

DAVID BIALE

# BLOOD AND BELIEF



THE CIRCULATION OF A SYMBOL  
BETWEEN JEWS AND CHRISTIANS

THE S. MARK TAPER FOUNDATION  
IMPRINT IN JEWISH STUDIES



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## Blood and Belief



*Moses throwing blood on the Israelites at the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. Laud Mahzor (Southern Germany, c. 1290), shelf mark MS. Laud Or 321 folio 127 verso. Reproduced by permission of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.*

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*The Circulation of a Symbol  
between Jews and Christians*

David Biale



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*For Anina  
who will find all the errors*





And [Moses] took the book of the covenant and read it to the people and they said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do and obey.” Moses took the blood and threw it on the people, saying, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you concerning all these words.”

Exodus 24:7–8

My flesh, which you see, becomes for me like paper and my blood like ink, where I dip my pen and write . . .

Romanos the Melodist (sixth century C.E.)

Of all that is written, I love only that which an individual writes with his blood. Write with blood: and you will experience that blood is spirit.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*



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# Preface

Shortly before this book went to press, a distinguished Italian Jewish historian, Ariel Toaff, published a book entitled *Pasque di Sangue: Ebrei d'Europa e omicidi rituali* (*Passovers of Blood: The Jews of Europe and Ritual Murder*). Toaff speculates that some Ashkenazic Jews in northeastern Italy may have actually killed Christian children for their blood, motivated in part by a desire for revenge and in part by the practice of using human blood for medicinal purposes. An enormous controversy broke out and forced the author to suspend new printings of his book until he could incorporate some clarifications.

While there is little doubt that the Jews, like other people in the Middle Ages, believed that human blood had medicinal value, there is no real evidence (apart from confessions obtained under torture) either that they committed murder to obtain such blood or that such alleged practices—if they ever existed—had the sanction of ritual. But the fact that an argument about events five hundred years ago could occasion such heated polemics—Toaff was the target of death threats and calls for his removal from his professorship at Israel's Bar-Ilan University—demonstrates that the relationship between Jews and blood remains as controversial and compelling today as it was in the past.

From the role of blood in the biblical sacrifices to the rituals of circumcision and the Passover meal, the Jewish religion has always invested the greatest symbolic meaning in the red “juice of life.” Perhaps for that reason, the blood libel—the accusation that Jews use Gentile

blood for ritual purposes—arose in the Middle Ages, fed by dark suspicions that a more nefarious purpose underlay Jewish rituals, and that the biblical prohibition on eating blood really concealed its opposite. As the explosive reaction to Toaff's book demonstrates, these issues remain current, since anti-Semitic literature continues to circulate the blood libel as if it were true, borrowing freely from the Nazis and their nineteenth-century predecessors.

Yet blood does have many meanings in Jewish culture, which bear no relation to those concocted by anti-Semites, and some of these remain equally contemporary. The daily papers regularly publish stories about the genetic "purity" of the Jews, a subject that used to be discussed with the language of blood. Are the Jews a "blood community" in some genetic sense? Or is it rather the way blood figures in their covenant with God, as the Bible describes it in a strange ritual at Mount Sinai, that constitutes them as such? And how do Jewish ideas about blood relate to Christianity, whose own blood theology both derives and departs radically from its older sibling? These are among the many questions that I take up in the pages ahead.

• • •

This book has gestated for many years, and I have consequently accrued many debts in its making. I originally became interested in the role of blood in Jewish religion and culture while working on my book *Eros and the Jews*, first published in 1992 and reissued by the University of California Press in 1997. In medieval medical texts, semen is said to be the most clarified form of blood. How, I wondered, did Jews in this period think about blood; and, given its importance in medieval Christianity, how did it figure in relations between Jews and Christians? What began as a series of questions about the Middle Ages gradually expanded backward, toward the Bible and late antique sources, and forward, toward modernity.

I began research during a sabbatical in Israel during the academic year 1992–93 with the support of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Lady Davis Foundation at the Hebrew University. I was also privileged to participate as a fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. At a later stage, a fellowship from the Simon Guggenheim Foundation, along with the University of California President's Fellowship in the Humanities, permitted me to take a research leave in the 2000–2001 academic year. Without all this generous support, the project would never have reached completion.

Colleagues, friends, and former students have generously read parts or all of the manuscript, and I am grateful for their suggestions: Steven Aschheim, Shaye J.D. Cohen, Alison Frazier, Peter Gordon, Erich Gruen, Ronald Hendel, Peggy McCracken, Naomi Seidman, Abe Socher, and Azzan Yadin.

Over the years, I have received much needed help from a number of fine research assistants: Andreas Agocs, Thomasin Alyxander, Elena Aronson, Ron Reissberg, Devorah Schoenfeld, and Meeta Sinha.

I have also had the opportunity to present chapters of this work in various academic settings. I want to thank all those who participated in these colloquia for their helpful comments, especially my hosts (and their institutions): Murray Baumgarten and Peter Kenez (University of California, Santa Cruz), Richard Cohen (Hebrew University, Jerusalem), Dana Hollander (McMaster University), Maurice Kriegel (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris), Marc Raphael (William and Mary College), Eugene Sheppard (Brandeis University), Gary Smith (Einstein Forum, Potsdam, and the American Academy of Berlin), and Magda Teter (Wesleyan University).

Finally, as always, thanks to my family—Rachel, Noam, and Tali—for the lesson that while “the life of all flesh is in the blood” (Lev. 17:11), there is much more to life than just blood. This book is dedicated to my mother-in-law, Anina Korati, collector of antiquities and admirers, and grande dame of the Bet Shean Valley for more than sixty years.





# Introduction

## *Writing with Blood*

In the first half of the twentieth century, stories circulated throughout East Africa that firemen and policemen had kidnapped Africans, draining blood from them to treat Europeans with blood diseases.<sup>1</sup> Here was the confluence of African folk traditions with Western medicine and superstition in colonial contexts. Here, too, was a classic instance of the way blood inhabits the imagination as both substance and symbol. For these Africans, the firemen and the policemen extracted real blood from their victims, blood that could go on to serve an actual medical need. But this blood was also symbolic of the more general extraction of wealth from the African colonies: the blood stood for much more than itself precisely because of its inherent physiological power. Even if these Africans had little concept of the function of blood in terms of Western medicine, seeing it rather as synonymous with sexual fluids,<sup>2</sup> they still shared the universal human intuition that blood means life and therefore contains extraordinary symbolic power.

These “vampire stories” from East Africa may be understood as complex responses to colonial rule, but myriad other kinds of beliefs have also circulated around the theft of blood. In Europe, vampires, witches, Gypsies, and other real and imagined outsiders might take the place of the firemen and policemen in East Africa. Such beings were hardly colonial rulers, however, but quite the opposite: they were on the margins, and their imputed extraordinary power was in inverse proportion to its actuality. These cases have been called “reverse colonization,”

where it is the dominant power that feels endangered and projects its fears on those held to secretly conspire in the taking of blood.<sup>3</sup> The first widespread instance of such charges was by pagans against Christians in late antiquity, an early illustration of how an empire believing itself in danger projects its fears on a secretive minority.<sup>4</sup>

Since the Middle Ages, the Jews have been the outsiders most persistently accused of blood theft. The “blood libel”—that Jews need Christian blood for their rituals—goes back in European history to the thirteenth century (the first ritual-murder accusation in Norwich, England, in 1144, does not mention the need for blood), and it has continued in remarkably similar forms to the present day. But is the language of empire and colonialism appropriate to understanding the blood accusations against the Jews? There is a contemporary fashion of applying post-colonial theory to the Jews, referring to them as Europe’s “internally colonized Others.” The terminology is, however, imprecise. The Jews were not native peoples colonized by foreigners, but the opposite: foreigners who became longtime residents in European states. To their enemies, the Jews represented a foreign body in Europe, invaders of sorts.

Yet, they were invaders of a special kind: the return of the “living dead,” the religion, according to Christianity, that had been superseded and turned into a fossil, yet remained stubbornly alive. Indeed, the blood libel cannot be severed from the larger, complex relationship between Judaism and Christianity, in which the younger religion labored under what it believed to be the continued, accusatory presence of the religion it claimed to transplant. Since the Jews represented a dead religion, one superseded by *verus Israel*, they were thought to suck the blood of the living, as a vampire might, in order to bring themselves back from the dead. This violation of Christian bodies by transfusing the blood of the one into the body of the other became a metaphor for the general threat that Jews were thought to pose: the return of the repressed, to use Freud’s language, to violate the sacred order established by God’s new chosen people. Put differently, the blood libel suggests a deep anxiety about Christian identity, since the theft of blood might be understood as a theft of the very essence of the Christian by the one who denies his religion. By sucking Christian blood, the “dead religion” of Israel seeks to drag the “living religion” back into its ghostly realm.

Whether or not one sees the Jews as a colonized group on the European continent, the accusation that they stole the blood of Christians was surely a case of reversal in which the majority culture projected its fears upon a minority. As Alan Dundes provocatively argued, these were

projections based on what Christians actually do, that is, consume the blood of their Savior.<sup>5</sup> Or perhaps Christians were turning on the Jews the charge that they themselves, as a persecuted minority, had been subjected to in late antiquity when pagans accused them of killing children and drinking their blood. For a religious culture for whom the blood of Christ and the blood of its martyrs were commodities to be treasured and protected, the belief that the Jews had designs on this blood served to reinforce its value. Yet, as we shall see, it is not sufficient to look only at how Christians imagined the Jewish consumption of Christian blood; we must also consider how Jews may have projected their own fears and desires upon the host culture. The Jewish polemical response to the blood libel will tell us a great deal about how a minority protects its identity by sanctifying its own blood rituals. If the Christians regarded Jewish blood practices as primitive, the Jews turned the tables and leveled the same accusation at the Christians. This question of which party represented “civilization” can be traced from late antiquity to the twentieth century.

As important as the blood libel has been in the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, it is only part of the story that I want to tell here. A larger context is in order. Judaism and Christianity rest on the same sacred scripture. But Judaism is no more a biblical religion than is Christianity; it is, instead, the rabbinic interpretation (or interpretations) of biblical religion. Both Judaism and Christianity should therefore be seen as Second Testaments, two religious formations that emerged in late antiquity out of the same literary, cultural, and religious milieu. On the question of blood, though, the two appeared to take opposite trajectories: while rabbinic Judaism, following biblical proscription, rejects the consumption of blood, Christianity mandates the drinking of, at least, the symbolic blood of Christ in one of its central sacraments.

How could these two religions derive opposite lessons from their shared First Testament? As we shall see, this formulation of the question is too extreme, since, in fact, each religion came to share more with its competitor than initially meets the eye. In late antiquity, as in every subsequent era, Jews and Christians engaged in a common discourse around blood, even as they disagreed, often violently, about it. The common language was not only the result of their shared scripture; it also reflects the circulation of symbols and meanings developed after the Bible. In the essays that make up this book, I examine how this discourse involved such symbols as the “blood of the covenant,” “God’s blood,” and “blood community.” We will also see how the

secularization of blood language in the modern period scarcely interrupted this circulation of symbols, but instead transposed it into a different key.

Blood is a matter not only of belief but also of practice. In rituals such as sacrifice, circumcision, and the Eucharist, the most physical of objects—blood or wine—come to symbolize the most mysterious, indeed spiritual, of entities, whether the covenant of the Jews or the mystical blood of Christ. Blood is at once symbol and substance. Or, to quote Roy Wagner's suggestive phrase, blood is a symbol that "stands [also] for itself."<sup>6</sup> Blood arouses the powerful emotions that are harnessed by ritual, since, when it does become visible, it is often a sign that the body is no longer whole. Perhaps because it is the only substance whose proper place is inside the body but which becomes visible when the body is endangered,<sup>7</sup> blood has the capacity to act as a *liminal* fluid, as the mediator between what is within the body and what is without, the one realm hidden and hermetic, the other visible and tangible. It is therefore at once an ambivalent symbol of life *and* of death.<sup>8</sup> It can also be a symbol of purity *and* of impurity. It is, then, the very "fluidity" of blood as a symbol that gives it its power, because it can be filled with a host of meanings, some of them even contradictory.

Since blood is both symbol and substance, I shall claim that it stands for one of the central conflicts between Jews and Christians over what is real and what is figurative. Early Christian theology famously labeled Judaism "Israel of the flesh," while the church, as the true Israel that had superseded its predecessor, was "Israel of the spirit." But where does blood fit into this binary? The Bible itself has two words for the essence of life: blood (*dam*) and breath (*ruah*).<sup>9</sup> The latter is, almost by definition, ethereal, while the former combines both the corporeal and the spiritual. Yet the Jewish-Christian debate revolved less around *ruah* and more around *dam*. For Christians, Jews were left with only the physiological substance of blood, whereas, thanks to their Savior's sacrifice, they inherited its spiritual essence. Jews engage in blood sacrifices, which for Christianity came to an end with the ultimate sacrifice of Christ. For Jews, the temple sacrifices involved both aspects of blood. However, only a generation after the death of Jesus, the destruction of the temple put an end to the sacrifices for Jews as well as Christians. Both nascent Christianity and post-temple Judaism then had to reconstruct their rituals without a temple. And they did so in a pagan world still dominated by sacrifice, at least until the late fourth century. As we shall see in chapter 2, unable to abandon blood language altogether,

both Christians and Jews sought substitutes for sacrifice and for the biblical “blood of the covenant.” Christians found these substitutes in the symbolic blood of the Eucharist and in the blood of the martyrs, the Jews in the blood of circumcision and in their own traditions of martyrdom. Regardless of their differences, Jews and Christians held onto both the spiritual and physical meanings of blood, even as they transformed their biblical roots.

In the Middle Ages, polemics between Jews and Christians expanded on this late antique discourse. The medieval blood libel arose at the time when Christians elevated their Eucharistic sacrament to a full-blown dogma in 1215, and when the holiday of Corpus Christi found a mass, popular following. Jews became the dark side of this Christian celebration of the blood—and body—of Christ. In accusations that Jews stabbed the Host, one can see how Jewish literalism was pressed into service to buttress Christian belief. For it made sense that those whose religion was carnal could get the wafer to actually bleed. Yet it was the Christians themselves who were now leaning increasingly toward a kind of symbolic literalism by venerating the very body of their Savior. The Jews responded to these developments with surprising vehemence, ridiculing the Christian doctrine of transubstantiation but also insisting that they had more efficacious—and physical—blood rituals in circumcision and in the blood of Jewish martyrs. Against the accusation that they stole Christian blood, Jews may well have responded that they scarcely needed the blood of their neighbors, since they had their own divinely given blood practices.

These battles were also fought on gendered grounds, with each side portraying the men of the other religion as female. Whereas Christians might deride Jewish men for menstruating, Jews responded that it was rather Christianity that was impure and female, since Christian women were polluted by menstrual blood, which in turn polluted their male offspring. The archetype of this polemic was the Jewish accusation that Mary conceived Jesus during her menstrual period, rendering him a *ben niddah* (son of a menstruous woman), a phrase that functioned as the most damning of curses. By this imprecation, the Jews were raising questions about the mother of God that came uncomfortably close to questions raised by Christian theologians themselves.

Gender and blood intersect in another way. In his *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Claude Lévi-Strauss described how the exchange of women as wives—exogamy—represents the highest form of gift-giving.<sup>10</sup> In the giving of wives, a family or tribe forms new kinship relationships

with the family or tribe of its new in-laws. Because the giving of wives is not the same as selling, the wife serves as a mediator or bridge between the two clans, belonging, in a sense, to both. The gift of wives guarantees genetic diversity, or, to use the language of biology from before the discovery of genes, the mixing of different blood. As Richard Titmuss has argued in his celebrated study of blood transfusion, *The Gift Relationship*, the altruistic giving of one's blood to others creates a community in ways that selling one's blood does not.<sup>11</sup> If we can extrapolate from transfusion to exogamy, it is precisely the gift of blood inherent in the giving of wives that produces community beyond the family group.

This blood-giving raises a question, though. Where do the borders of the community end? Shakespeare's Shylock suggests in his famous speech that Jews are as human as Christians because "if you prick us, do we not bleed?"<sup>12</sup> Blood is what humanity has in common. But it is also what separates and distinguishes. The nobility willingly gives its daughters to other nobles beyond its own immediate family, but not to non-nobles, to those whose blood is not "blue" (a term that originally distinguished those of light complexion who did not work in the sun). A nation encourages matrimony among its members, but not with other nations. Blood is a universal fluid but also a marker of difference.

This dialectic between blood as unifying and blood as dividing has been a critical one for Jews since the fifteenth century. The "purity of the blood" statutes, first passed in fifteenth-century Spain, created a distinction new to Christianity between "Old" and "New" Christians. These rigid categories based on blood were reactions to the emergence of Jewish groups that violated traditional boundaries. If the earlier blood libel had already suggested an anxiety over Christian identity, the conversos in Spain challenged medieval categories much more overtly and directly by occupying two positions at once: Jewish and Christian. Some, of course, became full-fledged Christians and left their Judaism behind. But others mixed the two traditions in a brew that was heretical to both.

In the nineteenth century, Jewish converts to Christianity as well as those who remained Jewish posed a similar, if modern, threat to ideas of an ethnically homogeneous nation-state. Blood now became the marker of difference between so-called races. Intermarriage and miscegenation were the particular phobia of those who sought the purity of the nation: here, the exchange of wives described by Lévi-Strauss seemed not the gift that creates kinship, but a poisoned chalice. Jewish blood appeared dangerous to the new racial anti-Semites on two contradictory counts: it represented the power of a hermetic purity *and*

it had the capacity to pollute the blood of its Christian host. The Jews were the purest of races and the polluters of others. Far from the fossilized throwbacks to the biblical age of Christian theology, these Jews were modern mutations. Defying categorization, they appeared to anti-Semites as the “ferment of decomposition.”

The anti-Semitic association of Jews with blood is connected to the larger rhetorical field of liquidity, instability, and mobility. As Yuri Slezkine has argued, Jews share with certain other minority groups the character of “service nomads,” mobile groups that have taboo status because they fulfill essential but forbidden roles.<sup>13</sup> Although the Jews were not the only moneylenders in the Middle Ages, this was a role with which they were very much identified. Liquid, rather than fixed, capital appeared to be Jewish, so that when modern capitalism emerged, with its basis in a money economy, it is not hard to see how it might be blamed on (or credited to) the Jews. That such a group was also believed to traffic in blood, whether extracting it from Christian bodies or injecting it into them, is therefore not surprising. In modern economics money circulates, just as blood does in modern medicine.<sup>14</sup> Those whose cardinal characteristics were believed to be impermanence, rootlessness, and wandering were considered ideally suited to partake in these modern forms of circulation. The modern age, to quote Slezkine, is quintessentially Jewish, at least in the eyes of anti-Semites.

The Jews could not ignore these anti-Semitic images, but neither did they assimilate them without qualification. I argue throughout this book that the Jews’ ideas about blood developed in creative interaction with their cultural surroundings. As a minority people, the Jews have always defined their culture in a complex process of accommodation with and resistance to the majority cultures among which they lived. Even in the biblical period, when the ancient Israelites had political sovereignty, they never lived in isolation from their neighbors. The model of culture with which I operate here assumes the importance of the word I have already used several times and which is most relevant to our topic: *circulation*.<sup>15</sup>

In terms of blood, I shall argue, following Israel Jacob Yuval,<sup>16</sup> that Jewish ideas developed in constant interaction, first with Greek culture, then with the Greco-Roman and Christian cultures, and finally, in the modern period, with European nationalism. Each chapter is constructed as a kind of dialogue between the Jewish and the relevant non-Jewish cultures. The exception to this structure is the last two chapters, where, for reasons of length, I have divided the non-Jewish



from the Jewish. In chapter 4 I examine the dual discourse of blood in Nazi anti-Semitism and its nineteenth-century precursors, and in chapter 5 I show how modern Jewish culture adapted and responded to the dominant discourses of blood in modern nationalism. It may be uncomfortable for the reader to discover that the blood language of modern racism found echoes among some modern Jewish writers, but after encountering the kinds of cultural interactions we shall follow throughout Jewish history, this conclusion will not be surprising.

All of the periods discussed in this book—the biblical, late antique, medieval, and modern—share a common denominator: the control of blood as an index of power. The biblical rules that the priests fashioned for the proper disposition of animal blood enacted their ritual monopoly. After the destruction of the Second Temple, rabbis and church fathers reinterpreted the covenant of blood in the Bible as rituals without sacrifices—and thus eliminated competition for power from priests. In the Middle Ages, the polemic between Christians and Jews over whose blood rituals were most efficacious was, at bottom, a struggle for power through discursive arguments. And in the modern period, when blood became synonymous with the nation, who would have access to this blood was a central political question. For all of these different discourses, to borrow a phrase from David Sabean, power was “in the blood.”<sup>17</sup>

This is a study in mentalities, in the cultural history of a bodily substance. It is about how the writers of texts have written about blood and about the ways these discourses both reflected and shaped beliefs. In *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Friedrich Nietzsche enigmatically declared: “Of all that is written, I love only that which an individual [*Einer*] writes with his blood. Write with blood: and you will experience that blood is spirit.”<sup>18</sup> To take the most vital element of the body and turn it into ethereal spirit requires that it pass first through the written word. As the mediator between body and soul, writing is thus analogous to blood itself, that most equivocal substance, at once corporeal and spiritual, alive and dead, particular and universal. It is in the hope of discovering a textual tradition “written in blood” that we now turn to its origins.

## Pollution and Power

### *Blood in the Hebrew Bible*

“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have assigned it to you to ransom your lives on the altar; it is the blood, in exchange for life, that ransoms. Therefore I say to the Israelites: No person among you shall eat blood, nor shall the alien who resides among you eat blood.” So states Leviticus 17:11–12 in one of the central texts in the priestly literature of ancient Israel. Blood is not to be eaten, because it is reserved for a cultic ritual of expiation. In an article published in the early 1990s, Stephen Geller pointed out the critical importance of blood in the priestly documents of the Bible.<sup>1</sup> The priests, he argued, authored what might be considered the first mystery religion, in which blood serves as the powerful physical substance that restores the sacrificial shrine and, indeed, the cosmos as a whole, to its original state of purity. Through blood, human beings can commune with God. Against the transcendent theology of the Deuteronomic author (D), the priestly documents argue for God’s immanence, a presence that can be effected through the agency of blood. In protest, as it were, against D’s transformation of biblical religion into an abstract religion of words, the Bible’s priestly religion was physical and immanent. Ultimately, the rabbis adopted D’s verbal religion, while Christianity adapted the priestly religion of blood, making Christ’s blood a substance of redemption.

In chapter 2, I take issue with Geller’s trajectory, according to which the priestly religion culminates in Christianity and the Deuteronomic in rabbinic Judaism, arguing instead that elements of each can be found in

both religions. Deuteronomy itself is hardly opposed to sacrifices. I am also not certain that blood brings God's presence down to earth, since no biblical text actually states this. But these reservations notwithstanding, Geller's overall insight into the central role of blood in the priestly religion of ancient Israel remains highly persuasive and forms my starting point here.<sup>2</sup>

This role is additionally remarkable because blood was evidently less important in other ancient Near Eastern religions. As Dennis McCarthy has noted, the ancient Israelites were the only Near Easterners to make blood a central element in their religious rituals.<sup>3</sup> There were, to be sure, magical and medical rituals mentioned in Akkadian, Sumerian, and Hittite texts that used blood to feed bloodthirsty demons,<sup>4</sup> and one Hittite text mentions the use of blood as a ritual detergent (similar to its use in the Bible),<sup>5</sup> but blood played no other significant role in the sacrificial offerings of the ancient Near East. Those offerings were intended to feed the gods, and blood was not usually the main course on the divine menu: although the Canaanite goddess Anat is said to have drunk the blood of her brother, Baal, this was probably not her everyday diet.<sup>6</sup> With two possible exceptions,<sup>7</sup> no biblical text states explicitly that the Israelite God drinks or eats blood ("eating" blood in the biblical context evidently meant eating meat with its blood still in it), but the prohibition on his people's doing so undoubtedly stems from the centrality of blood in the Israelite cult.

In his authoritative work on priestly religion, culminating in the magisterial *Anchor Bible* commentary on Leviticus, Jacob Milgrom has offered one of the most comprehensive surveys of biblical blood.<sup>8</sup> Blood is a ritual detergent when used by the priests in the temple in order to purify the sancta after they have been contaminated. Such contamination can even come in the form of a "miasma" from outside the temple precincts. The blood from different expiatory sacrifices is also used as part of a process of atonement for inadvertent sins. For Milgrom, since blood is equated with life, the killing of an animal for nourishment, which he identifies with the *shelamim* (well-being) sacrifices, involves a capital crime that can be expiated only by the blood of the animal itself (Lev. 17:11). Therefore, any animal killed for the purpose of consumption must have its blood poured out on the altar or, if it is a wild game animal, covered with earth. Ingestion of the blood is strictly prohibited (Lev. 3:17, 17:10–16, 19:26). Deuteronomy accepts this prohibition on eating blood (Deut. 12:23) but allows for secular slaughter of domesticated animals that previously could be killed only as sacrifices.

