiszaeszlár blood libel case. He rightly connects Jewish emancipation and the proliferation of Central European blood libel cases but the only case with a “positive” verdict, the Polna case, remains ignored.

That the Polna blood libel case never became a determining part of the Czech and Jewish historic consciousness is surprising because the first, legendary president of the independent and democratic Czechoslovakian Republic, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, systematically, and publicly, defended the accused and sentenced Leopold Hilsner. In his public appearances, brochures he rejected blood libels against Jews and specifically refuted the charge of ritual murder in the case mentioned. His bold, though futile, projection is what went down in history and not the fact that the Polna case has been the only one which saw the accused Jew receiving a legally binding sentence. Again: the blood libel case of Polna had the accused Jew sentenced. The judgement was made by a jury whose verdict coincided with the judgement of the then Czech public opinion. The same public opinion condemned not only Leopold Hilsner and the Jews as such but those too who stood up to Hilsner and who received with criticism the anti-Jewish blood libel. The same fate awaited Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk as well. His students provoked him at the university and most of his political friends got alienated from him after his actions and behaviour regarding the Hilsner case. Hilsner first received death penalty but later his sentence was replaced to life imprisonment. Only in 1918 did he get released, with amnesty by the last Austrian Emperor. The same year dr. Karel Baxa, the once young and anti-Semitic lawyer who attained nationwide political reputation “with the help of the Hilsner case”, became mayor of Prague and remained so until 1937. It is a paradox that it was President Masaryk, the person with whom he had bitterly quarrelled two decades earlier about the Polna case, who inaugurated him. Masaryk’s manly posture has been preserved by historical tradition but the Polna blood libel case was, largely, forgotten. It was improper to remember the people’s movement and the general anti-Jewish carnival following the blood libel, since, according to the above mentioned tradition, the Czechs, as people, are characteristically more tolerant than their neighbours.

The pioneer of Hungarian Judaistics, Géza Komoróczy, wrote in his essay about the two *possible* functions of history writing. His work of 1996 titled “*Historic Events in Thought: Oblivion, Processing, Taking Responsibility*” was published in 2000 as part of a volume titled “*Holocaust: Flue Dust Burning in Our Skins*”. Komoróczy’s thoughts perfectly lend themselves to describe our narrower subject. As is referred to by the author, history writing basically has two different functions. One he called “uplifting” history writing which is, “to mainly serve a given community’s togetherness and continuous subsistence.” Besides uplifting there is a kind of critical history writing that, “holds discernment as most valuable and is critical of traditions. (...) He maintains that tradition is only to survive if it renews itself: “those to whom it is important, ceaselessly renew it and make it an organic part of the ever changing circumstances.”

With regards to modern history of East-European anti-Semitism and its history of ideas, the indebtedness of critical history writing is undisputed.

This dissertation’s manifest goal was to cope with the above mentioned undisputed indebtedness of critical historiography.

Lincselés előtt és után. Antiszemizmus és közhangulat Miskolcon 1946-ban. Dimenziók, 1993. 1-2. 74-83.

The Language of the Blood Libel in East- and Central-European History. in: Pride and Prejudice. (ed. by László Kontler) CEU Press, Budapest, 1995. 91-104.

A vérvád az újkori Kelet-Európában – Egy előítélet működése. In. Csepeli György (ed.):

Vérvádak üzenete. Minoritás könyvek 2. Minoritás Alapítvány, Budapest, 1996. 13-30.

Pogrom forradalom idején. Két orosz pogrom 1905-ből. In: szerk.: Bódy Zsombor et al.: A mesterség iskolája. Tanulmányok Bácskai Vera 70. Születésnapjára. Osiris, Budapest, 2000. 294-312.

Zsidók Oroszországban. Társadalomtörténeti és "népismereti" adatok az oroszországi zsidóságról a 19-20. században. Világtörténet, 24. évf. 2002. ősz-tél, 66-87.

Együttélés – együtt félés. Historiográfiai megjegyzések az újkori kelet-európai vérvádakhoz. In: (ed. Nagy, Balázs – Szálka, Zsuzsanna – Szende, Katalin) „Az élet tanítómestere”. Ünnepi tanulmányok Gyapay Gábor 80. születésnapjára. Fazekas Öregdiákok Társasága, Budapest, 2004. 195-206.

Vérvádak a kelet-európai antiszemizmus szellemtörténetében. Historiográfiai megközelítés. In: (szerk. Paksy Zoltán) Az antiszemizmus alakváltozatai. Zala Megyei Levéltár, Zalaegerszeg, 2005. 44-58.

Oroszok és zsidók a kelet-európai összehasonlító történelemben – A revizionista historiográfia korlátaihoz. Dobrovits Mihály (ed.): Az előkelő idegen. 3. Vámbéry tanulmányok VI. Lilium Aurum, Dunaszerdahely, 2006. 77-91.