Since blood stands for life, Milgrom reasons that menstrual blood and semen are defiling because they are out of place: “their common denominator is death.”<sup>9</sup> Death is the archetypical impurity, and anything associated with it—such as menstrual blood, a human corpse, and scale disease—is polluting, albeit to differing degrees. The holy (*qadosh*) and the impure (*tamei*) do not represent benevolent versus demonic forces, for Israel had banished the autonomous demons, but the holy and the impure remained the “forces of life and death set loose by man himself through his obedience to or defiance of God’s commandments.”<sup>10</sup> Human deeds can cause the pollution of God’s sanctuary or God’s land, although Milgrom’s tendency to attribute an ethical dimension to the purity laws is tempered by his admission that impurity can be caused by inadvertent actions that are a part of normal life processes. Note that in all of Milgrom’s propositions, blood serves as a medium for purification or atonement, but not, as Geller would have it, primarily as a mode of communication.

What I propose to do in the pages that follow is offer a new analysis of the different forms of blood in the Bible, one that departs from Milgrom on some crucial particulars. As a number of recent commentators have pointed out, two types of defilement can be identified in the priestly documents. These documents are referred to as the Priestly Code (P), which comprises the first sixteen chapters of the book of Leviticus (as well as parts of Exodus and Numbers), and the Holiness Code (H), Leviticus 17–26 (plus some other sections of Exodus and Numbers). There is much scholarly debate on the chronological relationship of these two documents, with the most recent arguments holding that P preceded H.<sup>11</sup> If we follow this scholarship, both documents predated the destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C.E., although there were certainly passages added after the return from Babylonia. In the discussion that follows, I will make no assumptions about relative dating but will instead treat the two documents as reflecting different schools of thought that a later redactor brought together. Since the priests were the dominant leadership in the Second Temple Period (fifth century B.C.E.–70 C.E.), the ideas uncovered here reflect their political power in that period as well as in the one that preceded it.

Let us then look at these two types of pollution. On the one hand, the Priestly Code—especially Leviticus 11–15 and Numbers 19—knows of the defilement of persons who are prohibited from entering sacred precincts as a result of contact with a variety of contagions related to sexual intercourse, menstruation, childbirth, pathological genital

discharges, scale disease, the carcasses of certain impure animals, and human corpses. Such impurity—variously called by scholars “ritual impurity” or “levitical impurity”—is often unavoidable and can be cleansed by rituals of purification. Inadvertent and intentional sins can also pollute the sanctuary, even from a distance, requiring other means of purification.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, certain transgressions—sexual violations, idolatry, and murder—described by the Holiness Code in Leviticus 18 and 20 and Numbers 35:30–34, as well as by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, defile the land, rather than just the temple. No ritual process can atone for these “moral impurities”; instead the guilty individual may be “cut off” (*karet*). If these sins become too widespread, the land will “vomit” out its inhabitants.<sup>13</sup>

If we follow a number of recent scholars—notably Jonathan Klawans—in regarding these two types of defilement as literal, rather than metaphorical, how do we explain the seeming contradiction between them? Why can certain sins be expiated while others cannot? Why, for example, does animal blood serve as “ransom for your lives” in Leviticus 17, whereas Numbers 35 holds that nothing short of capital punishment can purify the land from the defilement of murder? And why is it that in Leviticus 15:19–24, sexual relations with a menstruating woman confer only ritual uncleanness, which can be purified, whereas Leviticus 18:19 and 20:18 threaten the most severe individual and collective retribution for those who engage in intercourse during a woman’s menstrual period?

These contradictions can be—and have been—solved by the argument that the texts in question reflect the different schools of priestly legislators (P and H) from different epochs in Israel’s ancient history. But the redactors who wove them together into the canonical Bible must have had a vision of how the texts might be harmonized without recourse to the modern documentary hypothesis. I will argue that a correct understanding of the Bible’s blood discourse provides a key to unraveling these riddles. To state the argument succinctly before we turn to its respective parts: while animal and human blood, properly spilled, do not create ritual pollution—and, indeed, animal blood is the most powerful ritual detergent for decontaminating such pollution—blood improperly spilled is associated with the three cardinal, “moral” sins that defile the land. The one exception is menstrual blood, which creates both ritual and moral pollution.<sup>14</sup> Against Milgrom, I will argue that menstrual blood, as opposed to all other blood outside the body, is a force of life rather than of death and that this

exception is the one that proves the rule. My argument is therefore organized around the three sins that create moral pollution: murder, idolatry, and sexual violations. After discussing these three transgressions, I will conclude with the way blood constructed the covenant of biblical Israel.

Before we turn to these matters, I wish to address what might be called the theological black hole that surrounds blood. Put simply, the Bible offers very little in the way of theological rationale for the surprising centrality of blood in its cult.<sup>15</sup> One might expect, given the relative lack of blood rituals in other ancient Near Eastern religions, that the biblical authors would have propounded a clear rationale for the use of blood as a fluid for purification and expiation. To be sure, we are told in a number of places that “blood is the life” or that “the life-force is in the blood,” but this undoubtedly universal perception does not seem sufficient to explain the specific religious meaning of blood in the Israelite cult.<sup>16</sup>

Instead of following the dozens of interpreters who have trod this well-worn path by venturing yet another speculation, I will argue that the very lack of an explicit theology of blood is itself a key piece of evidence. The purpose of the priestly discourse of blood—that is, the prescriptions we find in the written text—was political rather than theological: to create a priestly monopoly on sacrifice (and, indeed, on all slaughter of animals for meat) while simultaneously declaring other ritual uses of blood, Israelite or foreign, as abominations. These “abominable” rituals may well have been the inventions of the priestly authors themselves as rhetorical devices to distinguish Israel from its neighbors. This was what concerned the priests much more than developing a theological theory to rationalize their practices. These texts were performative; that is, they not only prescribed rituals but also enacted a cultural and religious code for their readers. In fact, by stating their position apodictically rather than in the form of an argument, the priestly authors ascribed much greater rhetorical force to their discourse.

This argument is similar to that of William Gilders, who, following Nancy Jay, holds that the blood manipulations were ways of “indexing” priestly status.<sup>17</sup> Indexing in this sense means a gesture that points (as in “index finger”) toward what is being communicated. Thus, by restricting blood to cultic sites and giving the priests exclusive right to manipulate it, the authors of these texts were either reinforcing or actually enacting priestly status. The blood, according to this argument, carries no meaning in itself but, like a pointing finger, establishes a connection

between the priests and their prerogatives. We are dealing, then, with a discourse of priestly *power*.

If the priestly documents used blood to distinguish Israel from its neighbors, they did not do so in a total vacuum. In the argument that follows, I will make extensive use of Greek analogues to illuminate Israelite practices. Especially around issues of blood, Greek religion was significantly closer to that of the Israelites than were the rituals of more proximate Near Eastern cultures. In some cases there may have been indirect cultural interchange between Israel and Greece. But even where there was not, the role of blood in Greek religion suggests that its rituals are much more likely than those of Israel's immediate neighbors to shed light on the discourses of blood in biblical literature. Thus, the substance that was supposed to differentiate Israel from its neighbors unexpectedly points to cross-cultural comparisons elsewhere.

#### DIVINE FURY: BLOOD AND VENGEANCE

You shall not pollute [*tahanifu*] the Land in which you live; for blood pollutes the Land and the Land can have no expiation for blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it. You shall not defile the Land in which you live, in which I myself abide, for I the Lord abide among the Israelite people.

Numbers 35:33-34

The archetype of blood pollution is homicide. In this theology, quite probably a product of the Holiness school, blood spilled by deliberate violence pollutes the land and can be expiated only by the blood of the murderer. God does not dwell only in the tabernacle or the temple, but throughout the land, and although the land is not specifically designated as "holy,"<sup>18</sup> human blood can defile it.<sup>19</sup> The consequence of unavenged blood is captured in God's dramatic response to Cain's murder of Abel: "Your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. Therefore, you shall be more cursed than the ground which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand" (Gen. 4:10-11). Here it is the ground itself that is said to have a mouth that drinks Abel's blood, which then cries out to God through this mouth; it is this very crying out that is the expression of the blood pollution's curse. Not only the victim is offended, but so is the earth. While in the law of secular slaughter in Deuteronomy, pouring the blood of an animal

onto the ground is an adequate means of disposal, here the blood of the murdered victim becomes the mechanism for polluting the earth and calling out for revenge.

The law in Numbers 35 makes it clear that the spilling of blood occasions bloodguilt (*damo bo* or *damo be-rosho*, “his blood is in him” or “his blood is on his head”), which is avenged by a blood-avenger (more precisely: a blood-redeemer, *goel ha-dam*). Deuteronomy 19:13 reads: “You must show him [the murderer] no pity. Thus you will purge [literally “burn out,” *u-viarta*] the innocent blood [*dam ha-naki*] from Israel and it will go well with you.” The act of murder involves the shedding of innocent blood that must be expiated by means of shedding “guilty” blood in order to absolve the land of pollution: the blood of the guilty decontaminates (“burns out”) the spilled blood of the innocent. As Ezekiel says in cursing the Edomites: “Assuredly, as I live, declares the Lord God, I will doom you with blood; blood shall pursue you; I swear that, for your bloodthirsty hatred, blood shall pursue you” (Ezek. 35:6). In this way, the innocent blood is “redeemed,” which we may understand as “returned to its proper place.” In Deuteronomy 32:42–43, God promises “to make my arrows drunk with blood” in order to “avenge the blood of his servants.” Unredeemed blood attaches to the slayer and his family for generations (see 2 Sam. 3:28–30 and 2 Kings 9:26).

In the case of a corpse whose slayer is not known, the bloodguilt may pollute the whole nation (Deut. 21:8) unless the ritual of the heifer whose neck is broken (*egla arufa*) is performed (Deut. 21:1–9).<sup>20</sup> This ritual involves substituting a heifer that has never been yoked (a kind of substitute “virgin” sacrifice) for the unknown murderer. The elders of the nearest town wash their hands over the heifer’s corpse and proclaim: “Our hands did not shed this blood.” Once again, only shedding blood can adequately atone for murder.

Given this draconian rhetoric regarding the spilling of human blood, it makes sense that biblical law would not allow any remission of capital punishment, a unique stringency in ancient Near Eastern law.<sup>21</sup> As Genesis 9:6 states the law: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in His image did God make man.” But what is the “image of God” in which human beings are created? Is it somehow connected to blood? No definite answers to these questions can be given, since, as I have already observed, the Bible is quite taciturn in explaining the rationale behind the prohibition on spilling human blood. All we know is that only the spilling of the blood of the guilty



can compensate for the blood of the innocent and, in the process, wipe out the land's blood-defilement: "I will demand your blood in payment for your souls [*le-nafshotekhem*]" (Gen. 9:5).<sup>22</sup>

There are some tantalizing hints that animal blood may also, in certain circumstances, deflect God's avenging violence. A good example is the puzzling ritual in Exodus 12 in which the Israelites take the blood from the Paschal offering and smear it on the doorposts and lintels of their houses, as a sign to God not to destroy the Israelites when he comes to kill the Egyptian firstborn. As William Propp has argued, the blood seems to have been intended to ward off a demon, now conflated with God, but it does so by *purifying* the doorway: "God . . . protects [*psh*] the household from his own demonic side. Thus the doorway functions as an altar."<sup>23</sup> Purification neutralizes divine violence. The Israelite house in the Passover ritual functions much in the same way as the temple, with blood serving to mark its boundaries.<sup>24</sup> In a similar way, Propp suggests that the blood of the circumcision of Moses's son, when applied to Moses's genitals (Ex. 4:25), atones for his earlier slaying of the Egyptian (Ex. 2:12); here, too, divine wrath for blood spilled is assuaged by blood, but in this case by the blood of circumcision.<sup>25</sup> As interesting as these two examples are, neither found its way into Israel's codes of laws. Instead, it is the blood of the guilty that must, in all cases, atone for the blood of the innocent.

Although the Bible's severity is not to be found elsewhere in ancient Near Eastern law, it was certainly the rule in ancient Greece, or, at least in the classical age's reconstruction of Greece's mythic past. In *The Choephoroi*, written by Aeschylus in the mid-fifth century B.C.E., the Chorus, speaking of the murder of Clytemnestra, proclaims, in a virtual echo of the Cain and Abel story:

The gods ordain  
That blood by murder shed  
Cries from the ground for blood to flow again.<sup>26</sup>

The Furies, whose job it is to enforce this law, drink the blood of vengeance, as they declare in *The Eumenides*, now against Orestes for killing his mother:

You shall, for your soul's guilt,  
Give us your blood to drink  
Red from the living limb  
Our dear and deadly food.<sup>27</sup>

The problem in Aeschylus is, of course, how to break the cycle of blood vengeance and institute courts of law, which happens at the end of *The Eumenides* when the Furies are turned into the patron gods of Athens.

The biblical text seems less diachronic. Biblical law contains stipulations that courts are to hand down and execute capital sentences, but at the same time, the blood-avenger is clearly recognized as a legal entity; the two forms of justice seem to coexist in partial contradiction to each other. But the failure of human beings to effect justice will provoke God to take his own revenge, in a manner reminiscent of the Greek Furies. And it is the blood of the murdered that serves as the provocation.

#### BLOODY GOATS: IDOLATRY AND THE PROHIBITION ON EATING BLOOD

Idolatry, like homicide, is quintessentially a blood crime. As Ezekiel puts it: “You eat on the blood, you cast your eyes upon your idols and spill blood, and still you expect to inherit the Land?” (Ezek. 33:25). In Ezekiel, the defilement of the land that comes from idolatrous practices is the same “moral impurity” wrought by violence, and both are intimately linked to the spilling and improper disposal of blood.<sup>28</sup> Since Ezekiel includes “eating on the blood” in this rhetorical field, we shall need to investigate how the consumption of blood might have been seen as idolatrous. In order to do so, we must first delve more deeply into the prohibition on eating blood. Only after what might seem like a long detour will we be able to return to the association between blood and idolatry.

Leviticus 17, as we have seen, is the central text that proscribes the consumption of blood. It equates the failure to slaughter meat in the form of a temple sacrifice with the shedding of human blood. Both incur “bloodguilt” (*dam yihashhev*):

If anyone of the house of Israel slaughters an ox or sheep or goat in the camp, or does so outside the camp, and does not bring it to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting to present it as an offering to the Lord before the Lord's Tabernacle, bloodguilt shall be imputed to that man: he has shed blood; that man shall be cut off from among his people. This is in order that the Israelites may bring the sacrifices which they have been making in the open—that they may bring them before the Lord, to the priest, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting and offer them as sacrifices of well-being [*shelamim*] to the Lord; that the priest may dash the blood against the altar of the Lord. (Lev. 17: 3–6)

The Lord's tabernacle is the only appropriate place to shed animal blood without incurring bloodguilt. Later, the book of Deuteronomy, which

centralized the cult in Jerusalem, permitted secular slaughter, provided that one pour the blood of the animal onto the ground.

But is the shedding of animal blood the same as the shedding of human blood? A passage from Ezekiel suggests that it is. Ezekiel prophesies to Judah: “Woe to the city of blood . . . for the blood she shed is still in her; she set it upon a bare rock; she did not pour it out on the ground to cover it with earth. She set her blood upon a bare rock, so that it was not covered, so that it may stir up [my] fury to take vengeance” (Ezek. 24:6–8).<sup>29</sup> The very visibility of the blood on the bare rock provokes God’s vengeance, which comes in the form of more spilled blood, and only when he is satiated will his fury lapse. The context here is not homicide but improper disposal of the blood of a slaughtered animal. Ezekiel combines two laws (Lev. 17:13 and Deut. 12:24) and concludes that if one kills an animal for food outside of the temple and does not pour its blood out, covering the blood with earth, he has committed the equivalent of murder. The implication is that the uncovered blood will cry out just as the blood of Abel did.

Jacob Milgrom builds upon this evident equivalence between homicide and animal slaughter. He notes that the law against homicide proclaimed after the flood in Genesis 9 is accompanied by the prohibition on eating blood. Leviticus 17 expands on Genesis 9 by requiring that all domestic animals intended for food (the *shelamim* sacrifices) must be slaughtered on the sanctioned altar and their blood must be poured onto it: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have assigned it to you for making expiation for your lives on the altar; it is the blood, in exchange for life, that ransoms” (17:11). Milgrom understands this verse not as a general statement of the use of blood for purposes of expiation, but as specifically about the disposal of the blood as atonement for the death of the sacrifice itself, for otherwise, killing animals would be a capital offense. For Milgrom, such atonement by blood reflects an ethical sensitivity toward animals not found elsewhere in the Near East (an ironic sensitivity since the animal ends up dead in any case).<sup>30</sup> The vegetarianism of the period from the Garden of Eden to the Flood was the Bible’s dietary utopia; the sacrificial laws reflect the values grounded in this ambivalence toward the eating of meat.

As Baruch Schwartz has indicated, though, this extension of the strict laws of homicide to the killing of animals seems highly doubtful.<sup>31</sup> The analogy between homicide and killing animals is imperfect because, if the killing of a sacrificial animal had been a capital crime, then only the death of the sacrificer would have atoned for it—clearly

an absurdity in any sacrificial religion. Or, conversely, if the blood of the victim could atone for its death, why couldn't some ritual of purification using the blood of the victim suffice for homicide? Since both of these suggestions are patently absurd, it is hard to imagine that biblical culture really thought that the killing of animals for food or sacrifice was a form of murder.

Greek religion also had a myth of primordial vegetarianism and, additionally, required a kind of symbolic assent by the sacrificial animal, yet there is no evidence that the ancient Greeks really felt ambivalent about eating meat. Indeed, it seems unlikely that any religion based on sacrifice—and that of ancient Israel was certainly a prime example—would have a guilty conscience about killing animals or, as Milgrom holds, would have developed such guilt into an ethics of animal rights.

How, then, should we understand the prohibition on eating blood, a prohibition that appears to be unique to Israel? It certainly makes sense that if blood is used for specific rituals within the temple, it should not be consumed or otherwise disposed of improperly. But, as Schwartz notices, Leviticus 17 deals with killing animals for nourishment, the *shelamim* sacrifices, and not with the sacrificial rituals for purification or atonement. The association in Leviticus 17 of the *shelamim* sacrifice with atonement disrupts the careful categorization of the priestly system. Why does the text say that *this* blood needs to be reserved for expiation or ransom? If it is not for killing the animal itself, what is being expiated or ransomed?

The attempts to solve this problem are almost as numerous as the scholars who have put their minds to it.<sup>32</sup> The explanations can be grouped roughly into two categories: internalist and externalist. The internalists argue that not eating blood is linked to some fundamental principle of Israelite theology, that is, it is prohibited for reasons internal to the religion, while the externalists believe that the motivation is a response to an external factor.

One internalist argument holds that the blood belongs to God, so it must be returned to him when life is taken. But the fact that blood is the essence of life does not automatically mean that it belongs to God. And even if it does, how is this connected with expiation? A better argument, which I discuss further at the end of this chapter, is that the act of bringing any sacrifice involves exposing oneself to God's wrath, which must be appeased by blood.<sup>33</sup> But that function, even if the reasoning is generally true, is not specified by Leviticus 17. Moreover, as Schwartz notes, if this doctrine were automatically true, then Nadav and Avihu, who brought

“strange fire” and were struck dead (Num. 3:4), could have averted their punishment by a blood ritual, an evident absurdity since they were punished at the moment of their infraction. Blood certainly had a protective function, but this could not be the only argument for why *all* blood had to be disposed of ritually.

Another internalist argument has been offered by Schwartz.<sup>34</sup> The earlier priestly law held that the blood from purification or atonement sacrifices had to be reserved for cultic disposal and could not be consumed with the meat of the sacrificed animal. Schwartz argues that Leviticus 17:10–12 generalizes this law to include *all* meat, even when the animal was killed only for food and its blood had no cultic function. The text then holds that the blood of *all* animals was given as “ransom” for the lives of the sacrificers, based on the wordplay between expiate (*kipper*) and ransom (*kofer*). This text is unique, but it bases its innovation on already existing prohibitions against eating the blood of atonement and purification sacrifices. Schwartz’s is a reasonably plausible solution, but it leaves open the question of why the legislator would have constructed a law so unprecedented and so unexplained that it has left generations of scholars completely stumped. Why did the lives of the sacrificers need to be ransomed?

Schwartz does not answer the question of motivation; but in a sense, the answer is right at hand. As he himself demonstrates so effectively, Leviticus 17 is about outlawing all secular slaughter: “This [law] is in order that the Israelites may bring the sacrifices which they have been making in the open—that they may bring them before the Lord, to the priest, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting and offer them as sacrifices of well-being [*shelamim*] to the Lord; that the priest may dash the blood against the altar of the Lord” (vv. 3–6). By making the blood of *all* domesticated animals the “property” of the cult, the priests guaranteed their monopoly. And what better way to do so than by threatening the direst consequences for those who did not surrender the animal—and its blood—to the priestly slaughterhouse? The life that the blood ransomed was none other than that of the Israelite who wanted to eat meat but did not avail himself of the priests’ services. This is, admittedly, a circular argument: the blood is needed to ransom the life of the person who does not use the blood as ransom. But the very paradoxical nature of this commandment, its legal incomprehensibility, is precisely what gives it its rhetorical power. By disseminating an almost consciously cryptic blood theology, the legislator turned blood into the vehicle for control of an agrarian society’s richest resource.

This internalist argument does not, however, entirely suffice, since the text suggests that an *external* impetus is also at work: “and that they may offer their sacrifices no more to the goats [*seirim*] after whom they whore [*zonim*]” (Lev. 17:7). The externalists therefore argue that the prohibition is a response to some religious practices that the biblical authors want to denounce. The granddaddy of this type of explanation is Moses Maimonides, who, in the twelfth century, explained the prohibition on eating blood as a response to the religion of the Sabians, a group of dubious historicity whom he conflated with all ancient pagans:

Know that the Sabians held that blood was most unclean, but in spite of this used to eat of it, deeming that it was the food of the devils and that, consequently, whoever ate it fraternized with the *jinn* so that they came to him and let him know future events—according to what the multitude imagine concerning the *jinn*. There were, however, people there who considered it a hard thing to eat of blood, this being a thing abhorrent to the nature of man. Accordingly, they used to slaughter an animal, collect its blood in a vessel or in a ditch and eat the flesh of this slaughtered animal close by its blood. In doing this they imagined that the *jinn* partook of this blood, this being their food, whereas they themselves ate the flesh.<sup>35</sup>

In this passage, Maimonides searches for what we would call a historical explanation for the prohibition on eating blood. Following the overall method of part 3 of his *Guide of the Perplexed*, one can explain many commandments as responses to specific idolatrous practices of the Sabians. Their “reasons” (*taamim*) are not to be sought in the internal logic of the culture but in reaction to external influences: these laws were means of marking the borders between Israel and its neighbors, rather than arising indigenously as expressions of Israel’s essential identity.<sup>36</sup>

There were two kinds of Sabians, holds Maimonides: those who ate blood because they believed that it put them into direct contact with the mantic *jinn* (i.e., prophesying demons) and those who were repulsed by blood, poured it into a ditch, and then ate the sacrificial meat nearby in order to achieve the same communion with the *jinn* as those who actually ate the blood. Having given the *jinn* their food, these latter Sabians would then be visited by the demons in dreams and would learn “secret things.” In order to wean the people from the idolatry of the *jinn*, the law revealed at Sinai specifically prohibited not only eating blood but also coming together and eating in its vicinity: “[The] blood should be covered up with dust so that the people should not gather to eat around it.”<sup>37</sup> Maimonides refers here to the peculiar phrase, found in three places in the Bible (Lev. 19:26, 1 Sam. 14:32–33, and Ezek. 33:25), that

forbids eating “on the blood” (*alha-dam*).<sup>38</sup> Understanding “on” the blood as “around” the blood, Maimonides interprets this prohibition as linked to the ostensible custom of those Sabians who poured the blood for the *jinn* into a ditch and ate the animal’s flesh nearby.

In 1966 Joshua Grintz took up Maimonides’ interpretation and argued that the prohibition of “eating on the blood” must be understood as a response to a set of practices found in early Greek religion.<sup>39</sup> Rituals to propitiate the demons of the underworld (*chthonioi*) or to nourish the souls of the dead required the sacrifice of an animal with its throat pointed down, so that the blood would flow into a pit (*bothros*) and from there into the ground. These sacrifices often took place at night and in a hidden place, such as a cavern. The blood would call forth the dead, who would then make prophecies. Such practices were the diametric opposite of sacrifice to the gods of Olympus, in which the animal’s throat was pointed toward the heavens, the ritual site was a raised platform (*bamos*), and the sacrifice took place during the day. Milgrom has recently expanded on Grintz by showing how various ancient Near Eastern religions—from Mesopotamia to Egypt—held that certain gods, usually of the underworld, were bloodthirsty and required nourishment in the form of blood from animal sacrifices.<sup>40</sup>

Grintz analyzes the passage in 1 Samuel 14 where Saul’s troops, after defeating the Philistines, kill the animals taken as booty “towards the earth” (*artza*) and “eat on the blood.” Saul chastises them, rolls a large stone to be used as an altar, and performs the slaughter (not specifically referred to here as a sacrifice) on the stone so that the blood flows onto the stone. Grintz holds that Saul feared that his troops were imitating the Greek practice of worshipping demons of the underworld; he also believes that the Israelite custom of slaughtering animals on stones was already well known. So, too, were the Levitical laws prohibiting the eating of blood, which Saul implicitly invokes. The prohibitions linked in the same verse (Lev. 19:26) between eating “on the blood” and practicing “divination and sooth-saying” (*lo tenashu ve-lo teonenu*) Grintz understands by reference to the Greek practices. Since Leviticus 17 commands that animals that one wishes to eat be brought to the “Tent of Meeting” to be killed and prohibits sacrificing to the *seirim* (which Grintz understands—following Maimonides—as “goat-demons of the desert”), Grintz believes that the law prohibiting the eating “on” the blood goes back to the desert period itself.

Part of Grintz's argument, now largely adopted by Milgrom, is convincing, but much is not. There is a variety of evidence having to do with pits (*ob*) and with divination through the dead that suggests the presence of chthonic worship in ancient Israel. However, with the exception of the law in Leviticus 19:26, these texts have nothing to do with blood. Moreover, nowhere in either the Greek or the ancient Near Eastern texts on chthonic worship do we find the *worshippers* eating blood; instead, they feed it to the ancestral gods from the underworld. The only way to harmonize the biblical sources with the known descriptions of chthonic rites is Maimonides' quite forced interpretation of "on the blood" as meaning "around the blood," that is, that the worshippers poured the blood in a pit and ate the meat nearby. But here, too, the chthonic cults we know of say nothing about eating a sacrifice near the *bothros*. Indeed, those offerings were typically burnt rather than whole.<sup>41</sup> Despite Grintz's and Milgrom's best efforts, the meaning of this strange locution seems to be simply the same as eating *with* (*al* = *im*) the blood still in the meat.<sup>42</sup> And Grintz's analysis of the incident in Samuel of eating "on the blood" is a classic example of pushing the evidence further than is warranted; what is at stake there is simply whether a stone altar is needed for the slaughter of animals, with the blood allowed to run off, or whether the killing can be done directly on the ground.<sup>43</sup>

Grintz claims that the prohibition against "eating on the blood" is from the desert period. His main proof is that the *seirim* mentioned in Leviticus 17 are demons of the desert and play no role in the "later" prophetic denunciations of Baal worship on the *bamot*. But while several texts refer to wild goats or goat demons invading the ruins of Judah (Isa. 13:21–22 and 34:14),<sup>44</sup> *seirim* appear twice in connection with prohibited worship in the land itself. King Josiah, in 2 Kings 23:8, "demolished the *bamot* of the 'gates' at the gate of Joshua." While this reading is not impossible, it seems more plausible to emend the word *gates* (*shaarim*) to *seirim*.<sup>45</sup> Thus, Josiah abolished the "altars of the goats" which stood at the city's gate. In 2 Chronicles 11:15, we learn that Jeroboam had "appointed priests for the altars [*bamot*] and for the goats and calves which he had made" (referring evidently to statues of goats and calves that were part of the northern Israelite rite). These last two texts suggest, against Grintz, that goat worship of some kind was associated with the *bamot* in the land and not only with a desert cult. Moreover, since the Chronicler added the goats to the parallel story in Kings, which has only calves, there is reason to suppose that



goat worship—if it actually existed—was a relatively late cult in First Temple history.

Psalms 50:12–13 reinforces the supposition that the blood of goats might have been a part of unorthodox Israelite or non-Israelite sacrifices:

Were I hungry, I would not tell you  
for Mine is the world and all it holds  
Do I eat the flesh of bulls,  
or drink the blood of he-goats [*atudim*]?<sup>45</sup>

There is no specific Semitic cult in which the flesh of bulls and the blood of goats were offered to a god, but the passage in Psalms does give us evidence that at least some in ancient Israel believed that there was. Yet there is no connection here or elsewhere between the blood of goats and chthonic worship, however it may have existed in biblical culture.

Who were these goats, and why are they connected to the prohibition on consumption of blood in Leviticus 17? On the one hand, Stephen Geller suggests the association of the goat divinities mentioned in chapter 17 with the Yom Kippur ritual of the two goats in Leviticus 16. He believes that the scapegoat is sent out to Azazel to be reunited with the goat-demon of the desert (“send the goat to the Goat”). This is an inventive possibility, but it remains speculative since we have so little evidence of a goat cult associated specifically with the desert. Milgrom, on the other hand, holds that the prohibition on sacrificing to goats in Leviticus 17 is actually an argument by H against P: where P makes goats central to its ritual of atonement (Lev. 16), H outlaws them.<sup>46</sup> But this is a problematic reading, since Leviticus 16 is about the use of goats to perform an atonement ritual, while Leviticus 17 prohibits sacrificing *to* goats. Even if sending the goat to Azazel involves belief in some goat deity, as Geller would have it, Leviticus 17 would seem to be a very oblique attack on it, so oblique, in fact, that no later Jewish memory ever questioned the Yom Kippur ritual as somehow idolatrous.

Another possibility of an external influence, following Grintz’s suggestion of a Greek parallel, might be the cult of Dionysos, which Michael Astour has argued originated in the Near East.<sup>47</sup> Dionysos was often accompanied by satyrs in the form of half-goat, half-human images, and he was frequently worshipped with goat sacrifices.<sup>48</sup> Dionysian rites were also associated with blood, both literally and figuratively. According to Euripides’ *Bacchae* (408–407 B.C.E.), the Dionysian rites involved an ecstatic frenzy during which a sacrificial victim was torn

limb from limb and eaten raw (*omophagia*), thus consuming the flesh with its blood:

Joyful on the mountain  
 When from the rushing, dancing throng  
 Sinks he to the ground  
 With his holy fawn skin round him,  
 Pursuing blood, slaughter of goats,  
 Joy of raw flesh devoured,  
 Pressing on to the mountains of Phrygia, Lydia.<sup>49</sup>

This consumption of blood reminds us of the Furies in the *Oresteia*, who thirst for the blood of murderers.

Dionysos was also, of course, the god of what the Bible calls the “blood of the vine,” and in the *Bacchae*, wine and blood become mixed sacrificial metaphors:

He (Dionysos) found the liquid shower  
 Hid in the grape. He rests man’s spirit dim  
 From grieving, when the vine exalteth him. . . .  
 Yea, being god, the blood of him is set  
 Before the gods in sacrifice, that we  
 For his sake may be blest.<sup>50</sup>

The consumption of wine as part of the Bacchic rites might be understood as the metaphoric consumption of blood. But the text also cryptically suggests that Dionysos’s own blood is offered up to the (other?) gods.

The temptation is great to connect the Hebrew *seirim* with the Greek *satyroi* (satyrs), the goatlike male participants in the Dionysian orgies, although the etymology may be spurious.<sup>51</sup> And the implication in Leviticus 17:7 that the sacrifices to the goat-demons involved something sexual—“after whom they whore”—hints at similarities to the orgiastic overtones associated with the female maenads of Dionysos.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the biblical “eating on the blood” may be identical to the Dionysian *omophagia*, since only when eating meat raw would the presence of the blood really be noticeable.

However, as A. Henrichs has demonstrated conclusively, the evidence that the worshippers of Dionysos actually consumed bloody meat is scant at best.<sup>53</sup> In the famous passage quoted above, which has frequently been used as the basis for making this claim, it is apparently only the god who practices *omophagia*, just as in the chthonic rites it is the gods and not the worshippers who consume blood. Moreover, known Dionysian ritual texts do not corroborate literary representations like

the *Bacchae*. The way Euripides imagined the rites was not, evidently, the way they were actually practiced: myth and ritual are not necessarily identical. In short, the initial attractiveness of some kind of West Semitic Dionysian cult as the target of Leviticus 17's wrath fades as the evidence comes into sharper focus.

But the overall similarities between Greek and Israelite blood rituals may yet yield fruit. Greek and Israelite sacrificial customs turn out to have been more similar to each other than the Israelite was to other ancient Near Eastern cults.<sup>54</sup> And it was these similarities that might have drawn the attention of the priestly writers. The word for *altar* in Greek (*bamos*) is virtually identical to the Hebrew (*bamah*). Biblical and Greek sacrifices involved both burning and eating, as opposed to Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Minoan-Mycenaean offerings, which do not appear to have been burned at all. As we have seen, blood played only a minor role in Near Eastern sacrifices, but, like the Israelites, the Greeks required the splashing of blood on the altar and its proper disposal. As Walter Burkert summarizes: "The blood flowing out [of a sacrificial animal] is treated with special care. It may not spill on the ground; rather, it must hit the altar, the hearth, or the sacrificial pit. If the animal is small it is raised over the altar; otherwise the blood is caught in a bowl and sprinkled on the altar-stone. This object alone may, and must again and again, drip blood."<sup>55</sup> One of the few pictorial representations of Greek sacrifice is on a vase painting. It shows a Dionysian rite in which a satyr wields a knife with a maenad assisting as the blood pours down into the *sphageion* or bowl for catching sacrificial blood, perhaps similar to the bowls (*aganot*—see Ex. 24:6) used in biblical sacrifice.<sup>56</sup>

As in Israel, blood was used by the Greeks as an agent of purification (*apomattein*, to wipe clean). Indeed, the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus made fun of this practice: "They vainly purify themselves of blood-guilt [*haimati mianomenoi*] by defiling themselves with blood, as though one who had stepped into mud were to wash with mud; he would seem to be mad, if any of men noticed him doing this. Further, they pray to these statues, as if one were to carry on a conversation with houses, not recognizing the true nature of gods or demi-gods."<sup>57</sup> Heraclitus regards the use of blood, which he evidently sees as a source of contamination, to purify as an example of self-contradictory magic. But while the first part of his statement could just as well describe the use of blood in Leviticus 17 as the agent that purifies or atones for bloodguilt, the second part, attacking idol worship, sounds as if it comes from a biblical prophet.

Greek philosophers like Empedocles and Critias regarded blood as the soul and the principle of life, quite reminiscent of the biblical “the blood is the life” and “the blood is in the soul” (*nefesh*, “life-force” in the biblical lexicon).<sup>58</sup> For the Greeks, only mortal beings have blood; the gods, being immortal, do not, possessing instead the mysterious *ichor*. The Bible’s theological reticence makes it difficult to know what runs through the Israelite God’s veins, but the biblical authors may have agreed with the Greeks’ divine hematology. For the Greeks, the splashing of the blood on the altar does not seem to “return” the blood to the gods as their rightful possession. Similarly, the Bible does not really specify why God needs the blood of sacrificial animals or animals killed for consumption, except to insist that he does not need it as food. Blood contained or was equivalent to the life/soul and therefore had to be disposed of properly, but whether it was in any sense a “divine” substance remains unclear.

Does all this mean that Leviticus 17 was a polemic against—or an imitation of—a Greek or quasi-Greek cult of goat worship in which bloody meat was consumed? The evidence is insufficient, especially since no Greek practices, chthonic or Dionysian, quite fit. But it may be possible that just as modern scholars have been mistaken in seeing close similarities and ignoring differences, the priestly authors constructed a vague countercult out of what may have been fragmentary rumors of certain Greek sacrificial rituals, perhaps specifically Dionysian. Why do so? Because, as I have already argued, the primary function of our text was not so much to outlaw the consumption of blood as to cement the priests’ monopoly on sacrifice. As Schwartz points out, Leviticus 17 turns all killing of meat for food into sacrifice, either permitted or prohibited. The prohibited, which was any slaughter outside of the tabernacle, it attributes to an idolatrous worship of goat-demons: everything outside the cultic site is the realm of these putative demons.<sup>59</sup>

There was, however, no attested goat-demon worship among Western Semitic religions. It may well have been instead Greek religion—or, better, secondhand, confused images of Greek religion—that was particularly threatening to the priests, since Greek sacrifice looked in so many ways closer to that of the Israelites than did that of their closer neighbors. What seemed closest was precisely what had to be most violently rejected, a case of Freud’s “narcissism of small differences.” Thus, the monopoly the priests sought over the lucrative slaughter of animals for food was dressed up as a full-blown polemic against a form of idolatry that may never have existed: the worship of goat deities through

the consumption of blood sacrifices. Just as the Dionysian myth of eating raw meat was understood as a wild rebellion against the civilized order of cooked or roasted sacrifices,<sup>60</sup> so the biblical rejection of eating blood fashioned a powerful contrast between orthodox Israelite religion and imagined idolatry. It was not the blood itself that contained specific meaning, beyond the generality that “blood is life,” but rather its very fluidity as a medium of exchange, offered to the priests as payment (“ransom”) for the right to eat meat.

#### WHORING AFTER GOATS:

#### BLOOD AND THE SEXUAL PROHIBITIONS

The third major transgression that pollutes the land, after murder and idolatry, is violation of the sexual laws. In fact, the prohibition on eating blood in Leviticus 17 has distinctly sexual overtones. It explicitly enjoins slaughter on an altar in front of the Tent of Meeting in place of “sacrifices to the *seirim* after whom they whore [*zonim*]” (17:7). If this goat cult bore any resemblance to Dionysian rites, then the sexual innuendo is apposite, since the Bacchae were often associated both with women and with unbridled eroticism. Ezekiel also connects the idolatrous eating of blood with sexual transgression. The full passage whose beginning I quoted above reads: “You eat on the blood, you cast your eyes upon your idols and spill blood, and still you expect to inherit the Land? You have relied on your sword, you have committed abominations and you have defiled other men’s wives, and still you expect to inherit the Land?” (33:25–26) Homicide, idolatry, and sexual sins are all of a piece.

As is well known, the literary prophets typically associated adultery and other sexual transgressions with idolatry because they represented the relationship between God and Israel as that of husband and wife.<sup>61</sup> Ezekiel, for example, repeatedly and explicitly describes the idolatrous practices of Israel in terms of cultic sex: “you made yourself phallic images and fornicated with them” (16:17). Idolatry is not just metaphoric adultery for Ezekiel: he seems to have imagined ritual practices that involved sexual acts.<sup>62</sup> The same point might be made more generally for the biblical polemic against pagan rites. Whether or not the Canaanites or reprobate Israelites actually carried out cultic orgies or indulged in ritual prostitution—and the evidence is less than scant for such practices—the authors of various biblical documents believed that they did.<sup>63</sup>

The Levitical sexual prohibitions, usually attributed to the Holiness school, appear in Leviticus 18 and 20. These prohibitions include incest, adultery, and bestiality, but also offering up children to Moloch (18:21 and 20:2–5) and sexual relations with a menstruating woman (18:18 and 20:18). Milgrom has argued that Moloch was an underground deity, like the chthonic gods, who was worshipped together with YHWH. Whether or not this is true, it is clear that Leviticus 20 is driven by the polemic against Moloch worship since the verses containing this polemic (vv. 2–5) form the prologue to the chapter. Why the denunciation of Moloch worship appears together with the sexual prohibitions in both of these chapters is hard to determine. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz has offered the intriguing suggestion that since the priestly writers in general wanted to promote procreation, they brought together and prohibited all practices that might dilute the proper patriarchal lines.<sup>64</sup> On the one hand, sacrificing children to Moloch would certainly not be in the interest of a procreative theology. On the other hand, since child sacrifice could actually be a way of thanking the deity for fertility, and since the very existence of child sacrifice in the Bible remains disputed, we should refrain from overreaching conclusions.<sup>65</sup> What is clear, though, is that the author or authors of Leviticus 18 and 20, for whatever reason, associated some kind of bloody sacrificial rites involving children—real or imagined—with the sexual prohibitions. Incest and adultery, like idolatry, were inseparable from the illegitimate spilling of blood.

Both chapters understand the sexual prohibitions in the context of the practices of the Canaanite nations. They defiled the land by their transgressions of these laws and lost their claim to it; so, too, would the Israelites be “vomited out” of the land should they imitate their predecessors. While this is not precisely equivalent to idolatry, it is obviously to be understood as inhabiting the same universe. Just as the Canaanites defiled their cultic sites with sexual rites, so they defiled the land with sexual transgressions. As with cultic sex, we are in the dark about whether the Canaanites really practiced incest and adultery. It may well be that the very exclusivist nature of Israel’s religion required the argument that those Israel displaced did the opposite. Whereas they consumed blood, slept with their sisters (as well as with their goats), offered their children up to Moloch, and had wild orgies in their temples, Israelites did not.

Sex therefore had no place in the Israelite cult. This we learn not only from the denunciations of the Canaanites but also from Moses’s

admonition to the people to refrain from sexual relations for three days before the revelation at Sinai (Ex. 19:15) and avoid violating the proper boundaries between the sacred and the profane.<sup>66</sup> If this distinction for P was between cultic sites and the rest of the world, for H it was between the land as a whole and that which lay outside it. But to prohibit sex in the land was obviously absurd, so H insisted instead on a list of sexual practices that were proscribed anywhere in the land.

The lists of sexual prohibitions in Leviticus 18 and 20 include bans on sex with a menstruating woman, an action now considered to result in moral impurity. How are we to understand this particular prohibition, especially in light of the fact that in Leviticus 15:19–24, relations with a woman during her menstrual period confer only ritual impurity? Here, as I have said, is the one action that falls under *both* the laws of ritual and of moral impurity, but in a way that is mutually contradictory: according to Leviticus 15, sexual relations with a woman during her menstrual period create an impurity that can be purified, but according to Leviticus 18:19 and 20:18, this act is *also* one of those irreparable transgressions, which merit either expulsion of the transgressor (*karet*) or expulsion of the people.

H's horror at sexual relations during menstruation is reflected in other biblical expressions in which menstruation becomes a synecdoche for violent and idolatrous behavior. Thus, Isaiah 30:22: "You will treat as unclean the silver overlay of your images and the golden painting of your idols. You will cast them away like a menstuous woman [*dawa*]." Or Ezekiel 36:17–18: "O mortal, when the House of Israel dwelt on their own soil, they defiled it with their ways and their deeds; their ways were in My sight like the impurity of a menstuous woman [*be-tumat ha-niddah*]. So, I poured out my wrath on them for the blood which they shed upon their land, and for the fetishes with which they defiled it." Or, most dramatically, when Ezra discovers that the returnees from Babylonia have been intermarrying with the "peoples of the land," he proclaims: "the land that you are about to possess is a menstuous land [*eret niddah*], unclean through the menstuousness of the peoples of the land [*be-niddat amei ha-aratzot*], through their abhorrent practices with which they, in their impurity, have filled it from one end to the other" (Ezra 9:11). Ezra then bans marriages with these "foreigners" (who may actually have been Israelites who did not go into exile) on essentially "racial" grounds: "The holy seed [*zera kodesh*] has become intermingled with the peoples of the land" (9:2).<sup>67</sup> The holy seed must be protected from contact with the impurity of menstruation, invoked

here as a metaphor for impurity in general, but an apt metaphor since it is precisely the kind of impurity that might be acquired during sexual relations.

I shall return shortly to the question of why menstruation came to acquire such lethal metaphoric significance, standing, as it did, for the worst forms of defilement. But first, let us look at why it was ritually defiling. As mentioned earlier, Jacob Milgrom has argued that since blood stands for life, menstrual blood and semen are defiling because their loss is associated with death, the archetypal impurity. There is a significant problem with this argument. Notice that only blood from the *genitals*, menstrual blood, is polluting, as are other genital fluids, such as semen and pathological discharges.<sup>68</sup> All other blood, including human blood, does not pollute in the ritual sense. Even though human blood spilled through violence can defile the land (Num. 35:33) and animal blood improperly disposed of creates bloodguilt, neither of these falls directly under the laws of cultic purity and impurity: a murderer may receive the death penalty, and someone who slaughters an animal without proper blood rituals may be “cut off” (*karet*), but he or she is not prohibited from entering a cultic site to bring a sacrifice (not that it will do them much good, since bringing an atonement sacrifice for these intentional crimes will not expiate them). So, if impurity is associated with death, it would be hard to explain why only menstrual blood, and not any other kind of blood, creates impurity. On the contrary, simple observation would show that women do not die from menstrual bleeding, while blood from a wound, if severe enough, may well turn its owner into a corpse.<sup>69</sup>

Menstrual blood should not, therefore, be considered either in the same category as other kinds of blood or as necessarily connected to death. Neither should it be considered, as Mary Douglas terms it, a form of dirt, that is, “matter out of place.”<sup>70</sup> As Milgrom points out, Douglas is wrong in arguing that impurity in the Bible is “dirt out of place,” since many substances that would be considered dirty—such as urine, feces, or spit—do not create impurity. And in fact, Douglas’s whole hypothesis becomes problematic when considering semen that is ejaculated by the male into the female: according to Leviticus 15:18, both parties must bathe and are rendered impure until evening, even though the semen is anything but “out of place.”

An important contribution to thinking about the relationship of genital discharges, whether male or female, to blood as a whole has been made by Leslie A. Cook in an essay on women’s rituals of purification in the Bible and in the Mishna.<sup>71</sup> Cook correctly notes that



*“both men’s and women’s discharges can generate impurity in certain contexts.* The defining factor seems to be not whose blood—not even blood—but rather the context of the discharges.”<sup>72</sup> As opposed to those who have argued that there is a gender hierarchy when it comes to blood,<sup>73</sup> Cook holds that women’s blood is not valued differently from men’s blood or from animal blood. Blood can be used to purify in the right context, or can create impurity in the wrong context. But blood itself is neither pure nor impure. The role of blood, Cook argues, is to *distinguish* human beings from God (an interesting alternative to Geller’s thesis that blood serves as the medium of communication *between* humans and God).

This is, on the whole, very persuasive. However, Cook’s claim that “blood out of context” causes impurity,” borrowed, it seems, from Mary Douglas, fails for the same reason: semen pollutes when it is “in context,” that is, ejaculated into the vagina. Since *only* genital discharges pollute, while all other types of blood, in and out of context, do not, perhaps menstrual blood should not be properly called blood, as if it were the same substance as arterial blood, only emitted from the genitals. Like semen, it inhabits a different universe. It needs to be considered a procreative fluid, female seed, as it were.<sup>74</sup>

The problem, stated simply, is this: how is it that the priests, obsessed with lineage and fertility and the presumed authors of the repeated biblical blessing “be fruitful and multiply” (*pru u-revu*), would consider a normal act of intercourse to cause pollution? For if the loss of seed through menstruation or nocturnal emission caused defilement because the seed was wasted, surely one could not argue the same for intercourse. In response to this difficulty, Milgrom quotes the thirteenth-century Spanish exegete Moses Nachmanides: “The reason for the defilement of seminal emissions, even though it is part of the process of procreation, is like the reason for the defilement of death. . . . The individual does not know if his seed will be wasted, or if a child will result.”<sup>75</sup> But this sounds too much like a postfactum rationalization on the parts of both the medieval and the modern commentators. One might quote the rabbis against this interpretation: “No man intends his intercourse to be that of mere promiscuity [*beilat zenut*].”<sup>76</sup> A procreative theology, such as that of the priestly school, would want to encourage sexual relations as potentially fertile, not discourage them as potentially sterile.

I would like to suggest an alternative to Milgrom’s assumption that any emission of semen or menstrual blood is defiling because of its

associations with death. Let us try a thought experiment: what would it look like if nonpathological genital fluids—menstrual blood and semen—were viewed not as inherently negative, but rather as forces of life?<sup>77</sup> Here, Greek sources may once again provide a helpful interpretation. Hippocrates compared menstruation with sacrifice, arguing that “the blood [of menstruation] flows like that of a sacrificed victim” (*choreei de haima hoion apo hieraiou*).<sup>78</sup> The medical logic behind his comparison is that menstrual blood is humorally hot, like the blood that spurts from the throat of a sacrificed animal. In Aristotle, the *psyche* or spirit of life is contained in this hot blood.<sup>79</sup> Helen King has suggested that, for the Greeks, a woman (*gyne*), as opposed to a prepubescent girl (*parthenos*), was defined by bleeding; a mature woman who did not bleed regularly was considered ill. Men, in contrast, were defined by the opposite: shedding blood in war or in sacrifices.<sup>80</sup> The alignment of mature women with sacrificial victims in Hippocratic body symbolism presents “their bleeding as an essential part of the life of the city.”<sup>81</sup> For, just as men sustain the city by their bloodletting activities, so women contribute to the city’s fertility by their own form of bleeding. The gods, however, fall outside of this political hematology, for they have no blood and therefore do not bleed. Artemis, the goddess of the hunt and of fertility, is a particular example of this divine difference: she does not bleed, but she sheds the blood of others, both as huntress and as director of the process by which a *parthenos* becomes a *gyne*.

Until the Hellenistic period, Greek sources did not treat menstrual bleeding as ritually polluting, as opposed to the blood of childbirth, which did prevent one from entering a sacred precinct.<sup>82</sup> It would be a mistake, though, to associate either the blood of childbirth or menstruation with death, which also caused ritual defilement in Greek religion. Quite on the contrary: again following King, both of these forms of female bleeding are necessary elements of fertility, which Greek religion regarded as inherent to the human, or profane, world and therefore segregated from the realm of the gods. The nonprocreating gods assure fertility: Artemis remains a virgin, as do her devotees, but by doing so they guarantee that profane sexuality will be fertile. For the same reason, sexual intercourse may not take place within a Greek temple (Herodotus claimed that only the Greeks and the Egyptians refrain from sex within their temples;<sup>83</sup> he left out the Israelites). That which is part of the natural order belongs in the profane world; the realm of the sacred, where humans commune with the gods, must be free of such activities, not because they are inherently devalued, but because they are quintessentially *human*.

Let us see how this interpretation of female blood in Greek religion might apply to the Bible. Given the priests' particular concern with fertility, it is hard to understand how they would view negatively a normal act of intercourse, although it is certainly possible that they might have considered aspects of sexuality or of the body—male or female—negatively (this common assumption remains, however, in need of proof). Far from a sign of death, in any case, menstruation was more likely a sign of life and fertility, since only when a woman begins to menstruate is she ready to conceive. And given that married women in biblical times spent most of their adult years either pregnant or lactating, the return of menstruation would signal, once again, their fertility: the ability to become impure on a regular basis is necessary for conception, just as abnormal bleeding indicates a pathology in the reproductive system. Conversely, the end of menstruation with menopause was a clear sign that a woman was no longer fertile. So the blood of childbirth should also be associated with the creation of new life, rather than with death. As Tikva Frymer-Kensky puts it: "The person who has experienced birth has been at the boundaries of life/non-life."<sup>84</sup> This same logic applies to men as well, since only when a man can ejaculate semen is he fertile, as the Bible proudly proclaims of Moses, who died at 120 and "his wetness had not abandoned him" (Deut. 34:7). Semen and menstrual and parturient blood all ought to be understood as part of the natural order created by God.

The suggestion that genital fluids ought to be associated with life rather than death finds support from the metaphoric prophecy in Ezekiel 16:6: "When I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you: 'Live in your blood,' yea, I said to you: 'Live in your blood.'" The prophet here sees the female child Israel lying abandoned in the blood of childbirth (referring to it as "your" blood is therefore misleading, since it is really the blood of the mother). The Jewish Publication Society translators of the Bible, perplexed by the meaning of the original, render the doubled blessing "live *in spite of* your blood." But this forced reading of the letter *bet* is unnecessary. Rather, it should be understood as an instrumental *bet*: "live *by means of* your blood." Female blood—the blood of menstruation and childbirth—is a vital fluid.

So is semen, which pollutes both partners in an act of intercourse. To be sure, the pollution of intercourse is the least defiling of all those listed in Leviticus 15: it only lasts until evening, requires no sacrifice, and affects only the two partners. But the act of intercourse still causes defilement, a puzzle until we recall that sexual relations may not take

place in God's sanctuary. Sexuality and everything connected to it belong to the profane world, as they do in Greek religion.<sup>85</sup> Given this view, it is no surprise that the prophetic literature denounces so vociferously those practices (real or imaginary) that involve sexual relations in cultic sites.

How might this thinking apply to the ban on sex with a menstruating woman? The following argument is necessarily speculative. If menstrual blood, like semen, was thought of as a procreative fluid, then it too had to be separated from cultic activity. And intercourse during a woman's menstrual period might produce a *double* impurity: the impurity of normal intercourse plus the impurity of contact with menstrual blood. This appears to be the reasoning behind the most stringent form of the prohibition in Leviticus 20:18: "If a man lies with a woman in her infirmity [*davah*] and uncovers her nakedness, he has uncovered her source [*mekorah*] and she has uncovered the source of her blood; both of them shall be cut off [*ve-nikhretu*] from among their people." The "source" of the blood is what must remain hidden, as it apparently is when she is not menstruating, even during intercourse. Menstrual bleeding by itself indicates that the source has been breeched, but it takes an act of intercourse to fully "reveal" it. This "revealing" (*gilui*) is therefore at once related to and different from the other sexual prohibitions, in which *gilui* means simply sexual relations. What is clear is that intercourse during the menses causes both partners to "reveal" (or "come into contact with") the source of female fertility. As one interpreter has argued, the punishment of *karet* (being "cut off from their people") for this infraction may be infertility.<sup>86</sup>

As in Greek religion, so in ancient Israel, fertility is assured by segregating the holy from the profane: no sex is allowed in sacred sites. God may be the source of fertility, but he does not engage in sexual relations, as do the gods of the Canaanites, and therefore one must not have sex in the divine precinct, as the prophets thought that the Canaanites did. Would it be too speculative to suggest that the same logic applies to sexual contact with the female source of fertility? Following Mary Douglas, female genital blood is a site of danger and impurity but also of power. If the body mirrors society (again according to Douglas), then the female body contains a sacred site. Like the profane "encroacher" who enters a cultic site and must be killed (Num. 1:51), those who engage in sex during menstruation encroach on sacred terrain and must suffer the appropriate punishment.

This theory of the meaning of the female body has an analogy in the beliefs of the Hua of the New Guinean highlands, as described by Anna Meigs: "The site of the body is the temple, the place where the awesome powers reside."<sup>87</sup> This is because the Hua do not have any particular theology: with no gods to be worshipped, the spiritual forces in the world are to be found in the body. It is a view that resonates with rabbinic Judaism, for whom the destruction of the temple meant the end of God's direct connection to the world, thus leaving the body as the temple's remnant.<sup>88</sup> For the Hua, the blood of menstruation and childbirth are viewed as at once the most polluting and the most creative bodily substances.<sup>89</sup> The argument I am proposing here suggests a similar dynamic in biblical religion: the polluting character of menstrual blood is a result of its procreative power, which comes from a sacred site within the female body.

Kathleen O'Grady has made an argument about the *niddah* (menstruating woman) in the Bible that offers support for this theory.<sup>90</sup> She shows that both the laws and the language pertaining to the *niddah* are remarkably similar to those concerning the *nazir* (Num. 6:1-21), the man or the woman who takes vows to abstain from grape products, to leave his or her hair unshorn, and to avoid contact with corpses. The roots *n-d-d* (which many assume is the underlying root of *n-d-h*) and *n-z-r* look strikingly alike and, in any case, have the same lexical meaning: to set aside or segregate. A nazir who has become defiled by a corpse (Num. 6:9 says that it is his hair that becomes defiled) must wait seven days and, on the eighth, bring two turtledoves or two pigeons to be sacrificed, one as a sin offering and one as a burnt offering. A woman who has abnormal bleeding must also wait seven days and then bring the same sacrifices (the language in Lev. 15:29-30 and Num. 6:10-11 is virtually identical). Drawing from James Frazer and Mary Douglas, O'Grady argues that the nazir and the *niddah* are not polar opposites (the one pure, the other polluted), but rather both are *taboos*, meaning persons who present a danger because they are consecrated or set apart.<sup>91</sup> O'Grady's equivalence between the nazir and the *niddah* needs qualification, however, since the first was clearly positive and the second, as we have seen, was negative. But seeing the menstruating woman as taboo in the sense of *powerful* because she is *polluted* opens up an entirely fresh way of attacking our problem.

If menstrual blood, like semen, was seen as a powerful fluid of procreation, then it constituted a danger to the sacred, but a danger that defined the boundary of the sacred. These fluids belonged to the profane realm, not because they represented the forces of death, but because they

were the forces of *human* life. O'Grady's conclusion puts it somewhat differently, perhaps better: "Menstrual blood, more clearly than any other taboo substance or state, is situated at an ambiguous semantic crossroads, expressing both the blood of life itself, the most sacred of substances, with the shedding of blood, in a 'sacrificial' gesture. Not surprisingly, this shifting valence between life and death requires ritual attention. Menstruation, in all its ambiguity, becomes the epitome or the ambivalent resonance (purity-impurity; sacred-unclean) imprinted in the linguistic container 'taboo.'" <sup>92</sup> Menstruation is its own form of bloody sacrifice, but a sacrifice that has to be kept out of the sacred sites, even as its very exclusion marks the boundary of the sacred.

We can now return to the question of why the authors of the Holiness Code made sex during menstruation a crime on the level of the sexual transgressions. One theory holds that H was simply uninterested in the ritual pollution issues that motivated P. But this explanation, even if true, still begs the question. A possible clue comes from Leviticus 15:31: "You shall set apart the Israelites from their impurity, lest they die through their impurity by polluting my Tabernacle which is among them."<sup>93</sup> This verse is understood by some to be an interpolation by H.<sup>94</sup> Either way, it constitutes a bridge between the ritual impurity of genital discharges and the moral defilement of the sexual prohibitions. Entering the tabernacle in a state of impurity leads to death at the hand of God. So, even though quite normal processes, such as sexual relations, create temporary impurity, the consequences of trespassing into a sacred site in such a state could be catastrophic. By extending the concept of purity beyond the tabernacle to include the land, H created a much larger circle of danger. Given this school's particular obsession with sexual ethics, it is not surprising that a sexual act might turn into the model for transmuting ritual pollution of the sanctuary into moral pollution of the land. Since it would be impossible, not to say self-contradictory, for a theology preoccupied with procreation to outlaw sexual relations *tout court*, H took the one act that was most like violation of a sacred site—sex during a woman's menstrual period—and used it as the basis for extending the purity laws throughout the land. For H, a woman's inner source is not only a bodily sanctuary; it is also a synecdoche for the land itself. And he who violates this temple necessarily defiles the land.

I do not wish for this interpretation to be misunderstood, for it to imply that the priests were somehow protofeminists. On the contrary, lacking a female priesthood, the male priests authored laws in both the

ritual and the moral codes that gave them the sole authority over female bleeding. If it is correct that the priests saw the female body as a temple in miniature, that view resulted in a dramatic loss of female autonomy: sacred sites were, after all, the dominion of priests. The menstrual laws must be seen, therefore, as part and parcel of the priests' demand for a monopoly on blood, a monopoly that indexed their political power in ancient Israel. If the menstruating woman possessed a certain inherent power through her pollution, the priests were intent on controlling that power themselves.

Thus, while the blood of all slaughtered domesticated animals must be properly disposed of inside God's temple, genital blood and semen belong outside. It is precisely the failure to maintain this division that characterizes idolatry in the biblical imagination: the idolaters consume the blood of animals as part of their rituals, just as they engage in sex within their cultic sites. For these reasons, their temples are defiled sites of abomination, sites of "menstrual impurity," and warnings of what the Israelites must avoid at all costs. And from idolatry it is but a short step to the shedding of human blood, as the psalmist charges Israel:

They did not destroy the nations as the Lord had commanded them, but mingled with the nations and learned their ways.  
They worshiped their idols which became a snare for them.  
Their own sons and daughters they sacrificed to demons  
They shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; So the land was polluted with bloodguilt. (Ps. 106: 34–38)

Thus, one form of ritual pollution, sex with a menstruating woman, became the synecdoche for all forbidden sex, which in turn came to stand for idolatry and murder. Taken together, all these sins, bound up as they were with various forms of bloodguilt, constituted cardinal violations of Israel's bond with God. And the covenant itself was effected by and maintained by blood.

#### COMMUNITY OF BLOOD

Chris Knight has suggested that in many hunter-gatherer cultures, as well as their successors, menstrual blood is linked to the blood spilled in the hunt. When women start bleeding, they go on a "sex strike" and send the men out to hunt. In his argument, women's menstrual practices are at the origins of culture, and the taboo on contact with a menstruating woman, so common in many cultures, stems originally

from an act of female rebellion.<sup>95</sup> Whatever the truth of this account, none of it remained, at least visibly, in Israelite culture. But one insight in Knight's account may be useful in connecting the different types of blood practices we have discussed: female bleeding and blood shed by men in sacrifice and in homicide (with the assumption that these are male domains) have a kind of equivalence. Menstruation, as we have seen, is both a source of pollution and a sign of fertility. Similarly, blood shed in animal sacrifice at the appropriate cultic site and with the proper disposal has enormous power to promote fertility of both land and people, as well as to atone for sins. In contrast, human blood spilled in acts of violence can pollute the land and bring down God's almost automatic vengeance. Blood connected to women and men, although different in nature, shares this dialectic in biblical culture.

All these forms of blood are essential to the relationship between Israel and God, a relationship sanctified by a covenant that is itself instituted by sacrifice. The first covenant between Abram and God (Gen. 15) is enacted by the "covenant of the pieces" (*berit ben ha-betarim*), in which Abram cuts a number of animals and birds in half. Perhaps significantly, the term here (and elsewhere) is to "cut" a covenant (*karat berit*—similar to the English expression "to cut a deal"); the same word is used for the punishment of "cutting-off" (*karet*). The meaning of this punishment is unclear in the Bible but is usually thought to refer to death at the hand of God. At least in the case of Leviticus 20, however, "cutting-off" may also mean "to be rendered infertile." The covenant that God "cuts" with Abram in Genesis 15 promises fertility; violating the covenant brings its opposite—both signified by the same word. In fact, it may be that the "covenant of the pieces" constitutes a warning: the violence done to the cut animals awaits those who would violate their pact with God. If so, then both covenant and its abrogation are bound up with bloodshed.

There are a variety of different signifiers of covenant in the Bible, such as circumcision (Gen. 17:11) and salt (Lev. 2:13). But in one curious passage, Exodus 24:6–8, covenant is signified—and perhaps also effected—by blood. Just before ascending Mount Sinai, Moses sacrifices bulls as offerings of well-being to the Lord: "Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins [*agganot*]. He threw half of the blood on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant and read it to the people and they said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do and obey.' Moses took the [other half of the] blood and threw it on the people, saying, 'Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made [*karat*] with



you concerning all these words [*devarim*—i.e., commandments].”<sup>96</sup> This is the only place in the Bible where Moses functions as a priest, and it is, significantly, a text that critics do not attribute to a priestly source. It is also the only sacrificial ritual where some of the blood is thrown on the people; in all others, it is disposed of on altars.<sup>97</sup> Clearly, this blood is meant to effect an initiation, an anointing of the people who are entering into covenant with God. In the priestly texts, we find blood used for purposes of anointment (together with oil), but limited to the anointing of Aaron and his sons (e.g., Ex. 29:19–21). In this case, the blood is mysteriously smeared on the right earlobe, the right thumb, and the right big toe of each priest (the same anointment is performed as part of the purification of the leper—see Lev. 14:25). Then blood and oil are sprinkled on them and their garments.

What might these strange rituals signify, and what can we learn from them about the singular act of enacting a covenant with the people by throwing blood on them? Part of the answer will come in chapter 2 in an exploration of the exegetical career of the verse in Exodus 24, but I will offer here some provisional suggestions about how blood functions in biblical covenant and anointment. Although the covenant of blood in Exodus 24 does not involve anointment in the priestly sense, the use of blood in the anointment of priests suggests asking what anointment meant generally in the biblical lexicon.<sup>98</sup> Anointment clearly sanctifies the person or the thing anointed, making the person or the thing capable of contact with the divine.

One way it does so is by providing protection against God’s overwhelming power. In David’s lament over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, he speaks of “the shield of Saul no longer anointed with oil” (2 Sam 1:21). The clear implication is that an anointed shield conveys protection; Saul’s shield, the shield of “the Lord’s anointed” no longer possesses this magical power. We may surmise that the anointment of priests serves a similar purpose. Entering the holy precinct exposes them to danger. If they are not properly purified, they may die: “When they [Aaron and his sons] enter the Tent of Meeting they shall wash with water, that they may not die; or when they approach the altar to serve, to turn into smoke an offering by fire to the Lord, they shall wash their hands and feet, that they may not die” (Ex. 30:20–21). What is true for purification by water must be even more true for anointment by the more precious blood and oil: they must convey protection against the divine power resident in the sanctuary. If this analysis is correct, then throwing blood on the altar, like the other uses of blood in the sacrificial

order, must be a means not only of purification and consecration but also of protection: that which is purified is protected against the divine wrath that operates almost mechanically against the encroachment of impurity into a sacred site.<sup>99</sup>

If throwing blood on the altar conveys protection, then so does throwing blood on the people. The covenant between God and Israel turns the people into “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6), although this specific language does not appear in Exodus 24. In other respects, however, the language of Exodus 19 is similar to that of Exodus 24: covenant is invoked and the people swear, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do” (19:8 and 24:7). Consecrated to God, the people, if they keep the laws and maintain their purity, can bring sacrifices with impunity to the cult, sacrifices that ensure their well-being and fertility. The covenant of blood, itself the product of a sacrifice, is therefore the necessary precondition for offering blood sacrifices. And although the covenant conveys divine protection and beneficence, murder, idolatry, and sexual violations all can shatter this promise.

The covenant of blood involves the drenching of the people in the blood of bulls, a ritual eerily reminiscent of the *taurobolium*, the cult of Attis and of the Magna Mater in which a bull would be slaughtered, its blood showering down onto an initiate crouched in a pit below.<sup>100</sup> We shall return to this ceremony in chapter 2. But because the ritual involves throwing half of the blood on the altar (that is, on God) and half on the people, it also suggests a “blood brotherhood” between God and his people. Such a blood brotherhood effected by the mixing of blood between members of the covenant is widely attested in the ancient Near East. Herodotus describes such a ritual among the Arabs: “A man stands between the two parties that would give security . . . and cuts with a sharp stone the palms of the hands of the parties; then he takes a piece of wool from the cloak of each and smears with the blood seven stones that lie between them, calling the while on Dionysos and the Heavenly Aphrodite.”<sup>101</sup> In the second century C.E., the church father Tertullian elaborated on Herodotus: “Concerning the eating of blood and other such tragic dishes, you read (I do not know where—it is in Herodotus, I think) that blood drawn from the arms and tasted by one another was the method of making covenant among certain nations.”<sup>102</sup>

That Herodotus may not have been inventing such blood covenants is attested by a wide variety of evidence from many cultures in which blood is mingled or even drunk as a sign of brotherhood.<sup>103</sup> It has even

been suggested that the rare Latin word *assiratum*, which signified a drink of blood and wine, may have its origin in the Semitic root *a-s-r*, which stands for *bond* or *covenant* in a number of languages, including Hebrew.<sup>104</sup> Finally, in an uncanny foreshadowing of the medieval blood libel, covenants sometimes even involved mixing bread with blood. An Egyptian ostrakon of the Ramesside period reads: "You mingled with 'Amu having eaten bread [mixed] with your blood."<sup>105</sup> This practice is attested in at least one other source: the weddings of gypsies in Great Britain in which "the bride and groom mixed blood from their wrists in flour which was baked into a cake and eaten by the two."<sup>106</sup> Although most wedding cakes are made of less gruesome ingredients, it may well be that the ritual drinking of wine at weddings represents a substitute for blood in the sealing of a compact between the marital partners.

The Israelite covenant of blood involved neither the drinking of blood nor the baking of bread made with blood.<sup>107</sup> Human blood played no role in it whatsoever. But if there were ancient Near Eastern rituals of blood brotherhood in which blood might be mingled or consumed, this would perhaps explain the vehemence with which our priestly texts reject the consumption of blood: blood was the covenantal solution, but, as Maimonides intuited, it must not be used after the fashion of the idolaters. That which they eat, Israel must not. The protective power of blood is anointed on the bodies of Israel and its priests, but its consecrating power works on the *outside* of their bodies. In contrast to the later Christian doctrine of the Eucharist, it is not what enters the body that makes it holy, but what is kept outside of it.

Following Ronald Hendel, just as in the Passover sacrifice, where the blood on the doorposts was a sign of God's protective covenant (Ex. 12:21–23), so the blood thrown on the people may have functioned, together with the sacrificial system as a whole, as "a reminder of the bond that links the Israelites with their God."<sup>108</sup> Like Geller, Hendel understands the priestly use of blood as a kind of performance in which communication with God is enacted. The blood on the altar is a visible reminder of the ongoing covenantal relationship with God. But the communicative function of blood does not, as Hendel admits, exhaust its meanings. The throwing of blood on both the Israelites and the altar is not only a *sign* of the covenant, but, as Martin Noth has argued, actually *creates* the covenant.<sup>109</sup>

By the proper use of blood, Israel becomes a "blood community," that is, a community constituted through its sacrificial relationship to its God. Here, the meaning of "blood community" is very far from

what it was to become in the age of modern nationalism, namely, a nation based on common racial origins. To be sure, ancient Israel also had its myth of a common tribal identity, going back to the patriarchs and their sons. But the covenant of blood suggests that the nation was based on ritual actions at least as much as on ancestry. By properly disposing of blood in all its guises and avoiding the blood transgressions that polluted the land, the members of the nation were bound to each other, as well as to their land and to their God.

Despite the centrality of blood in this national culture, biblical religion contained the seeds of its own negation. The prophet Isaiah, in his critique of the sacrificial system, suggested that the “blood of bulls” is not necessary to atone for sin. If one acts justly, “be your sins like crimson, they can turn snow-white; be they red as dyed wool, they can become like fleece” (Isa. 1:18). Sin may be the same color as blood, but not only blood can turn it “snow-white.” Without exaggerating the dichotomy between priests and prophets, here was a challenge to the monopoly of the sacrificial system that the priestly schools had articulated in their legal texts. And once the temple sacrifices ended and the people were exiled from the land, the red symbol that glued the system together also dissolved, leaving its practitioners in search of new interpretations of their covenant of blood.

## Blood and the Covenant

### *The Jewish and Christian Careers of a Biblical Verse*

The destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. radically challenged the “blood cult” that stood at the heart of biblical religion. How could a sacrificial religion preserve its central practices when it no longer had the physical facility to offer sacrifices? If blood in the Bible was a signifier that “indexed” the power of the temple priests, what role did it play when priests no longer served as the primary religious and political authorities? And how could such a religion demonstrate that it deserved recognition as a religion in the Greco-Roman world, which continued to be dominated by blood sacrifices until the late-fourth century? (The sacrifices were finally banned by Emperor Theodosius.) These were challenges faced in different ways by rabbis and church fathers, even as the two groups competed to show that their tradition was the chosen one of God.

As we saw in chapter 1, Steven Geller has argued that the blood cult of the priests fed into Christianity, which, although its origins predated the destruction of the temple by a generation, nevertheless came to represent a spiritualized substitute for sacrifice. Geller claims that the Deuteronomic transformation of sacrifice into textuality found its proper home in rabbinic Judaism, which also offered a nonsacrificial alternative to the temple cult. Indeed, on the “eating” of blood, Judaism and Christianity clearly parted company: whereas Judaism retained the biblical horror at consumption of blood, Christianity ultimately made the “eating” of its founder and the “drinking” of his blood a central sacrament.

In this chapter I want to examine whether the blood discourse of the Bible really did result in two different trajectories, the Christian and the rabbinic. I will suggest that such a radical distinction between these two religious formations is not borne out by the evidence. The fathers of the early church often turned the sacrifice of Jesus into a textual memorial, rather than an event to be literally repeated. And conversely, the rabbis never abandoned the actual sacrifices, even as they sought alternatives to them. Rabbinic Judaism had certain features of a blood cult, in theory if not in practice. Guy G. Stroumsa has suggested that late antique Judaism and Christianity were both “sacrificial religions without blood sacrifices.”<sup>1</sup> Each of them “spiritualized” sacrifice in distinctive ways but also developed physical practices that substituted for sacrifice. In addition, although the pagan world of pre-Christian Rome was, of course, a world of blood sacrifice, Greco-Roman philosophers leveled their own critiques of sacrifice, some even seeing in Judaism a worthy model of a religion without a temple.<sup>2</sup> The “end of sacrifice” in Western religion was therefore a complex and dialectical process rather than an abrupt caesura.

My discussion starts with a premise that a number of researchers have recently advanced: for at least the first four centuries of the Common Era, both Judaism and Christianity developed in close interaction—dialogue and polemic—with each other.<sup>3</sup> The so-called parting of the ways happened over a long period of time, and the relevant familial metaphor for the two traditions was not “mother-daughter,” but two siblings, perhaps even fraternal twins. In fact, one might extend the metaphor further and argue that the two were really *identical* twins: one embryo that later split into two. Rather than the “elder” giving rise to the “younger,” the two developed side-by-side in the wake of the temple’s destruction and the Christianization of the Roman Empire. Instead of splitting off from an already-existing Judaism, orthodox Christianity developed in parallel to rabbinic Judaism, itself a “Second Testament” in its relationship to the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, Seth Schwartz goes so far as to argue that it was Christianity that provoked the “rejudaization” of Palestine after around 350 C.E.<sup>4</sup> The scholarly consensus seems now to be that the boundaries between Judaism and Christianity were fuzzy and their identities unclear until perhaps as late as the fourth century, despite the repeated efforts of the church fathers and rabbis to define orthodoxy as against heresy.

Nevertheless, in the argument I make here, my goal is not primarily to identify lines of influence between Judaism and Christianity (except where they can actually be proven), especially since some of the texts

we will consider came from Babylonia, where the dominant culture was not Christian. Instead, I will attempt to show *parallel* attempts to respond to two related problems in common: how to construct a religion without sacrifice when each tradition had its origins in ritualized spilling of blood, and how to do so in a pagan world in which either sacrifice was still the dominant form of worship or the memory of sacrifice was still quite fresh.

To examine this parallel development, I will take up the text from Exodus 24, considered at the end of chapter 1, dealing with “the blood of the covenant.” Although blood was central to the sacrificial cult of ancient Israel, the explicit association of blood with the covenant between Israel and God appears only twice in the Bible (Ex. 24:8 and Zech. 9:11). In fact, the Exodus 24 description of Moses throwing blood on the people does not fit easily into the so-called documents of the Pentateuch, and certainly not into those of the priestly school. The strange incident left seemingly little trace in later biblical literature, with the exception of Zechariah’s puzzling apocalyptic reference to “you who have released your prisoners from the pit for the sake of the blood of your covenant.”<sup>5</sup> Yet, surprisingly, rabbis and church fathers were both drawn to the Exodus text, using it to establish their claim to a covenant when the original form of sacrifice—animal sacrifices for the Jews and the sacrifice of Jesus for the Christians—lay in the past. The converging and diverging ways that rabbis and church fathers interpreted this perplexing text will reveal a great deal about both the similarities and the differences between the two developing traditions.

The text raised many issues for those who adopted it as holy writ, but three merit our particular attention. First, does the covenant between God and his chosen people require blood, and if so, is it actual blood or some symbolic substitute? Both traditions found solutions to this dilemma by turning their own nonsacrificial practices into memorials of the original blood covenant. Second, if Exodus 24 describes a ritual of initiation in which half the blood of sacrificed bulls is poured on an altar and half is thrown on the people, what implications does the text have for later initiation rites in rabbinic Judaism and Christianity, in particular circumcision and baptism? I will argue that the two traditions both entertained and contested scandalous ideas of initiation, not in water, but in blood. The idea of baptism in blood is connected to the third issue: the way martyrdom became a substitute for animal sacrifice, with the blood of the martyrs serving as a vehicle for affirming one’s faith and for bringing divine redemption.

Since the text of Exodus 24:3–8 will be so central to our discussion, here it is, again, in its entirety:

Moses went and said to the people all the words of the Lord [YHWH] and all the rules; and all the people answered with one voice, saying, “All the things that the Lord has said we will do.” Moses then wrote down all the words of the Lord. And he arose early in the morning and set up an altar at the foot of the mountain, with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. He sent young men from among the Israelites, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed bulls as offerings of well-being to the Lord. Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins [*agganot*]. He threw half of the blood on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant and read it to the people and they said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do and obey.” Moses took the [other half of the] blood and threw it on the people, saying “Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made [*karat*] with you concerning all these words [*devarim*—i.e., commandments].”

Here is a text in which blood and a book are conjoined: the act of reading is followed immediately by throwing blood on the people.

Significantly enough, though, this is the only place in the Bible that blood is “thrown” or in any other fashion put on the people as a whole (as opposed to merely “daubing” it on priests).<sup>6</sup> This oddity was clearly troubling to ancient and medieval commentators. Some ancient versions of the text,<sup>7</sup> as well as medieval exegetes, such as Rashi, modified “thrown” (*zaraq*) to “sprinkled,” using a variety of verbs—either in Hebrew or in translation—other than the one in what would appear to be the original text. Another strategy, which can be found in the Targum Onkolos and Pseudo-Jonathan, also suggests unease with the literal meaning: instead of Moses throwing blood “on” the people, the preposition *al* is rendered “on behalf of the people.” It is this anxiety over what would appear to be the plain sense of the text and such strategies of displacement that I wish to follow in early Christian and rabbinic literature. Although the following discussion takes the exegetical career of Exodus 24:3–8, the covenant of blood, as its springboard, I want to claim that the way this text was understood uncovers the larger meanings of blood in the mentalities of Jews and Christians in late antiquity and, by extension, into the Middle Ages.

## THE SECOND TEMPLE BACKGROUND

Whatever the biblical text might have meant in its original setting—itself uncertain—it attracted a number of reinterpretations in the Second



Temple period before the rise of Christianity and rabbinic Judaism. In a sense, the reworking of biblical materials during these centuries before the Common Era (some refer to this as “the second Bible”) must be considered part and parcel of the scriptural tradition that later interpreters—Jewish and Christian—inherited. We will consider two that anticipate later exegesis, although their direct influence is hard to prove definitively. The earliest text of that period to take up Exodus 24:3–8 is the book of *Jubilees*, a work found in its entirety only in Ethiopic, but fragments of which were discovered in Qumran.<sup>8</sup> Some have dated *Jubilees* to the mid-second century B.C.E., the early Hasmonean period. *Jubilees* is sometimes labeled a “sectarian” work, probably a misnomer. It certainly does not conform to later rabbinic norms, but it may not have been sectarian when written, since we have no certain knowledge of what was normative in Hasmonean times. The book is an address by an angel to Moses while he is on Mount Sinai, giving a kind of “backstage” interpretation of God’s revelation. The address is based on the Bible but introduces all sorts of new characters, including a slew of angels and demons, and modifications of both stories and laws. The author demands total separation from non-Jews as well as other stringencies.

One of the author’s obsessions (the word is not overwrought) is blood, especially the prohibition on eating blood (*Jub.* 5:7–14, 7:29–33, 11:2, 21:6–7, and 21:17–19).<sup>9</sup> *Jubilees* 6:11–17 grounds the covenant of Exodus 24 in God’s original prohibition to Noah on eating blood.<sup>10</sup> In fact, as that text suggests, *Jubilees* seems to regard the very essence of the covenant to be the prohibition on the consumption of blood, the one commandment that outweighs all the others:

Therefore he [God] spoke to you [Moses] so that you also might make a covenant with the children of Israel with an oath this month upon the mountain. And you will sprinkle blood on them on account of all the words of the covenant which the Lord made with them for all time. This testimony is written concerning you so that you might keep it always lest you ever eat any blood of the beasts or birds or cattle throughout all of the days of the earth. And the man who eats the blood of the beasts or cattle or birds throughout all of the days of the earth shall be uprooted, he and his seed from the earth. And you, command the children of Israel not to eat any blood so that their names and seed might be before the Lord God always. They shall keep it for their generations so that they might make supplication on your behalf with blood before the altar on every day. And at the hour of daybreak and evening they will seek atonement on their own behalf continually before the Lord. Therefore, it is ordained and written in the heavenly tablets that they should observe the feast of *Shavuot* [“weeks” or, alternatively,

*Shevuot*—“oaths”] in this month, once per year, in order to renew the covenant. (*Jub.* 6:11–17)

What the author of *Jubilees* has done is to conflate the Exodus 24 covenant of blood with the priestly prohibition on eating blood, a connection that is hardly biblical. As William Gilders suggests, the author of *Jubilees*, basing himself on an interpretation of the Noahide covenant in Genesis, seems to have understood the prohibition on consumption of blood to stand for the larger prohibition on bloodshed and thus for a fundamental principle of the covenant between Israel and God.<sup>11</sup> The throwing or sprinkling of blood on the people is a reminder that they should not eat blood, but should rather reserve it “for supplication” or “atonement” on the altar. Neither of these ideas appears in Exodus 24, although blood is, of course, an atoning substance in the Levitical code. The blood that Moses sprinkles is not itself atoning, an idea that we will encounter later, but it signifies the fact that the blood of sacrifices is intended for rituals of atonement.

Another innovation of *Jubilees* is to connect the holiday of Shavuot, which appears primarily as an agricultural and pilgrimage holiday in the Bible, to the revelation of the Torah, in this respect anticipating rabbinic tradition.<sup>12</sup> *Jubilees* ambiguously renders the holiday that is generally understood as the festival of “Weeks,” symbolizing seven weeks after Passover, as either Weeks or Oaths (*shevuot*—since the word is unvocalized in the Ethiopic, as in Hebrew, and could mean either). Oaths would certainly fit the intention of *Jubilees*, since the author understands the covenant as an oath not to drink blood, thus taking one small law and inflating it into the essence of God’s commandments. Moreover, for *Jubilees*, he who eats blood will be “uprooted,” presumably the biblical *karet*, a punishment that the Bible threatens for all kinds of infractions, including the eating of blood. As mentioned in chapter 1, one possible interpretation of *karet* is a divine curse of infertility, so that only the avoidance of blood will guarantee the fertility of the nation.<sup>13</sup>

*Jubilees* adds yet another innovation to biblical law: “And let there not be seen any blood upon you or your garments” (21:17). This admonition has no basis in biblical law and clearly contradicts the bloody business in Exodus 24:8. Perhaps *Jubilees* reconciled that text with its prohibition as follows: if Moses was allowed to stain the garments of the Israelites at Sinai, the Exodus 24 covenant was a one-time event, commemorated by the holiday of Shavuot but not, in any way, to be

replicated. This idea of commemoration became central to both later rabbinic and patristic ways of understanding bloody sacrifices in general. But why the bloodstains on garments or on one's body should arouse such horror remains unexplained. As we shall see, later texts, such as Revelation, found in divine garments "soaked in blood" signs of the messianic redemption and thus the diametric opposite of the *Jubilees* perspective. If the Exodus 24 tradition suggested to some an initiation ritual—a kind of "baptism in blood"—then *Jubilees* was staking out a position against such a perceived scandal.

Why was the author of *Jubilees* so repulsed by the consumption of blood and even staining one's clothes with it, so that he came back to it repeatedly and vehemently, making it, in a sense, the centerpiece of the book's worldview? Could it reflect actual rituals—unknown to us—of which the author disapproved, in the temple or in popular culture? Little evidence can be adduced for any such practices. But the author of *Jubilees* was not alone in this horror at the consumption of blood. The so-called *Covenant of Damascus*, a sectarian document discovered in the Cairo Geniza, fragments of which were also found in Qumran, specifically quotes *Jubilees*. The *Covenant* holds that the Israelites ate blood in the wilderness and that is why they died there.<sup>14</sup>

Another pseudepigraphic and apocalyptic contemporaneous text, *1 Enoch*, shares some features with *Jubilees*.<sup>15</sup> In one passage, the angels mate with "the daughters of men" (Gen. 6:1–4) and produce giants who commit all manner of sins, including cannibalism and the drinking of blood (*1 En.* 7:5), even though in another passage they are said not to eat or drink anything at all (*15:11*). These demons represent the archenemies of the Watchers, who will be saved at the messianic judgment. Demons therefore consume blood, whereas the righteous refrain from doing so. In a similar midrash on the origins of humanity, the apocryphal *Life of Adam and Eve* relates how Eve reports the following dream to Adam after the birth of Cain and Abel: "My Lord, while I was sleeping I saw a vision—as if the blood of our son Abel was in the hand of Cain [who was] gulping it down in his mouth."<sup>16</sup> Like the giants in *Enoch*, Cain here represents the demons, whose main characteristic is that they are literally bloodthirsty.

Could this horror at consumption of blood have been a reaction to the willingness of non-Jews in the vicinity, including Greeks, to eat blood as a cultic practice or as part of their normal cuisine? Once again, we have no specific evidence of such practices. But even if they did not actually exist, it is possible that imagining that they did fit the

purpose of these extremely nationalistic texts. As with the Bible's association of blood consumption with the worship of idolatrous "goat demons," so *Jubilees's* horror at eating blood fits well its extreme xenophobia, expressed primarily in its violent denunciation of intermarriage: "And if there is any man in Israel who wishes to give his daughter or his sister to any man who is from the seed of the gentiles, let him surely die, and let him be stoned because he has caused shame in Israel. And also the woman will be burned with fire because she has defiled the name of her father's house and so she will be uprooted from Israel" (*Jub.* 30:7–8).<sup>17</sup> The text goes on for ten more verses to further excoriate in bloodcurdling detail those who might be tempted to intermarry. While it is hard to determine exactly the *Sitz im Leben* of this other obsession of the author of *Jubilees*, it may well have been a response to both the ethnic conflicts and the intermarriages of the Hasmonean period. The Hasmonean period was one in which the Judeans dominated their neighbors, and the very intermingling with other peoples may have been deeply disturbing to religious purists. The author's warning that those who eat blood and intermarry will be "uprooted" is a sign of this fear (paranoia?) of the demise of the nation, in danger of being swallowed up, as it were, by the bloodthirsty demons surrounding Israel.

A century or two after *Jubilees* was written, Philo of Alexandria offered a novel interpretation of Exodus 24:8, especially in light of later exegesis, both Jewish and Christian:

Why did Moses take that blood which was in the mixing bowls and sprinkle [it] over the people? By indicating that the blood of all [was] the same and that their kinship [was] the same, he wishes to show that in a certain way they were animated by one idea and nature, for on many occasions he puts the blood in the same class as the soul [*tes psycheis*]. Even if they are separated from one another by their bodies, they are nevertheless united by mind and thought, and they share together the divine sacrifices and victims, being brought from estrangement to community and to the concord [unity?] of distinguished blood.<sup>18</sup>

In good Neoplatonic fashion, Philo seeks to resolve the tension between individuated physical bodies and their unity in the divine Logos. Here it is the blood of the bulls that constitutes the unifying element: since the blood is the soul of the bulls, it can symbolize the collective soul of Israel. The sacrifices in their metaphoric meaning therefore serve to create spiritual community, even though they themselves are completely physical. But Philo's language is, I think, purposely ambiguous: the sacrifices

are not merely metaphors: they create community in *both* their physical and their spiritual forms, a position that would certainly make sense when the sacrifices were still taking place in Jerusalem.

Philo, of course, famously allegorized the Bible in general and the sacrifices specifically.<sup>19</sup> Sacrifice becomes an allegory for the soul's progress toward God.<sup>20</sup> With regard to the blood of sacrifice, he writes: "The blood of the sacrificed victims is a sign of the souls which are consecrated to God."<sup>21</sup> The souls of the animals, in a kind of allegorical rendering of the theory of substitution, therefore signify the human souls who devote themselves to God. Philo clearly regarded the sacrifices as problematic by themselves if not accompanied by "the true purity of a rational spirit in him who makes the sacrifice."<sup>22</sup> The altar for incense represents this spirit, and therefore "the thank-offering of incense [is] superior to that of the blood of beasts."<sup>23</sup> But Philo did not go so far as to discard the literal meaning of the commandments, as did more radical members of the Alexandrian Jewish community whom he describes.<sup>24</sup> Blood is not only a *symbol* of the soul, for the Bible claims, as Philo notes, that it *is* the soul. The physical substance is also spiritual and therefore has the capacity to mediate between the separate physical bodies of the Israelites and their spiritual community, their unified *logos*, a formulation that would certainly make Philo relevant to the later Christian church.

How can it be that the blood Moses throws on the people, which is from bulls and not from the people, nevertheless symbolizes their own kinship as people sharing the same blood? Philo explains why in greater detail in the next section: "Why does he say further, 'Behold the blood of the covenant?' Because the blood is a symbol [*symbolon*] of family kinship. And the form of kinship is twofold: one is that among men, which has its origin in ancestors, while that among souls has its origin in wisdom. Now he did not mention the kinship of ancestors and offspring, because it is also common to irrational animals, but the other [kind of kinship] as from a root grew wisdom."<sup>25</sup> Here Philo seems to move decisively away from an ethnic or blood-kinship definition of the community of Israel. If the people of Israel shared only the blood of their ancestors, they would be no different from animals, and, as he says further along in the passage, they would be polytheists. Rather, sharing the sacrifices and sprinkling the blood constitute a community bound by wisdom, which is the essence of the revealed laws. Philo turns out surprisingly to have been more uncomfortable with the definition of the Jewish nation as a tribal *ethnos* than he was with bloody sacrifices,

however allegorized and qualified. It is perhaps no wonder, then, that some of his arguments would resurface in the early Christian tradition, which was responsible for preserving him, for it was Christianity, at least in its Pauline version, that wanted to reconstruct biblical Judaism on a nonethnic basis. It is therefore to early Christianity and its version of Exodus 24:8 that we now turn.

#### THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Gospel of John contains the most radical version of the Eucharist, the teaching that the very flesh and blood of Christ is redemptive:<sup>26</sup> “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him” (John 6:53–56). In John, the drinking of blood, which was absolute anathema to *Jubilees*—as well as to the Bible itself—became a core principle of Christianity. To be sure, just how literally John meant his doctrine of the Eucharist remains uncertain, since, when challenged by his disciples, Jesus says that “it is the spirit that gives life, the flesh has nothing to offer” (John 6:63). It is the *words* of Jesus that constitute the spirit, not his actual flesh and blood.

If John should not be taken literally, this was even more true of the synoptic Gospels, which—as opposed to John—rely directly on the Exodus 24 phrase, “blood of the covenant.” The Synoptics are probably based on sources from before the destruction of the temple, and, as Jonathan Klawans argues, the early Christians did not oppose the temple sacrifices.<sup>27</sup> In fact, even in their final, postdestruction formulations, the Synoptics do not describe the Eucharist as a substitute for defunct temple sacrifices. But in invoking the language of Exodus 24, they do at least gesture toward sacrifice.

The oldest gospel, Mark, has perhaps the simplest version and the one closest to our text. Giving his disciples the cup of wine, Jesus declares: “This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, which is to be poured out for many” (Mark 14:24). Now the blood that Moses had thrown on the people is instead drunk in the form of wine, which the Hebrew Bible calls the “blood of the grape” (Deut. 32:14). As we shall see, it would be a mistake to read this text, as well as other Eucharistic texts from the New Testament and patristic periods, as if they already

contained the full medieval dogma of transubstantiation. Mark, for instance, may well mean that the wine symbolizes Jesus's blood rather than embodying it.

That the passage in Mark should not be understood as actual consumption of Jesus's blood gains credence from Luke: "Then he took some bread and when he had given thanks, broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body which will be given for you; do this as a memorial of me.' He did the same with the cup after supper and said, 'This is the new covenant in my blood which will be poured out for you'" (Luke 22:19–20). Here, Luke mixes Exodus 24 with Jeremiah 31:31, the prophecy of a new covenant, albeit without any blood connection. But the bread and wine are *memorials* (*anamnesis* in the Greek or *commemorationes* in the Vulgate's rendering), symbols for remembering Jesus's sacrifice.<sup>28</sup> Paul's understanding of the Eucharist (1 Cor. 11:23–25) has the same formulation, which suggests that it was a very old one.

As already stated, the language Mark and Luke use is not specifically sacrificial in any technical sense, but the echoes of our Exodus passage suggest sacrifice. As Klawans persuasively argues, what we have here is not the "spiritualization" of sacrifice, but rather the borrowing of sacrificial language for a ritual with a similar purpose. Matthew's version, which follows Mark more closely than Luke, makes the sacrificial dimension more explicit by adding a new element reminiscent of *Jubilees*: "Drink all of you from this . . . for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant,<sup>29</sup> which is to be poured out for many for the forgiveness of sin" (Matt. 26:27–28). Now atonement becomes an essential aspect of the blood of the covenant, an aspect that, as we have seen, is absent from Exodus 24 but is already present in *Jubilees*. So the blood thrown on the people to effect the covenant now becomes the blood of Jesus, shed for the forgiveness of sin.

This is the position of the pseudo-Pauline Letter to the Hebrews, the most extensive Christian interpretation of Exodus 24 (one might even call it a midrash). Hebrews is a text that is often dated to just before the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. (but an argument could be made for a postdestruction dating as well). Written most likely by a Christian in Rome to a congregation of Jewish Christians, probably in Syria, it seeks to persuade them, among other things, that the death of Jesus definitively replaces Jewish rituals of animal sacrifice. The text operates with sacerdotal language. Melchizedek, the high priest of Shalem (Gen. 14:18), but not from the tribe of Levi, receives tithes from Abraham. He

therefore becomes the prefiguration for Jesus as a non-Levitical priest (Heb. 7:4–14). Jesus is represented as a new form of high priest, modeled on his prefiguration, who does “not need to offer sacrifices every day as the other high priests do for their own sins and then for those of the people, because he has done this once and for all by offering himself (Heb. 7:27).” This is a high priest who paradoxically sacrifices himself and thereby establishes a new covenant, a new law, and a new heavenly temple. In Hebrews the efficacy of temple sacrifice is criticized; the earthly temple has vanished but is now replaced by a more efficacious and permanent alternative.<sup>30</sup>

Like the covenant of Exodus 24, the new covenant is sealed by blood, but this time by the blood of Christ:

He [Jesus] brings a new covenant, as the mediator, only so that the people who were called to an eternal inheritance may actually receive what was promised: his death took place to cancel the sins that infringed the earlier covenant. Now wherever a will is in question, the death of the testator must be established. . . . That explains why even the earlier covenant needed something to be killed in order to take effect and why, after Moses had announced all the commandments of the Law to the people, he took the calves' blood, the goats' blood and some water and with these he sprinkled the book itself and all the people, using scarlet wool and hyssop, saying as he did so: “This is the blood of the covenant that God has laid down for you.” After that he sprinkled the Tent and all the liturgical vessels with blood in the same way. In fact, according to the Law almost everything has to be purified with blood and if there is no shedding of blood, there is no atonement. . . . And he does not have to offer himself again and again, like the high priest going into the sanctuary year after year with the blood that is not his own. . . . Instead of that, he has made his appearance once and for all, now at the end of the last age, to do away with sin by sacrificing himself. (Heb. 9:15–27)

The first thing we notice is what a hodgepodge the writer of the Letter has made of Exodus 24:8. Instead of the blood of bulls, there is the blood of calves and goats. Moses combines this blood with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop—additions taken from the Red Heifer ritual of Numbers 19—and sprinkles not only the people, but also the book.<sup>31</sup> He then sprinkles the tent and the liturgical vessels, but not, as in Exodus, the altar. Everything is topsy-turvy. Why? It seems unlikely that the author was ignorant of the biblical text, but perhaps he did not have it in front of him. Since the focus of this passage is the necessity of shedding blood in order to perform atonement, he has taken the liberty of mixing in atonement sacrifices, as they appear in Leviticus, with the



Red Heifer, which, although not an atonement for sin, is a purification ritual for someone who has touched a corpse.

Another interesting feature of the passage is that the author accepts the biblical view that blood is an essential feature of rites of atonement, an idea we have encountered in *Jubilees*, but which is not explicitly stated in the Hebrew Bible, with the exception of Leviticus 17:11. There we are told that the blood, which is the life, is given to atone or ransom (*le-kapper*) for “your lives.”<sup>32</sup> As we have discussed in chapter 1, whether this means atonement for killing an animal for food, as Jacob Milgrom argues, or has a more general meaning remains unclear. It is that very lack of clarity that makes the statement in Hebrews so interesting, for the author, possibly following the tradition in *Jubilees*, has no doubt that atonement necessitates bloodletting: “if there is no shedding of blood, there is no atonement,” a phrase that the text uses as if it were biblical, which it is not.

In addition, Hebrews uses a word for “shedding of blood”—*haimatekchysia*—that appears here for the first time and is not attested in either the Septuagint or elsewhere in the New Testament.<sup>33</sup> Employing this Greek neologism, Hebrews neglects to refer to the primary ways in which blood is used for atonement in the Bible: either pouring or sprinkling it on the altar. For Hebrews, then, it is the very shedding of the blood of the sacrifice, much more than how it is deployed afterward, that constitutes the act necessary for atonement.<sup>34</sup>

Since the Letter writer understands the role of blood in the Bible as atoning and accepts this role as still valid (or knows that his readers will consider it still valid), he makes an argument that the blood of Christ is fundamentally different—as one might expect—from the blood of animals. The blood of animals turns out to be only weakly efficacious in effecting atonement: it has to be shed every day. The power of Christ’s divine/human sacrifice is that it is permanent. But it is also the blood of God incarnate, and so, unlike human blood spilled through violence, this blood requires no vengeance or capital punishment (the Jews’ notorious pronouncement in Matt. 27:25—“his blood be on us and on our children”—is therefore absurd in terms of Hebrews’s theology). The sacrifice of Jesus is a one-time, permanent event, a position that caused some of the church fathers to interpret the Eucharist not as the real presence of Jesus, but, in line with Luke, as a memorial, much as *Jubilees* understood the holiday of Shavuot as a memorial of the original covenant.

Hebrews’s invocation of Exodus 24 also presumes that blood must be shed in order to effect a covenant. This is an argument that the writer

couches in the legal language of inheritance: a will can take effect only when one can establish the death of the testator. The Greek term that appears here for covenant is *diatheke*, which was already used by the Septuagint in translating Exodus 24:8 (“the book of the covenant,” *biblion tes diatheke*). But in classical Greek, *diatheke* can also mean a will or testament.<sup>35</sup> The author of Hebrews therefore used the metaphor of the will of a testator, since the Greek word for covenant included this meaning in its semantic field: the New Covenant, like the Old, required a death in order to go into effect. But while the Old was established by the death of animals, the New is effected by the death of Christ, in both cases deaths that require the spilling of blood. That is, if the proof text for the Old Covenant is the blood of the covenant in Exodus 24, we can infer from the author’s use of the same proof text that Christ’s blood establishes the New Covenant.

#### PATRISTIC INTERPRETATIONS

When the early church fathers came to interpret this passage in Hebrews and its relationship to Exodus 24, they typically spiritualized the blood cult of both the Old and New Testaments. For example, in the fourth century, John Chrysostom of Antioch rendered Exodus 24 as a “type” prefiguring the New Covenant. Just as there was blood in the Old Testament, so there is blood in the New. Chrysostom was clearly aware that Hebrews’ reworking of Exodus 24 was highly inaccurate, and he used this inaccuracy as the warrant for a highly allegorical interpretation. Needing an explanation for the book and the liturgical vessels that were sprinkled with blood in Hebrews, but not in Exodus, he asks: “Where then is ‘the book’? He purified their minds. They themselves then were the books of the New Testament. But where are ‘the vessels of the ministry?’ They are themselves.”<sup>36</sup> The book and the vessels are to be taken metaphorically: they symbolize the members of the church, who become, as it were, the books of the New Covenant and the vessels of a spiritual temple. Indeed, the church itself *is* the temple.

Even the wool and the hyssop cannot be understood literally, which is Chrysostom’s explanation for why they appear in Hebrews at all:

But they were not sprinkled with “scarlet wool” nor yet “with hyssop.” Why was this? Because the cleansing was not bodily but spiritual, and the blood was spiritual. How? It flowed not from the body of irrational animals, but from the body prepared by the Spirit. With this blood not Moses but Christ sprinkled us, through the word which was spoken: “This

is the blood of the New Testament, for the remission of sins.” This word, instead of hyssop, having been dipped in the blood, sprinkles all . . . here, since the purifying is spiritual, it enters into the soul and cleans it, not being simply sprinkled over, but gushing forth in our souls. . . . But in the case of the soul, it [the repeated cleansing of the outward body with blood] is not so, but the blood is mixed with its very substance, making it vigorous and pure.<sup>37</sup>

Just as the members of the church become the books of the New Testament and the temple itself, so the blood of the New Covenant is actually the words of the text. The church turns the “blood of the covenant” into textuality, a move that we shall find in rabbinic Judaism as well with respect to the sacrifices.<sup>38</sup> The purification is spiritual, that is, purification of the soul rather than the outside of the body. In this way, it actually combines with the blood that is the life-soul of the believer. A synergy results between the spiritualized blood of Christ’s sacrifice and the “very substance” of the Christian, making her or his soul “vigorous and pure.” This spiritualized understanding of the blood of the covenant suggests how far Chrysostom was from the kind of literalism represented by the medieval doctrine of the “real presence” of Christ in the Eucharist.<sup>39</sup>

The transformation of the body and blood of Jesus into textuality was a move with great resonance, especially, as Derek Krueger has demonstrated, in later Byzantine Christianity.<sup>40</sup> The sixth-century liturgical hymnist Romanos the Melodist retells the Gospel story of Peter’s denial of Jesus by having Jesus say:

. . . having taken in [my hand] a reed, I am starting to write  
a pardon for all Adam’s descendants.  
My flesh, which you see, becomes for me like paper  
and my blood like ink, where I dip my pen and write.<sup>41</sup>

Christ’s blood is atoning because it becomes the ink of the Christian Testament.

This kind of spiritualization of Christ’s blood we can also find in Ambrose, who was, like Chrysostom, a fourth-century church father, but from the Latin West. The text relevant for our purpose is one of his letters to the priest Simplicianus. The letter is a commentary on Exodus 24 and particularly on Moses’s division of the blood into two parts. He argues that the part that is sprinkled on the altar is “mystical, because it is granted, by the favor and inspiration of heaven, that human minds conceive fitting ideas of God.” It is this mystical action that he ties to the later blood of Jesus. Much more interesting, however, is what Ambrose

does with the blood Moses puts in the bowls. Ignoring completely the throwing of the blood on the people, he claims, like Philo, that this blood stands for moral wisdom and is “put in basins, taken there from and consumed” (*quae mittitur in crateras, et ex illis percipitur atque hauritur*).<sup>42</sup>

Ambrose clearly did not intend actual drinking (if that is what *hauritur* means in this context) of the blood, because his whole interpretation is allegorical: “[T]he bowls are the organs of the senses. . . . The Word . . . pours into these bowls part of his blood that he may quicken and animate the irrational parts of our nature and make them rational [*ut vivificet atque animet irrationabiles portiones, et faciat rationabiles*].” This blood in the bowls signifies the moral instruction that the Christian draws from the life and death of Christ; once again, it is the “word” rather than a bodily substance. As with Chrysostom, there is no question here of actually consuming Christ’s blood. Yet at the same time, because of the doctrine of the Eucharist, Ambrose injects consumption of blood, even if utterly allegorical, into a biblical text that says nothing of the kind. By now we are very far from the plain sense of Exodus 24:8: the blood is divided into mystical and moral allegories, and Moses never actually throws it on the people.

As adherents of a religion that eventually developed a doctrine of the transubstantiation of wine and wafer into the real blood and body of Christ, Chrysostom and Ambrose are remarkable examples of reticence, if not anxiety, over the blood of the covenant in Exodus 24. To be sure, as the Letter to the Hebrews and other New Testament texts affirm, sacrifice and the blood of sacrifice lay at the heart of the Christian understanding of Christ’s death.<sup>43</sup> The book of Revelation, as another example, revels in the phrase “the blood of the lamb.” Early patristic literature could not ignore, and often embraced, such sacrificial language. But living in a world dominated by pagan sacrifices, the Christians had to make a case for why they did not offer up animals to their God, which was the only commonly recognized form of religious practice.

Absent sacrifice, Christianity appeared to be no religion at all. In the second century, Justin Martyr addressed this accusation directly: “What sober-minded man, then, will not acknowledge that we are not atheists, worshipping as we do the Maker of this universe and declaring, as we have been taught, that He has no need of streams of blood and libations and incense.”<sup>44</sup> Later in the century, Origen put it more colorfully in his debate with Celsus:

Seeking God, then, in this [the Christian] way, we have no need to visit the oracles of Trophonius, of Amphiaraus, and of Mopsus, to which Celsus

would send us, assuring us that we would there “see the gods in human form, appearing to us with all distinctness, and without illusion.” For we know that these are demons, feeding on the blood, and smoke, and odor of victims, and shut up by their base desires in prisons, which the Greeks call temples of the gods, but which we know are only the dwellings of deceitful demons.<sup>45</sup>

Even in the fourth century, paganism was anything but dead, and a preacher like Chrysostom had to make sure that his parishioners did not stray back to the worship of the ancient gods, a worship that the Emperor Julian had so recently tried to revive (ca. 363 C.E.). The blood language of the New Testament, not to speak of its roots in the Hebrew Bible, might send the wrong message if not properly sanitized.

The Christian allegorization of the blood of the covenant into the Word of Christ reflected a more general hesitation on the part of patristic authors to focus too literally on the physical substance of Christ's blood. To be sure, those who came to represent “orthodoxy” (the term itself begs the historical question) asserted Christ's physicality against those who insisted only on his divinity, but they were remarkably ambivalent about whether the Eucharist, the mystical reenactment of his body and blood, ought to be understood literally. One can find a range of opinion between those who emphasized more its purely symbolic meaning (Clement and Origen are prime examples) and those who argued more for a process of substantial change in the bread and wine (Ignatius and Justin). But as Jaroslav Pelikan has shown, the medieval and early modern debates over the Eucharist have little relevance in understanding how the church fathers thought about the question.<sup>46</sup> The idea that the Eucharist was a *memorial*, already prominent, as we have seen, in the synoptic Gospels, seems to have been the more dominant one in the early church.

The tendency toward spiritualization of the blood of sacrifices can be found in a wide variety of authors. Melito of Sardis, writing at the end of the second century, for example, said of the Paschal sacrifice:

Tell me angel, what turned you away? [i.e., from the houses of the Israelite children]  
 The slaughter of the sheep or the life of the Lord?  
 The death of the sheep or the type of the Lord?  
 The blood of the sheep or the spirit of the Lord?<sup>47</sup>

By implication, it was the sacrifice as prefiguration or typology—and not its physical blood—that rendered it efficacious in protecting the houses of the Israelites in Egypt.

Similarly, Origen understood the biblical statement that “the life of all flesh is its blood” (Lev. 17:11) as referring to a noncorporeal entity that has the same name as something corporeal: “bodily things refer to the outer human being, but the homonyms for bodily things refer to the inner human being.”<sup>48</sup> There are therefore two types of blood—spiritual and fleshly—and the Eucharist refers to the former. Origen offers an allegorical interpretation of the prophecy (Num. 23:24) that Israel is a lion that “rests not till it has feasted on prey and drunk the blood of the slain.” As a prefiguration of the church, this verse does not mean that the Christians violate biblical law by actually eating blood:

we are said to drink the blood of Christ . . . when we receive His words in which life consists, just as He says: “The words which I have spoken are spirit and life” (Jn 6:63). Similarly, “: . . He was wounded (or slain)” [Isa. 53:5] that One whose blood we drink, that is, we receive the words of his teaching. But those too were no less wounded who preached His word to us, and when we read the words of those men, that is, of the apostles, and attain to life from their words, we are drinking the blood of the wounded.<sup>49</sup>

It is precisely because the Christians understand the blood of Christ allegorically as the Word that they can commit the antinomian act of drinking it. In doing so, they become the true Israel: “You [i.e., the Christians] are the true people of Israel who know how to drink blood, and you know how to eat the flesh of the Word of God and to drink the blood of the Word of God.”<sup>50</sup> As with Chrysostom and Ambrose later, so for Origen, the true Israel can drink blood because the blood it drinks is the Word. Or, in the words of Augustine on the Eucharist: “It is therefore a *figura*, enjoining that we should have a share in the sufferings of our Lord, and that we should retain a sweet and profitable memory [*suaviter et utiliter recondendum in memoria*] of the fact that his flesh was wounded and crucified for us.”<sup>51</sup> With the ultimate sacrifice now refigured into a memorial, we find ourselves very far from a covenant effected by throwing blood on the people, or any other sacrifice, for that matter.

Once allegorized and transmuted, the biblical prohibition on consumption of blood might thus be overcome. Following ancient medicine, which regarded breast milk as a form of blood, Clement of Alexandria spoke of Christ’s blood as the milk that nourishes the church. The Virgin had no milk because the milk was the Child and she “has fed with the Logos the new people which the Lord Himself wrapped in the swaddling clothes of His precious blood. . . . Our

nourisher, the Logos, poured out His blood for our sakes. . . . The Logos and He alone . . . furnishes us infants with the milk of love and truly blessed are they alone who suck at this breast." Since the Logos is Christ himself, Christ's blood, far from literal, is at once the "swaddling clothes" of the church *and* the milk that feeds it.<sup>52</sup> Such language suspends or transforms all normal physiological processes to the point where the physical substances themselves have lost virtually all their normal referents.

For most of the church fathers, as for Clement, the Eucharist was a memorial of Christ's death and the blood of the covenant of Exodus a symbolic prefiguration of an allegorical sacrifice. One may be permitted to wonder why so many of the church fathers insisted on such allegorical interpretations, particularly in homilies. Could it be that their congregants, who had to contend with a pagan world in which sacrifice was the order of the day, held to more literal meanings of the blood of Christ, meanings that their leaders felt compelled to contest in order to differentiate Christianity from its competitors? If so, then we are dealing with a process quite the inverse of what was to happen in the Middle Ages, when the dogmatic doctrine of transubstantiation unleashed a popular movement venerating the Host. In the Middle Ages, the church had to restrain popular piety by withdrawing the Eucharistic cup from the laity, but not by questioning the very physicality of the communion.

#### RABBINIC INTERPRETATIONS

Early rabbinic interpretations of the covenant also turned to Exodus 24:8 as its source, and they exhibit some striking similarities to the patristic readings of the text. Here is how the second- or third-century halakhic midrash, the *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, puts it: "What does it say at the end of the section [the reference is to the laws in Lev. 25]? 'These are the statutes and ordinances and laws, etc.' And they [the people] said: 'We accept all of these.' When he saw that they accepted them, he took the blood and threw it upon the people, as it is said, 'And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people.' He said to them: 'Now you are bound, held and tied [*harei atem keshurin, tefusin ve-anuvin*]; tomorrow, come and receive all the commandments.'" <sup>53</sup> Like Philo, if less allegorically, but also like Hebrews, the *Mekhilta* sees the blood as a substance that binds the people to God, thus preparing them to receive the rest of the commandments.

The connection made by Hebrews between sacrificial blood and atonement also appears in *Exodus Rabba* in the context of how the Israelites merited the Exodus:

Although they repented, they would not have departed from Egypt but for the merits of the fathers, because the attribute of justice was accusing them on account of the Golden Calf which they would one day make. On account of this it says “And you shall take a bunch of hyssop” [Ex. 12:22] because they humbled themselves like the hyssop in making atonement, “and dip it in the blood that is in the basin” [Ex. 12:22] in virtue of the Torah they would in the future receive, for at Revelation we read “And Moses took the blood” [Ex. 24:8].<sup>54</sup>

This text makes an explicit exegetical connection between the Passover ritual in Exodus 12 and Exodus 24. Dipping the hyssop in the blood of the Paschal lamb prefigures the covenant of Exodus 24, much as the author of Hebrews imported hyssop into his rendering of the Exodus verses. The hyssop as metaphor for humility appears, as well, in patristic literature. But as a form of repentance before the crime, atonement using blood does not work by itself: only the merit of the forefathers atones for the sin of the golden calf and secures the Exodus. Of greatest interest, though, is that *Exodus Rabba* displaces the throwing the blood by substituting the dipping of the hyssop. Both Exodus 12 and 24 involve basins of blood, but dipping a branch in it and touching it to doorposts might well have seemed less problematic than literally throwing it on the people. Indeed, the *Exodus Rabba* passage shies away from explicit sacrificial language and even from the idea that sacrifice itself effects atonement.

Rabbinic interpreters therefore had no less difficulty than their Christian counterparts in trying to come to terms with the biblical blood of the covenant of Exodus 24. A reconstructed tannaitic midrash displaces the blood from the people onto the altar: “Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people—on the altar in the name of the people.”<sup>55</sup> We have already mentioned a similar move by Aramaic translators such as Onkolos (followed by Pseudo-Jonathan): “And Moses took the blood and threw it on the altar to atone for the people and said, ‘this is the small portion of blood that God decreed to you concerning these commands.’”<sup>56</sup> Both the midrash and Onkolos strain credulity with this interpretation. Since Moses splashes the first portion of blood on the altar (Ex. 24:6, which Onkolos translates literally), why would he have divided the blood into two parts, only to do the same thing with both of them? Both of these interpreters are clearly uncomfortable with



throwing the blood on the people. Moreover, like *Jubilees*, Matthew, and Hebrews, Onkolos concludes, against the plain meaning of the Bible, that the blood of Exodus 24 was meant to *atone* for the people.

The unease of the Aramaic translators in the face of the strange text in Exodus 24 is particularly significant because their versions were probably the ones used in the synagogue and therefore would have received popular dissemination. The same may have been true for midrashim that were originally part of sermons, although it is not always certain, when a midrash originated as a sermon, whether it was reworked in the bet midrash or whether its origins were purely scholarly. At best, we can say that the unease over Exodus 24:8 that we find in these texts reflects the views of *some* rabbinic interpreters, which may have filtered out to a wider audience.

These reinterpretations of the Exodus blood of the covenant away from its literal meaning have to be understood against the larger picture of rabbinic ambivalence toward sacrificial blood in specific and sacrifice in general. Whether blood or sacrifice or both were in fact needed for atonement in a post-temple age remained highly contested among the rabbis. To be sure, rabbinic views of the messianic age included restoration of the sacrifices and of the Levitical purity laws that had been restricted to menstrual purity. And rabbinic literature contains extensive discussions of the sacrifices themselves, including the precise disposition of the blood.

In fact, the phrase that we encountered in Hebrews, which does not come directly from the Bible—"if there is no shedding of blood, there is no atonement"—has a rabbinic analogue: "there is no atonement except with blood."<sup>57</sup> Surprisingly, though, it does not appear in any Palestinian rabbinic document, early or late, but only in the Babylonian Talmud. This does not automatically mean that it is late and/or non-Palestinian, especially since two of three Babylonian texts attribute it to a tannaitic source. It may well have originated in Palestine in the first or second century, but the Letter to the Hebrews was the earliest datable source to use it.<sup>58</sup> Hebrews is addressed to a Jewish audience, so the phrase was probably in general circulation, especially since we found evidence of such a position in *Jubilees*. But those rabbinic sources that adopt the phrase do so in a very limited, technical context of exactly what part of the sacrificial procedure—the laying of hands on the animal or the actual shedding of the blood—effects atonement. Rabbinic sources simply do not contain as global a statement as Hebrews about the sole and necessary atoning power of blood.

As is well known, the rabbis insisted, for obvious reasons, that other practices replaced sacrifice. Humility, charity, and repentance are said to be equivalent to sacrifice in effecting atonement.<sup>59</sup> In addition, a whole series of nonsacrificial ritual gestures might serve as memorials (*zekher*) of the temple and the sacrificial cult when those no longer existed.<sup>60</sup> The Palestinian Talmud, for example, states that the *charoset* of the Passover meal is a *zekher* to the blood of the Paschal lamb.<sup>61</sup> This notion of memorial is already to be found in *Jubilees*, as we have seen, and was a highly prominent feature of the synoptic Gospels' discussion of the Eucharist.

In a position reminiscent of Christian attitudes, suffering is said not only to take the place of sacrifice but to improve upon it: "Precious are sufferings, for just as sacrifices are means of atonement [*meratzim*], so also are sufferings. . . . And not only this, but sufferings atone even more than sacrifices, for sacrifices affect only one's money, while sufferings affect the body."<sup>62</sup> One may buy an animal for a sacrifice, but one suffers with one's own body. According to the midrash on Leviticus, the deaths of the righteous are as atoning as sacrifices, a theme to which we shall return when we consider the role of martyrdom.<sup>63</sup>

Like Chrysostom, rabbinic sources argue for the substitution of textual discourse for sacrifice. A statement in the *Tanhuma* makes this argument: "When the Temple is not in existence, how shall you find atonement? Occupy yourselves with the words of the Torah, which are comparable to the sacrifices and they shall make atonement for you."<sup>64</sup> More specifically, the study of the *laws* of sacrifice takes the place of sacrifice: "Since the Temple no longer stands, what will become of them [i.e., the sins of the Jews]? God said, 'I have given you the order of sacrifices [i.e., the Talmudic texts dealing with sacrifice] and when you are reading them, I will count it as if you are performing the sacrifices and forgive you.'"<sup>65</sup> Textuality proves as efficacious as rituality.

One can also find a number of passages that seem to implicitly disparage the blood of sacrifice. One Talmudic text says, "It is the glory of the sons of Aaron that they walk in blood up to their ankles."<sup>66</sup> The context here is a discussion of how the blood of the sacrifices flooded the floor of the temple. The halakhic question is whether standing in such blood constitutes a "division" (*hayyetz*) between the priest and the floor, which is not allowed. Moreover, says the Gemara, the priest would stain his garment, also a transgression that would nullify the sacrifice (and thus in line with the *Jubilees* horror at staining one's clothes with blood). Perhaps he raised his garment? But, no, the text

responds, the garment had to be a specific length and therefore could not be raised or lowered. Another way out of the legal dilemma would be for the priest to have been engaged in work preparatory to the sacrifice, in which case the prohibition on division would not apply. But this argument is also demolished. How then did the priest accomplish his task with blood ankle-deep on the floor? The answer: there were raised planks or benches on which the priests walked (the planks were evidently considered part of the floor, so that the prohibition on “division” was avoided). So what starts as a glorification of the priests for wallowing in the blood of sacrifice ends up with them walking fastidiously on planks above it. One has to wonder whether the opening line about the “glory of the sons of Aaron” is not meant ironically, for the rabbis, who cannot and do not stand “ankle-deep in blood,” seem to have considered their own immersion in study—including the study of the laws of blood—to be much more glorious. The text may be a covert polemic against the priests and a denigration of their form of worshipping God in favor of the rabbis’ textual practice.

A different approach appears elsewhere in the name of Rav Sheshet, who wants to show that fasting is a precise blood equivalent of sacrifice: “Lord of the world, when the Temple was standing, one who sinned offered a sacrifice, of which only fat and blood were taken and thereby his sins were forgiven. I have fasted today and through this my blood and fat have decreased. Deign to look upon the part of my blood and my fat which I have lost through my fasting as if I had offered it to you and forgive my sins in return.”<sup>67</sup> Here, too, one wonders if the text does not put its tongue in its cheek. The meager loss of blood and fat from one day of fasting could hardly be considered equivalent to the torrents of blood and mounds of fat when the temple sacrifices were in full swing.

Although the rabbis could not eschew the sacrifices altogether—they were no more Marcionites with respect to the Bible than were the orthodox church fathers—they were clearly conflicted about how to represent the sacrifices in their own texts. That Jews and Christians faced the same dilemma finds confirmation in Justin’s debate with Trypho, his Jewish interlocutor. Justin was constrained to admit that the differences between the Jews and the Christians were not that great when it came to sacrifice:

You assert that God does not accept the sacrifices of those who dwell then in Jerusalem and were called Israelites, but says that He is pleased with the prayers of the individuals of that nation then dispersed, and calls

their prayers sacrifices. Now, that prayers and giving of thanks, when offered by worthy men, are the only perfect and well-pleasing sacrifices to God, I also admit. For such alone Christians have undertaken to offer and in the remembrance [*anamnesei*] effected by their solid and liquid food, whereby the suffering of the Son of God which He endured is brought to mind, whose name the high priests of your nation have caused to be profaned and blasphemed over all the earth.<sup>68</sup>

Justin's statement is external confirmation of those rabbinic texts that considered prayer and other practices to have taken the place of sacrifice. But, against the Jews, the only prayers that Justin will admit truly function this way are those grounded in the Eucharist, which acts solely as a memorial: blood remains studiously absent. It was precisely the same ambivalence about the blood of the sacrifices in general that may well have informed the evasive strategies the rabbis adopted toward Exodus 24:8.

If the church fathers insisted on a spiritualized interpretation of the blood of the covenant, it may have been not only in response to the persistent attraction of pagan sacrifice. The debate between Justin and Trypho demonstrates that the issue of blood also preoccupied the leaders of church and synagogue. But in this case, the problem lay not so much in combating an enemy that was fundamentally different as in differentiating oneself from an opponent who looked too similar, once again "the narcissism of small differences." We know, for example, that Judaism was alive and well in fourth-century Antioch and that the bishop of the city, John Chrysostom, fought bitterly against the Jews and against those Christians who frequented their synagogue.<sup>69</sup> Since the rabbis also argued for turning the blood sacrifices into textual memorials, Chrysostom's argument for understanding blood as "the Word" may have been motivated by a need to distance Christianity not only from pagan worship but also from those Jews whose theology seemed too close for comfort. By asserting that the death of their Savior held the key to turning blood into text, the Christians may have hoped to preempt the other monotheistic tradition that needed to effect atonement without sacrifice.

#### RITUALS OF INITIATION

I have argued so far for similar Jewish and Christian strategies of turning the blood of the covenant in particular and sacrifices in general into allegories. This was a process that involved first making the strange passage

in Exodus 24 into the ground for all atonement sacrifices and then spiritualizing the text by turning the vats of blood that Moses showered on the people into something less tangibly bloody. But there was a countervailing tendency in both traditions that emphasized instead actual blood as a sign of the covenant and, in some of its more daring formulations, spoke of bloody rituals of initiation, at times relying on a more literal understanding of Exodus 24.

We begin with the Jewish texts, two of which invoke Exodus 24:8 as a ritual of initiation. First, from the Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Yevamot*:

We read [in Ex. 19:10]: “Go to the people and they shall sanctify themselves today and tomorrow they shall wash their clothing.” And since washing is not required [Rashi: in the case of a man who has an ejaculation], while immersion is required, wouldn’t it be the case that when washing is required, immersion is certainly required? But perhaps the washing was purely for cleanliness? However, this was not the case because we read “And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people.” And we learn that there isn’t sprinkling [of blood] without immersion.<sup>70</sup>

This passage requires some careful unpacking. The text wants to know whether the Israelites immersed themselves in ritual baths before receiving the Torah (seemingly a logistic nightmare given the desert setting and the number of people). The Talmud reasons that since immersion in a ritual bath is required in the case of a man who has had a seminal emission (Lev. 15:16), but he need not wash his clothing, it follows that if washing the clothes *is* required, then, a fortiori, immersion of the whole body must have been required. But what if the washing of the clothes was merely for cleanliness (after all, the Israelites had already been wandering in the desert for some weeks) and not for ritual purity? However, since Moses sprinkled blood on the people, they must have both washed their clothes for ritual purity *and* immersed themselves previously, because “there is no sprinkling [of blood] without immersion.”

In a sense, this text is upside-down, because the latter principle is not specifically articulated in the Bible, except by inference: one can bring a sacrifice (and therefore have blood sprinkled) only if one is ritually pure, a state that one attains by immersion. And more to the point, the text conflates the immersion necessary to bring a sacrifice with Moses throwing blood on the people, an act that *follows* a sacrifice but has no necessary ritual connection with it. The sprinkling of blood that requires immersion is the disposal of the blood on the altar following a sacrifice, but certainly not throwing it on the people.

A similar text, in the Babylonian Talmudic tractate *Keritot*, offers some additional evidence along the same lines: “Just as our forefathers entered into the covenant with circumcision, immersion and the sprinkling of blood, so shall [converts] enter the covenant. . . . Whence do we know immersion? ‘And Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people’ and ‘there can be no sprinkling without immersion.’”<sup>71</sup> Once again, we have an invented principle invoked as if it were already well-known biblical or rabbinic law. But it is invoked in a most peculiar way. The text is part of a larger discussion scattered throughout rabbinic literature about the proper procedure for conversion.<sup>72</sup> Following the by-now canonical position, the text in *Keritot* requires that converts undergo circumcision, immersion in a ritual bath, and the bringing of a sacrifice (“the sprinkling of blood”). The text brings proofs that circumcision and sacrifice are required, but what of immersion? Here, we encounter a surprise. We might have expected that the rabbis would invoke Exodus 24 to prove the sprinkling of blood (sacrifice) as a requirement for conversion, because one could understand the covenant scene there as a mass conversion of those who had left Egypt to the Torah received by Moses. But instead, the text learns the requirement of *immersion* from Moses throwing blood on the people. The sprinkling or throwing of the blood is therefore explicitly divorced from where we might have expected it: the other requirements of sacrifice and circumcision. Although on the surface the text assumes that the sprinkling *presupposes* prior immersion in water, beneath the surface it seems to equate them: what Moses did to the people was to baptize them in blood.

I need to emphasize that this conflation of immersion in blood and water is not explicit in these two rabbinic texts. But the very fact that Exodus 24 says nothing at all about immersion in water but does contain an unprecedented immersion (or at least splashing) in blood should put on us on our guard: these two Talmudic texts seem to hold, even if they did not want to explicitly state, that Exodus 24 had to do with a mass conversion ritual of bloody baptism, a ritual necessary for creating the new nation of Israel.

Rabbinic Judaism does, of course, contain a much more explicit and literal use of blood for a rite of initiation: the blood of circumcision. Lawrence Hoffman has argued that the rabbinic idea of covenant was founded on blood—specifically, the blood of circumcision.<sup>73</sup> There is, in fact, a great deal of material to support this argument. The Targum Jonathan translates Exodus 12:13: “Let this blood [i.e., the blood of the

Paschal lamb] be a sign to you” as “blood of the covenant and blood of the paschal lamb.” As other texts make clear, the phrase “blood of the covenant” has now come to refer to the blood of circumcision. The tannaitic liturgy for conversion specifically calls the blood of circumcision the blood of the covenant (*dam brit*).<sup>74</sup>

The *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* states that at the time of the Exodus, since Israel had not yet received any commandments, it had no basis in terms of good deeds on which to be redeemed from Egypt: “God assigned to Israel two commandments, the sacrifice of the paschal lamb and circumcision which they were to perform so as to merit being saved.”<sup>75</sup> The proof text that the *Mekhilta* brings is from Ezekiel: “Your breasts were fashioned and your hair had grown, but you were naked” (Ezek. 16:7). The exegete understands “naked” here to refer symbolically to “naked of all commandments.” This is the first instance of the “transgendering” of the description of female maturation in Ezekiel into the ground for the rite of circumcision (the text is also used to this day in the circumcision liturgy). The *Mekhilta* text further invokes the female blood in Ezekiel and connects it to the blood of the covenant mentioned in Zechariah 9:11 (“As for you also, because of the blood of your covenant, I send your prisoners forth from the pit . . .”). By implication, it is the blood of the Paschal lamb and of circumcision that effected the redemption from Egypt.

*Exodus Rabba*, in contrast—and in line with the passage from the same text discussed above—connects the blood of circumcision not to redemption but to atonement: “Fix, therefore this month [of Nisan] for Me and for you, because I will see in it the blood of the paschal lamb and will make atonement for you. . . . I will have mercy for you as a result of the blood of the paschal lamb and the blood of circumcision (*dam milah*), and I will make atonement for your lives.”<sup>76</sup> Here, circumcision appears as a form of sacrifice, since the blood serves to make atonement.

Like the Christian idea of the Eucharist as memorial, the blood of circumcision serves as a sign to remind God of the covenant. The Targum to Ezekiel 16:6 (“When I passed by you and saw you weltering in your blood, I said to you: By your blood live! And I said: By your blood live!”) translates: “Because the memorial of the covenant with your fathers is before Me, I revealed Myself to deliver you. . . . I said to you: Because of the blood of the circumcision, I will take care of you. I said to you again: Because of the blood of Passover I will redeem you.” As we have already seen, a whole variety of Jewish practices are said to be

memorials (*zekher*) for various divine acts or promises.<sup>77</sup> Here, it is the two types of blood, the blood of circumcision and of the Passover sacrifice, that serve as the memorial of the covenant with the patriarchs in Genesis. For those living after the destruction of the temple—the author and readers of this midrash—only the blood of circumcision remains to remind God of his covenant.

The most involved discussion of the blood of circumcision as the blood of the covenant appears in the eighth-century midrash the *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, where the biblical sorcerer Balaam, observing the hill of Israel's foreskins after Joshua had circumcised the people, says: "Who can withstand the merit of the blood of the covenant of circumcision [*zekhut dam brit milah*]?"<sup>78</sup> Perhaps following the suggestion in *Exodus Rabba*, the *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* sees circumcision as the only form of atoning sacrifice after the destruction of the temple:

Abraham was circumcised on Yom Kippur and every year, God sees the blood of Abraham's circumcision and atones for the sins of Israel. . . . [A]nd at the spot where Abraham was circumcised, his blood remained and there the altar of the Temple was built. . . . From when Isaac was born and was given up to be circumcised on the eighth day, we learn that every man who gives his son up for circumcision is like the High Priest who sacrifices his offering [*minhato*] and anoints it on the horns of the altar.<sup>79</sup>

The midrash weaves a myth that the blood of Abraham's circumcision effects atonement for Israel's sins. All circumcisions function like temple sacrifices. In fact, circumcision at the time of Abraham and Isaac prefigured those sacrifices and presumably continued to function as sacrifices when the temple no longer stood, which is to say, when the midrash was written.

Oddly enough, this section of the text seems to deliberately avoid the most obvious sacrificial connection to Isaac: not his circumcision, but the story of his binding, the *akedah* (Gen. 22). Moreover, the site where the temple is built, according to the *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, is not the site of the binding of Isaac, as most midrashic traditions have it, but the site of Abraham's circumcision, marked by the stain of his blood. The *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*'s avoidance of the binding of Isaac suggests conscious awareness of and polemic against the Christian use of the *akedah* as a prefiguration of the Crucifixion. Instead, it substitutes Abraham's circumcision and his blood, as if to say that circumcision lies at the heart of temple rite and therefore of Judaism in toto.



It is the blood ritual that Judaism alone practices. Abraham takes the place, as it were, of the High Priest and creates a sacrificial rite that can be carried on even in the absence of the temple.

It needs to be emphasized that the blood of circumcision plays no role in the Bible whatsoever, with the exception of the strange “bridegroom of blood” passage in Exodus 4. As Geza Vermes has noted, the various Targums were perhaps the earliest texts to emphasize the blood of circumcision in their translations of those verses.<sup>80</sup> The *Fragmentary Targum*, for instance, has Zipporah say: “Now may the blood of this circumcision atone for the guilt of my husband.” Pseudo-Jonathan adds: “How beloved is the blood of this circumcision which has saved my husband from the hand of the Destroying Angel.” It may well be that the exegetical difficulties posed by the bridegroom-of-blood passage caused these translators to glorify the blood of circumcision itself and their interpretations served as conduits for the nonbiblical conflation of the blood of circumcision with the blood of the covenant.

But given the fact that, with one exception, the blood of circumcision plays no role in the Bible, why did the rabbis make it so central to their concept of covenant? One possibility Hoffman suggests is the controversy with Christianity over whether circumcision is necessary as a soteriological sign of the covenant. The rabbis, he argues, specifically invoked the blood of circumcision as against the blood of Christ.<sup>81</sup> Jews and Christians were both concerned with the symbolisms of wine and blood, which the former mixed in the liturgy of circumcision, perhaps in response to the latter’s ritual of the Eucharist. This may well be part of the story. But since the early church fathers, as we have seen, typically believed that Christ’s blood sacrifice was a one-time event and that the Eucharist was a symbolic memorial, it is not at all certain that early Christianity prompted the Jews to emphasize the blood itself. Another possibility is that the pagan critique of circumcision, which found its most extreme expression in Hadrian’s ban on the practice during the Bar Kokhba War, served as the impetus for a Jewish counterpolemic. Just as the pagans had their bloody sacrifices, so did the Jews, even without a temple.

Whatever may have been the cultural or political context in which the rabbis used circumcision to create a covenant of blood, Hoffman misses a critical issue, which is at the heart of this chapter: as we are perhaps by now overly aware, the Bible *already* contains a covenant of blood in Exodus 24, but one that has no connection with

circumcision. As opposed to Hoffman, then, I would claim not that the rabbis *invented* a new covenant based on blood, but that they *displaced* it from its original setting to another. Indeed, one passage from the Jerusalem Talmud, which also appears in a manuscript variant in the Babylonian, specifically invokes Exodus 24: “Great is circumcision for it is equal to all the commandments of the Torah, as it is written [Ex. 24:8], ‘Behold the blood of the covenant which God has cut (*karat*) with you for all of the commandments.’”<sup>82</sup> It is possible that the cutting of circumcision suggested to the author of this text the biblical term for “cutting” a covenant, but it is a piece of exegetical sleight-of-hand, since, once again, the proof text from Exodus is about the blood of sacrifice rather than of circumcision.<sup>83</sup> In any event, the rabbis’ conflation of the blood of circumcision with the blood that Moses throws on the people to seal the covenant suggests that, in rabbinic times, circumcision might have been seen as a surrogate for that original “baptism in blood.”

If the rabbinic evidence must be sought to a degree “between the lines,” the idea of baptism in blood is more explicit in early Christian sources. For one, baptism and the Eucharist were often closely bound together in the narrative of the Passion. The lance wound a Roman soldier made in Christ’s side on the cross was said to have gushed forth both blood and water (John 19:34). But Christ’s blood might also be disconnected from the Eucharist, and as Caroline Walker Bynum has shown, this blood came to serve as the ground for a popular cult of blood relics in the Middle Ages when the priests denied the Eucharistic cup of Christ’s blood to the laity.<sup>84</sup> In the second century, Tertullian argued that the blood and water flowing out from this wound are symbols of two kinds of baptism: water and blood.<sup>85</sup>

The same idea was taken up by Chrysostom in the homily on Hebrews we considered earlier: “Tell me then why is the book of the testament sprinkled and also the people, except on account of the precious blood [of Christ] figured from the first? Why ‘with hyssop?’ It is close and retentive. And why the ‘water?’ It shows forth also the cleansing by water. And why the ‘wool?’ This also [was used] that the blood might be retained. In this place, blood and water show forth the same thing, for baptism is His passion.”<sup>86</sup> In this extraordinary statement, Chrysostom conflates blood and water, and the sacrificial death of Jesus becomes a baptism.<sup>87</sup> Chrysostom thus hints that Moses’s original throwing of the blood on the people might be understood as baptism by blood. For both traditions, then, blood

was necessary not only for atonement but also for initiation and, by inference, redemption.

#### THE BLOOD OF THE MARTYRS

The blood of the covenant is deeply connected to life, either as a ritual at birth (circumcision) or of rebirth (baptism). But just as sacrifice is a ritual of death, so the language of blood found a different resonance when the death of both Christian and Jewish martyrs came to be seen as a reenactment of the sacrifice of the new covenant.<sup>88</sup> If animal sacrifices were no longer possible, human sacrifices—modeled for Christians on the death of Christ—might now take their place. Already the book of Revelation speaks not only of the Lamb who shed his blood, but also of the martyrs: “And he said to me: ‘These are they who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’ (Rev. 7:14). Here, a kind of paradoxical alchemy occurs, in which the martyrs, who shed their blood, are made “white” (i.e., pure) by the blood of the Lamb. Martyrdom might thus be seen as an *imitatio Christi*, specifically in the act of shedding blood. Origen held that the blood shed by the martyrs was a sacrifice paralleling that of Jesus, which, in turn, was symbolized by the actual “sacrifices of the law.”<sup>89</sup> For Jerome, the blood of the martyrs served as repayment for the blood of Christ, as he writes in his commentary on Psalm 116:15: “‘Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.’ The only fitting return that we can make to Him is to give blood for blood; and, as we are redeemed by the blood of Christ, gladly to lay down our lives for our Redeemer.” This argument would fit into the way historians of religion have characterized some sacrifices as forms of rendering to the gods compensation for their beneficence.

An oft-quoted patristic phrase, originating with Tertullian, is “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Christians” (*sanguis martyrum, semen christianorum*).<sup>90</sup> The church, Tertullian claimed, was fructified by the blood of the martyrs and therefore could not be destroyed by persecution. Tertullian took his imagery from ancient medicine, which understood semen to be the most clarified form of blood. By conflating blood with semen, he also conflated martyrdom with sexuality. To die for God is an erotic act whose result is the birth of new Christians.

The blood of the martyrs could also be understood, on the one hand, as a fitting response to the bloody sacrifices of the idolaters, as John Chrysostom put it in his eulogy to the early second-century martyr Ignatius of Antioch, who was killed in Rome:

On this account both Peter and Paul, and this man after them, were all slain there, partly, indeed, in order that they might purify with their own blood the city which had been defiled with blood of idols, and partly in order that they might by their works afford a proof of the resurrection of the crucified Christ, persuading those who dwell in Rome, that they would not with so much pleasure disdain this present life, did they not firmly persuade themselves that they were about to ascend to the crucified Jesus, and to see him in the heavens.<sup>91</sup>

On the other hand, martyrdom might be understood as itself a form of blood sacrifice, as the martyrological story of the death of Polycarp attests: "And he, with his hands bound behind him, like a choice ram taken from a flock for sacrifice, an acceptable whole burnt offering [*olokautoma*] prepared for God, looked up to heaven and said: '... I bless Thee that Thou didst deem me worthy of this day and hour, that I should take part among the numbers of the martyrs in the cup of Thy Christ.'<sup>92</sup> The text's mention of the "cup of Christ" (*poterio tou Christou*) suggests that the sacrificial act of martyrdom involves imitating the spilling of Christ's blood.

Although martyrdom is obviously associated with death, it also came to be understood as a rite of initiation, in which the Christian had the opportunity to accept the faith for a second and final time, proclaiming before his or her death: *sum Christianus*. Thus, Tertullian equated "the fight of martyrdom and the baptism . . . of blood. . . . For, strictly speaking, there cannot any longer be reckoned anything against the martyrs, by whom in the baptism [of blood] life itself is laid down." Tertullian answers the obvious retort to this scandalous position: "Does God covet man's blood? And yet I might to affirm that He does, if man also covets the kingdom of heaven, if man covets a sure salvation, if man also covets a second new birth."<sup>93</sup> The idea that the blood of the martyrs might constitute such a second new birth appears as well in Augustine's polemic against the Donatist Petilianus. Augustine quotes his opponent:

But if you say that we give baptism twice over, truly it is rather you who do this, who slay men who have been baptized; and this we do not say because you baptize them, but because you cause each one of them, by the act of slaying him, to be baptized in his own blood. For the baptism of water or of the Spirit is as it were doubled when the blood of the martyr is wrung from him. And so our Savior also Himself, after being baptized in the first instance by John, declared that He must be baptized again, not this time with water nor with the Spirit, but with the baptism of blood, the cross of suffering.<sup>94</sup>

Augustine does not dispute this understanding of martyrdom as baptism in blood, but argues that the Donatists are not martyrs, for they have brought their fate on themselves by their heresy.

Finally, although from the Middle Ages, a story from the thirteenth-century *Legenda Aurea* set in the third century beautifully illustrates this idea of martyrdom as baptism in blood. During the reigns of Diocletian and Maximian, the prefect Damian was outraged that his wife wanted to be a Christian. He hung her by her hair and had her beaten. She asked Saint George, who evidently happened by as she was being tortured, what would happen to her, since she was unbaptized. He reassured her that her flowing blood both baptized and crowned her.<sup>95</sup>

The blood of the martyrs forced Christian thinkers to confront blood much more literally than when they came to render the biblical sacrifices—and that of Jesus himself—typologically. While the blood of Jesus might be allegorized or spiritualized into “rational” blood or the Logos, the same could not be done as easily with the blood of those mortals dying for the faith before the eyes or in the later memory of the church fathers. But the physical blood of the martyrs served an important function in the development of orthodox Christianity because it affirmed by inference the physicality of Jesus himself: if the martyrs were imitating Christ in spilling their blood, then the believer was reminded that Christ’s own blood was not only spiritual. The Christian blood of the covenant could not, therefore, escape entirely from its physical origins either in the biblical text or in the actual death of Jesus. And, in connecting martyrdom with baptism, the church fathers restored to blood some of its original meaning from Exodus 24.

But the early Christians were not entirely comfortable with this notion of baptism in blood, just as, in general, they felt it necessary to distance themselves from the overt pagan use of blood. A story about Constantine’s conversion appears to be an implicit rejection of such forms of initiation or conversion.<sup>96</sup> At the height of the persecution of the Christians, Constantine is said to have developed leprosy and was told by pagan priests that the only cure lay in bathing in the blood of Christian children in the Capitoline temple in Rome. Horrified at the prospect, the emperor turned back from the temple and had a dream that night that he would be cured if he immersed himself instead in the water of baptism. And so he tied his fate to the church and was healed. Constantine was converted, but in water rather than blood.<sup>97</sup>

The blood of martyrs also played an atoning and redemptive role within the circles of Jewish literati, although with less overt connotations of initiation. The Jewish martyrological traditions go back to the literature of the Hasmonean Revolt in the second century B.C.E. (although some of this literature was probably from later). These traditions were to feed both Jewish and Christian subsequent representations of martyrdom.<sup>98</sup> Thus, *4 Maccabees*, whose date and provenance remain uncertain, says of the martyrs to the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes: "Through the blood of these righteous ones and through the propitiation of their death the divine providence rescued Israel" (*4 Macc.* 17:22). Here was a theme not to be found in the Bible, but one that became increasingly relevant to both Jews and Christians.

*4 Maccabees* was preserved by the church, and its theology of atonement and redemption through the blood of the martyrs was taken up with great enthusiasm. There is no direct echo of the text in later Jewish literature. But even if not quoted directly, as Ra'anana Boostan has shown,<sup>99</sup> a similar theology permeated Jewish reflections on martyrdom, albeit from Palestinian texts that can be dated primarily from the Byzantine to the early Islamic periods. One example is the fifth-century midrash on the biblical book of Lamentations, which offers a retelling of the story of the mother and her seven sons from *2 Maccabees*: "Hananyah, Mishael and Azariyah were blameless and were detained by a blameless king, while we [i.e., the mother and her sons] are guilty and have been detained by a guilty and cruel king so that He may demand requital for our blood. The Holy One Blessed Be He . . . has delivered us into your [the king's] hands so that he may in the future demand from you requital for our blood."<sup>100</sup> Here we encounter a new theme: that of divine vengeance for the blood of the martyrs. And indeed it appears to be the blood itself that awakens God's vengeance. In a kind of circular argument, the martyrs must shed their blood in order for God in the future to shed the blood of their enemies: vengeance requires a crime and only then can it be requited. Of course, this idea of divine blood vengeance has its origins in the Bible (*Deut.* 32:43), but here it is linked to a theology of martyrdom that appears to have emerged with the Maccabean Revolt and to have deepened with the Roman persecutions of the Bar Kokhba uprising.

The seventh-century *Story of the Ten Martyrs*, analyzed in detail by Boostan, brought this theology to a crescendo. In one passage, Yeshehav the Scribe says to the Emperor: "'Even before I left my mother's womb, God had resolved to hand me and my colleagues over to you in order to

demand requital for our blood.’ He asked him: ‘Is there another world?’ He said to him: ‘Yes and woe unto you is your shame when He exacts the blood of His pious ones from you.’”<sup>101</sup> The martyrs were predestined for martyrdom in order to create the pretext for God’s eschatological requital of their blood. It is their merit that will earn God’s intervention, although their merit, too, would seem to be predestined.

In Jewish exegesis, Rome is associated with Esau, in turn associated with the nation of Edom, whose name suggests “redness” (*Edom* = *Adom*, red). Esau himself, of course, is unalterably linked with the red lentils for which he sold his birthright. The bloody character of Esau/Edom/Rome thus guarantees the eschatological reversal in which God will take blood vengeance on Israel’s enemies: without blood there can be no vengeance.

In the biblical book of Isaiah, an apocalyptic prophecy links God’s day of vengeance with the destruction of Edom. In this passage, God’s garments are “stained with crimson” “as if you had trodden the winepress” (Isa. 63:1–2).<sup>102</sup> In the traditions based on this prophecy, God’s vengeance is provoked in a very concrete way: by the staining of his cloak with the blood of the martyrs. This theme can already be found in the book of Revelation: “And now I saw heaven open and a white horse appear; its rider was called Faithful and True. . . . The name written on him was known only to himself; his cloak was soaked in blood” (Rev. 19:11–13).<sup>103</sup> Although Revelation does not specify it in this place, its reference elsewhere to martyrdom makes it likely that the blood that soaks the divine rider’s cloak is the blood of the martyrs.

In rabbinic literature as well, God is said to don red garments as he requites the blood shed by Edom.<sup>104</sup> In the Midrash on Psalms, we find the following reflection on the martyrdom of the second-century rabbi Hanina ben Teradyon: “And the Holy One Blessed Be He will demand of the nations of the world, ‘Why did you put to death Hanina ben Teradyon and all the others who were killed for the sanctification of My Name?’ And the nations will perjure themselves and answer: ‘We did not put them to death.’ The Holy One Blessed Be He, at once fetches His royal robe so that he may judge them and decree their doom. Hence it is said: ‘He forgets not the cry of the afflicted’” (Ps. 9:13).<sup>105</sup> The blood of the martyrs that has stained the royal robe thus serves as a literal memorial to remind God and warrant his delayed vengeance.

We have now traveled a long distance from the *Jubilees* equation of blood on one’s garments with the prohibition on eating blood. If the blood of animals was anathema to that old text, the blood of martyrs

on the divine garment now became a sign to God of his obligations to the faithful. We are also now very far, it would seem, from the blood with which the Israelites were initiated into the covenant in Exodus 24. Yet, just as blood came to serve as a memorial for the covenant, so it also came to serve as a memorial of martyrdom and a promise of future redemption. In a sense, they were all the same, for the meaning of martyrdom and its connection to redemption were both grounded in the original covenant. And just as the covenant required immersion in blood, so redemption would derive from immersion in another kind of blood: the blood of the martyrs. Here, too, we find a striking convergence between Jewish and Christian theologies, and one that pointed toward the Middle Ages, when blood spilled in violence came to increasingly occupy the center of the theological stage.

#### BLOODY RITES OF INITIATION

The transformation of the blood of the covenant into the blood of martyrdom no doubt reflected the experiences of Jews and Christians as they confronted the power of the Roman Empire in the first centuries of the Common Era. But Jews and Christians confronted Rome not only as persecuted martyrs but also as cultural competitors. The ambivalent idea of baptism in blood may have owed something not only to martyrdom but also to pagan rituals of initiation. While it must remain speculative, one possible such ritual may have been the *taurobolium* of the cult of Attis and the “Great Mother” Cybele, which originated in Asia Minor and began to make its appearance in Rome in the second century C.E. It reached its peak in the fourth century, when even the emperor Julian was said by some to have participated in it.

As Robert Duthoy has shown in a careful study of the *taurobolium* inscriptions, the ritual underwent an evolution.<sup>106</sup> It consisted of the slaughter of a bull, initially to promote the prosperity of its dedicator (some early inscriptions indicate that it was offered for the health of the emperor). In a second phase, the blood of the bull was caught in a bowl (*cernus*) and was given to the dedicator for purposes of purification. In the final stage, in the third and fourth centuries, the dedicator would descend into a pit and the bull would be slaughtered on a plank above, with its blood thoroughly drenching him. It is not clear whether this last ceremony was intended as a form of initiation or of purification.

There is also much scholarly dispute about whether the *taurobolium* during the period in which Christianity became a major competitor to



paganism was influenced by Christianity or influenced it. Neil McLynn has cast doubt on the major poetic source for this late stage, seeing it as too suspiciously like a Christian polemic.<sup>107</sup> But even if the drenching in the blood of a bull was more imagined than real, this version of the *taurobolium* may well have sparked deep unease on the part of the church fathers about the literal meaning of Exodus 24:8, an unease that I have tried to chart here.

As in Exodus 24, the sacrificed animal in the *taurobolium* was a bull, and its blood either was caught in a basin or drenched its adepts. The biblical rite, as with its later Christian interpretations, shared disturbing similarities about blood with the cult of the Great Mother. Indeed, since the cult originated in Anatolia, perhaps it had ancient connections to the mysterious biblical sacrifice. And finally, if the fascinating parallels between Jewish and Christian texts from this period suggest real cultural dialogue, then might the rabbis have known and reacted to the *taurobolium* as well?

That biblical Judaism contained a kind of *taurobolium* of its own in Exodus 24:3–8 may have stirred a certain ambivalence in both the rabbis and the fathers of the church. Although emerging rabbinic Judaism and Christianity fought mightily against paganism and its blood sacrifices, they inherited a sacred text and sacrificial practices in which the power of the physical substance of blood played a central role. Each for its own reasons had to at once preserve and neutralize these blood traditions, turning them into memorials of past sacrifices and promises of future ones. However, late antique Judaism and Christianity found in martyrdom a new blood ritual with its own redemptive potential. In the struggle for power between Jews and Christians, which was not resolved until the Christianization of the Roman Empire, each used their own interpretations of blood as a way of asserting their chosenness by God. Yet, in doing so, both traditions transformed the blood of the covenant into something very different from what it meant in the Bible, even as resonances of that most peculiar text continued to echo for centuries after it was written.

## God's Blood

### *Medieval Jews and Christians Debate the Body*

In a letter written in 1376 to her disciple Niccolo Soderini, the medieval mystic Catherine of Siena warned against divisions within the church: "It is better for you to live in peace and unity . . . for we are not Jews or Saracens, but Christians ransomed and baptized in Christ's blood."<sup>1</sup> The theme of Christ's blood recurs repeatedly in Catherine's writings, as we shall see, but what is striking here is that she specifies blood as the marker of difference between Christians and their monotheistic opponents. In this chapter I want to demonstrate that the competing claims of Jews and Christians to enjoy a "covenant of blood" with God, a covenant whose career we followed in chapter 2 through late antiquity, acquired, if anything, new force in the Middle Ages. Catherine's fascination with Christ's blood as the mystical vehicle for personal salvation resonated with larger cultural phenomena in a church that had adopted a literal interpretation of the Eucharist as dogma, popular celebrations of the Host that spread throughout Europe, and a new cult of blood relics. At the same time, Jews also turned to blood as a signifier of their uniqueness. Not only the blood of circumcision, but now even the blood of menstruation was harnessed in the service of Jewish identity. As on the Christian side, blood came to occupy an important place in mystical ideas about God's body and the vehicles through which the mystic might commune with the divine.

Moreover, Jews and Christians became increasingly aware of each other's beliefs and practices and turned these understandings—and,

perhaps as often, *misunderstandings*—of the other into the stuff of polemics, which involved singularly violent language. Here is an example from a thirteenth-century compendium of polemics: “The heretics anger us by charging that we murder their children and consume blood. Answer by telling them that no nation was as thoroughly warned against murder as we and this murder includes the murder of Gentiles. . . . Moreover, we were also warned against blood more than any nation, for even when dealing with meat that has been slaughtered properly and is kosher, we salt it and rinse it and bother with it extensively in order to remove the blood.”<sup>2</sup> Historians have long noticed the curious fact that the medieval blood libel is an accusation against the Jews for doing what is most abhorrent according to Jewish law. And not only does the blood libel involve the inversion of actual Jewish practices; it is seemingly also a projection onto the Jews of what Christians themselves do, namely, eat the body and blood of Christ in the form of the Eucharist. The blood libel, on this reading, would appear to be the result of an inner Christian dynamic that causes Christians to attribute to Jews the very opposite of what Jews believe.

Over the past decade and a half, however, Israel Jacob Yuval has advanced a radical argument against this contention.<sup>3</sup> Yuval claims that the medieval Ashkenazic Jews believed in an eschatological theology according to which God would avenge the blood of the Jewish martyrs as a prelude to the coming of the Messiah. Following a martyrological trope discussed at the end of chapter 2, this blood was thought to reach the very throne of God, where it stained his coat and thus provoked him magically to avenge his slaughtered children. This theology was responsible, says Yuval, for the extraordinary behavior of the Ashkenazic Jews during the Crusader pogroms when they killed first their children and then themselves rather than convert to Christianity. The Jewish chroniclers—to whom we shall return—portrayed these acts of mass suicide as ritual sacrifices that would bring about God’s vengeance. Yuval suggests that the Christians knew about the Jews’ suicidal acts and were particularly shocked at the way they killed their children. From this idea he speculates that the blood libel may well have had its origins in the belief that the Jews were willing to kill children—Jewish or Christian—in order to bring about their redemption.

Whatever one makes of Yuval’s startling conclusion,<sup>4</sup> he has suggested a significant new way of thinking about the blood libel and about Jewish-Christian relations in general: what Christians believe about Jews may be linked in some way, however distorted, to actual Jewish belief and

behavior. The two religious cultures were deeply enmeshed in each other. *Projection* may indeed be the operative word; yet, as with paranoids who have real enemies, it is projection based on a seed of reality. I wish to take up Yuval's seminal suggestion and argue that what medieval Jews and Christians believed separately about blood was shaped in part by what they knew of each other. As in late antiquity, Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages spoke a common language, more common than earlier scholarship was willing to admit. Ivan Marcus has cogently argued that many of the practices of the medieval Ashkenazic Jews, often considered the most insular of Jewish communities, may have come from a complex process of appropriation and polemical reversal of Christian motifs.<sup>5</sup> Jeremy Cohen has shown in particular how some of the stories in the Hebrew Crusader chronicles adopted Christian motifs such as the mass and the idea of *Mater Ecclesia*.<sup>6</sup>

Following Yuval, Marcus, and Cohen, I want to show how Jewish and Christian beliefs about blood have a symbiotic relationship, operating within the same universe of discourse. Of course, one should not exaggerate this thesis, since both traditions also had their own internal dynamics and textual traditions. I will try to indicate where these internal factors are at work, while at the same time attending carefully to where they may also be influenced by the larger medieval discourses shared by both Jews and Christians. In addition, although most of the scholarly discussion of blood in medieval Jewish-Christian relations focuses on the blood libel, I will try to embed this accusation and the Jewish defense against it in larger structures of elite and popular religion. Because this is an argument dealing with cultural beliefs and practices that persisted over the *longue durée* (some of them continue today in more secularized forms), the discussion that follows will draw phenomenologically from a wide range of sources from the twelfth to the eighteenth century. I aim less to demonstrate specific influences and filiations than to sketch out some fundamental Jewish and Christian medieval mentalities having to do with blood.

The thesis of this chapter is built around two implicit arguments (implicit because one never finds them made explicitly). First, on the Christian side, since the blood of God is to be found in the bodies of Christians who have taken communion, Jews might want to steal such blood for themselves: the blood libel was the product of a Christian theology of blood projected outward. But for Jews, too, a tight connection emerged between God's blood and the blood of the Jews themselves, especially the blood of circumcision and the blood of the martyrs. This association

had an implicit implication for the blood accusation: because Jews had various forms of blood that connected them to God, they had no inherent need for the blood of Christians. In the fraught relations between medieval Jews and Christians, the blood of the adherents of each religion had an additional function, though: when it was spilled in violent defense of the faith, it might bring about the final redemption. In this chapter, as in chapters 4 and 5, the trajectory of blood—both human and divine—leads ineluctably to apocalyptic violence.

I have argued in chapters 1 and 2 that blood must be seen as an index of power, in the Bible that of priests, and in late antiquity that of Christians versus Jews. In the Christian Middle Ages, this last struggle for power had long been resolved, and the Jews were a minority—often a tiny minority—in Christendom. Nonetheless, the polemics between Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages suggest that the imbalance in actual power did not prevent both real and imaginary threats. Thus, Christians feared that Jews mocked them and stole their holy objects, such as the Host. And some became convinced that the Jews had designs on their blood. Whether or not these accusations were true—some were, but many, of course, were not—the fact that Christians entertained them and that Jews vociferously launched their own counterattacks demonstrates that on the discursive and imaginative level, power was more evenly shared.

#### DIVINE BLOOD AND THE MYSTICAL BODY OF GOD

We begin at a considerable remove from the violent language of the ritual-murder accusation and other bloody controversies between Jews and Christians. In both medieval Christianity and medieval Judaism, blood came to occupy a central place in conceptions of God and thus of the way one ought to worship the divine. The evolution of the Eucharist into the dogma of literal transubstantiation is a familiar story in the history of medieval Christianity. Whereas the Eucharist had been one sacrament among many, and perhaps even inferior to baptism, it now became the preeminent sacrament. As Alger of Liège (1055–1131) wrote: “The water of baptism does not contain the Holy Spirit essentially but only figuratively; only the sacrament of bread and wine is changed in such a way that in substance it is not what it used to be before.”<sup>7</sup> In 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council declared that the transformation of the wine and wafer into the blood and flesh of Christ was literally true, thus ending more than a millennium of debate among theologians.

But the physical reality of the Eucharist was not only a preoccupation of elite theology. Miri Rubin has shown in her study of the Corpus Christi feast that worship of the Eucharist on the popular level involved increasingly physical representations, such as processions with the venerated Host.<sup>8</sup> The corporality in these popular beliefs was an expression of a more general tendency in late medieval Christianity among theologians and artists toward thinking of Jesus in human terms, such as representations and imitations of his physical sufferings.<sup>9</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum has demonstrated how this emphasis on the physical body of Christ manifested itself at times in startling gender reversals with Jesus represented as a nursing mother, a trope similar to earlier Jewish traditions on Moses and Aaron nursing the Israelites with Torah.<sup>10</sup> This metaphor might be applied as well to pastoral leaders, such as the twelfth-century saint Bernard of Clairvaux, who was said to lactate and provide milk to his flock.<sup>11</sup>

The twelfth-century Cistercian monk Aelred of Rievaulx, drawing on the story from the Gospel of John in which the wound on Jesus's side flowed with water and blood, understood the water as Christ's milk:

Then one of the soldiers opened his side with a lance and there came forth blood and water. Hasten, linger not, eat the honeycomb with your honey, drink your wine with your milk. The blood is changed into wine to gladden you, the water into milk to nourish you. From the rock streams have flowed for you, wounds have been made in his limbs, holes in the wall of his body, in which, like a dove, you may hide while you kiss them one by one. Your lips, stained with blood, will become like a scarlet ribbon and your word sweet.<sup>12</sup>

Christ's wound is transformed here into a kind of male breast; the blood coming from it is changed into wine, and the water into milk (we shall later see how the relationship between blood and milk was mobilized in Jewish-Christian polemics).<sup>13</sup> This text reverses the Eucharist: rather than the wine turning into blood, the blood turns into wine. Bynum has pointed out this oddity and has argued that the withholding of the Eucharistic cup from the laity—and particularly from women—led to a surrogate blood piety based on the relics of Christ's blood.<sup>14</sup> This blood cult competed with the Eucharist by offering a different vehicle to mystical ecstasy, one based more on death than on life. As Bynum notes, the operative Latin word in some of the texts is *cruor*, which means bloodshed, as opposed to *sanguis*, which might be understood as life-giving blood.

An example of this kind of blood piety can be found in the eleventh century, when the Italian monk Peter Damian related the following vision:

"I often perceived, in a very vivid intuition of my mind, Christ fastened with nails, hanging on the cross, and, with my mouth placed underneath, I eagerly caught the dripping blood."<sup>15</sup> Note that Peter imagines he drinks directly of the blood of Christ from his wounds. To drink this blood meant to find salvation in the very violence with which the Savior had died.

The text from Exodus 24 might also be pressed into service in the intensifying fervor of medieval blood piety. In his gloss on Exodus, Rupert of Deutz (1075/1080–1129), a Benedictine monk from France, like some of his patristic predecessors, interpreted Moses's throwing of blood on the people as a baptism. He argued that the conclusion of the chapter, in which Aaron and the elders see God, was not possible without this act: "Without the sprinkling of blood, no one will see God."<sup>16</sup> Once again, it is blood, rather than water, that constitutes the more powerful liquid agent: "baptism" in blood is necessary to achieve the highest mystical vision. Here, too, the blood in question appears to be something other than that of the Eucharist, perhaps even, like the blood relics, a spiritualized alternative to the sacramental cup.

No medieval Christian spiritualist was more obsessed with blood than the thirteenth-century Catherine of Siena.<sup>17</sup> Catherine opens many of her letters with such phrases as "I, Catherine, servant and slave of the servants of Jesus Christ, am writing to encourage you in his precious blood." She is famously said to have died uttering the words "blood, blood," meaning, presumably, that she was now ready to give up her soul to the blood of Christ. In a letter from the same year as the one quoted above, this time to a female disciple, she wrote:

I long to see you a true servant and daughter of the good gentle Jesus, bathed and clothed in the blood of God's son, so that every garment of selfish love may be stripped from you, along with any ignorance and indifference. So I want you to follow the Magdalene, that lovely woman in love, who never let go of the tree of the most holy cross. No, with perseverance she was bathed in the blood of God's son; she got drunk on it; she so filled her memory and heart and understanding with it that she became incapable of loving anything but Christ Jesus.<sup>18</sup>

Catherine's account of Christ's blood is clearly based on a mystical sense that the very physical substance that drenched Mary Magdalene below the cross was still available to all Christians who wished to throw off "the garment of selfish love." In another letter she adjures a follower: "Unhappy me! I can see no other reason except that the eye of our understanding is not focused on the tree of the cross. For there is revealed such warm love, such gently persuasive teaching filled with life-giving

fruits, such generosity that he has torn open his very body, has shed his life's blood, and with that blood has baptized and bathed us. We can and should make use of that baptism every day with continual remembrance and great love."<sup>19</sup> For Catherine, the idea of baptism in blood was urgently real, as it was for some of the church fathers we met in chapter 2; it formed the very foundation of her piety.

It was through blood that Catherine imagined it possible to unite mystically with God, as she writes concerning the reenactment of the Last Supper:

This is the Passover I want us to celebrate: I want to see us at the table of the spotless Lamb, who is food, table, and waiter. . . . This table has been furrowed, with channels everywhere flowing with blood. But among them all there is one channel flowing with blood and water mixed with fire, and to the eye that rests on this channel is revealed the secret of his heart.

This blood is a wine on which our soul gets drunk. The more we drink, the more we would like to drink, and we are never fully satisfied, because his flesh and his blood are joined with the infinite God.

Do as a heavy drinker does who loses himself and can no longer see himself. If he really likes the wine he drinks even more, till his stomach becomes so warmed by the wine that he can no longer hold it and out it comes! Truly, son, here is the table on which we find this wine: I mean the pierced side of God's Son. This is the blood that warms, that drives out all chill, clears the voice of the one who drinks it, and gladdens heart and soul.

We who eat at this table and become like the food we eat begin to do as he does . . .<sup>20</sup>

Here the focus is not on baptism in blood, but on eating and drinking. To become drunk on the spiritual blood of Christ means to "become like the food we eat," to *become* Christ. But this is not only a question of the unification of souls: the *body* of the adept becomes part of God's mystical body. This is, of course, a body shorn of its dross materiality, but it is still a body.

A similar process of identification with the physicality of God took place at roughly the same time in Jewish thought, possibly under the influence of Christian ideas. The development of the medieval doctrines of Jewish mysticism—commonly referred to as Kabbalah—began in southern France in the late twelfth century and accelerated in thirteenth-century Spain, culminating with the writing of the Zohar (Book of Splendor) near the end of the century. The Zohar is based on a theosophy of ten divine potencies, called *sefirot*, consisting of male and female elements. The Kabbalist strives not only to understand the



relationship between these *sefirot* through esoteric exegesis of the Bible, but also, through prayer and purposeful performance of the commandments, to bring the *sefirot* theurgically into a state of harmony. This state of harmony is frequently described in erotic terms as the sexual union of the male and female *sefirot*. But if this union or harmony is disturbed, evil or demonic forces arise and are themselves indirect products of the divine forces.

The theosophical Kabbalah famously organized its symbolic system around a divine *anthropos*, an astral body of God.<sup>21</sup> Arthur Green has argued convincingly that the female aspect of God, called *shekhinah*, represents a Jewish mystical response to the medieval cult of the Virgin Mary.<sup>22</sup> If one may generalize from Green's conclusions, might not the fascination with the divine body that one finds in the Kabbalah, and especially in the Zohar, reflect a similar Jewish response to the new Christian preoccupation with Christ's body? If this suggestion has any validity, we might expect that God's blood would also find some expression in the Kabbalah. And in fact, based on the Kabbalistic notion that every entity in this world has its spiritual analogue in the divine, the various types of human and animal blood described in the Bible may be said to inhabit God's body as well.

The Zohar describes the blood of the ancient sacrifices as representing the power of judgment, or *din*, which is the *sefirah gevurah*. This *sefirah* is particularly dangerous because if not balanced with the power of mercy, the *sefirah hesed*, it can degenerate into the evil side or *sitra ahra*. In the color symbolism of the Zohar, *din*, or judgment, is red, and *hesed*, or mercy, is white.<sup>23</sup> When the holocaust sacrifice is burned, the red blood is turned into white smoke, which mystically means that stern judgment is turned into mercy.<sup>24</sup> If, however, the blood is not properly disposed of, it turns black, which is the color of the demonic *sitra ahra*.<sup>25</sup> Translating this theology into physiological terms, the blood coagulates and becomes, in effect, dead, even the *essence* of death, and is no longer the biblical essence of life. One might say that God's own blood has potentially violent or destructive qualities unless reigned in by other forces in the divine anatomy.

Although the Zohar does not deal extensively with the blood of circumcision, the act of circumcision is very important to its symbolism, as Elliot Wolfson has made clear.<sup>26</sup> The circumcised penis is the *sefirah yesod*, or "foundation," which mediates between the male *sefirah tiferet* (beauty) and the female *sefirah malkhut* (kingdom), also called *shekhinah*, or the divine presence (the latter term refers to the fact that this female *sefirah*

mediates between the divine system of *sefirot* and the lower worlds). The Zohar takes the old midrash discussed in chapter 2, the midrash that says Israel was redeemed from Egypt because of the blood of the Passover sacrifice and the blood of circumcision, and gives it a surprising new meaning.<sup>27</sup> When one performs a circumcision, there are two types of blood. The first is that of the circumcision itself, and it paradoxically symbolizes the *shekhinah* (that is, male blood symbolizes the divine female). The second type of blood stands for what is called in the circumcision ceremony *periyah*, the folding back of the membrane under the foreskin over the corona of the penis. This blood represents the sexual unification of the female and male potencies through the divine phallus. Wolfson has argued persuasively that this process represents the masculinization of the *shekhinah*.<sup>28</sup> The female element of God has to be circumcised on a male body as a precondition for divine union in order to purge it of the demonic forces represented by the foreskin. And it is the blood of circumcision that both symbolizes and theurgically effects divine sexual union.

The Zohar Hadash, a sixteenth-century collection of material not included in the printed edition of the Zohar, applies this doctrine to Abraham's circumcision.<sup>29</sup> Isaac could be born only after Abraham was circumcised, that is, after Abraham shed blood. The two Hebrew letters for blood, *dalet* and final *mem*, stand for elements in the lower and upper worlds that must be repaired in order to assure fertility, both human and divine. (Oddly enough, the text implies that Sarah's infertility was really Abraham's.) The blood of circumcision effects this repair. Once the divine union is repaired, a human soul can descend from its divine home into the world.

Blood is also the medium through which food is incorporated into the body.<sup>30</sup> This nexus between food, blood, and fertility is found in the thirteenth-century Kabbalistic instructional guide to sexuality, *Iggeret ha-Kodesh* (Letter of Holiness). Here digestion is presented as the proper model and analogue for sexuality.<sup>31</sup> The author raises the question of why human beings are allowed, even commanded, to slaughter animals for food, when fruits and vegetable would have done as well. His answer, which is based on a detailed physiology of digestion taken almost entirely from Galen, is that eating animals is a way of raising them to a higher level, since they are incorporated into the limbs of their eaters: what we eat becomes us, an idea that would not have seemed alien to medieval Christians.

The incorporation of food into the body of the eater reaches its end state with the formation of the semen, which understanding explains

why one must digest one's food fully before engaging in intercourse. The semen first forms in the blood, then passes to the brain, and then moves through the spinal column to the genitals. Semen is the most rarefied element of the body, the most clarified form of blood—an idea also taken from ancient Greek medicine. Following the homunculus theory, semen contains miniature versions of each limb of the body. It represents a material substance that is nevertheless the most purified of any mere physical dross. Although the *Iggeret* never makes this point explicitly, semen would seem for the author to be the mediator between the material and the spiritual, a *res divina*. In the seed, all lower forms of materiality, including both food and the actual limbs of the body, are transmuted into a pure substance that has the capacity not only to create new life but also to influence the very potencies of the divine. Just as the digestive system raises the meat of an animal to a higher level, culminating in the formation of semen as the most clarified form of blood, so physical desire has to be transformed into spiritual intention. But digestion is not just a metaphor, since food is precisely that material substance out of which semen is made. Proper sex, one might say, is the spiritual extension of digestion, as that which started as food becomes semen and finally effects the union of the male and female *sefirot*.

Since the blood that becomes semen passes through the brain, it is uniquely susceptible to thought. The brain is linked to the upper spheres, so thoughts are more likely to disturb the harmony of God's emanations than are physical deeds. But the power of thought works in the other direction as well, by impressing on matter that which is imagined. Thus, if one's thoughts are directed toward heaven—and specifically toward the female manifestation of God—the semen will be pure; but if one's thoughts are about pleasure or the physical beauty of one's earthly partner, then the seed will become “smelly” and polluted. The erotic ecstasy of medieval Christian mystics toward Christ finds its Jewish counterpart in this Kabbalistic doctrine.<sup>32</sup>

This is not, however, only a sexual physiology for human beings; it is also a mystical description of the divine body. The very same process that takes place within the human body during intercourse takes place simultaneously within God. Thus, the divine blood must also undergo clarification into semen, but if God's harmony is disrupted, typically by human misdeeds, then—as we have seen—His blood coagulates and becomes malevolent.

The divine body described here is male, just as the mystics addressed by the Kabbalah would appear to be exclusively male. But, as should

already be apparent, the body of God has its female elements, and as Daniel Abrams has shown, in some passages in the Kabbalistic literature of the thirteenth century, God is conceptualized as female.<sup>33</sup> In what appears to be a precise Jewish equivalent of the Christian trope of “Jesus as Mother,” God is portrayed as having breasts and suckling the mystic with divine milk.<sup>34</sup> Here, following Galenic medicine, God’s blood is transmuted not into semen, but into milk. Just as food was linked to male forms of blood, so female blood, following Galen’s physiology, had its nutritive product in breast milk.

But if one follows Galen further, female blood that does not turn into milk becomes menstrual blood. And whereas the blood of circumcision and clarified blood in the form of semen possessed certain divine qualities in the Kabbalah, the same could not be said for the blood of menstruation. An extraordinary passage from an early fifteenth-century text, the *Sefer ha-Nizzahon* of Yom Tov Lipmann Mühlhausen of Prague, inverts the eating metaphor of the *Iggeret ha-Kodesh*. The author states that “the prohibition on sex with a menstruating woman is part and parcel of the prohibition on eating blood.” Just as someone who eats the blood incorporates into himself the bestial nature of the animal on his plate, so the man who has intercourse with a woman who is menstruating absorbs the bestial nature of the menstrual blood, since his lust (*taavah*) causes the “sources of [animal] nature” (*mekorei ha-tivaim*) to open up.<sup>35</sup> This is not, however, true for sex with a virgin, because the blood of virginity (as the Talmud already postulates) is not uterine. By using the word *mekor*, Lipmann Mühlhausen refers to the passage in Leviticus 20:18 that, we recall, speaks of both parties to intercourse during menstruation revealing “her source” (*mekorah*), probably meaning her uterus. Sex during menstruation causes male lust to become contaminated with female animality, which a man should avoid by channeling his passion through the prescribed methods of intercourse.

The Jewish mystical tradition (of which Lipmann Mühlhausen was well aware) represented the blood of menstruation in its most negative light by holding that it contained the forces of *tumah*, or impurity. Indeed, Jewish mysticism went far beyond the Talmud in its negative views of the menstruating woman; for the Talmud, menstruation conveyed only a technical impurity and not a moral stain.<sup>36</sup> As Sharon Koren has shown, the spurious *Beraita de-Masekhet Niddah*, a quasi-mystical work that she dates to the sixth or seventh century, contains some of the most venomous warnings about the dangers of the menstruating woman, going so far as to attribute demonic powers to her breath and

her footsteps.<sup>37</sup> This text strongly influenced the classical Kabbalah of the Middle Ages. In the *Zohar*, the *shekhinah* herself is said to menstruate when she is under the sway of the demonic forces and she has “adulterous” sexual union with these forces.<sup>38</sup> Sexual relations by human beings during a woman’s menstrual period can also cause the *shekhinah* to menstruate, which in turn provokes her exile from the realm of the holy into the realm of the demonic. The pure *shekhinah* therefore did not menstruate, a unique status that resembles some views of the Virgin Mary.

Following an old midrash, the *Zohar* holds that the primordial snake cast his “filth” upon the woman (meaning here the *shekhinah*); this filth is identified with menstrual blood.<sup>39</sup> The snake is therefore the cause of menstruation, a rather interesting gender reversal, since the snake stands for the male aspect of the demonic. In one particularly dramatic passage, the snake bites the *shekhinah* on the vagina twice as she is giving birth. The first bite causes her to bleed, with the snake licking the blood of childbirth, while the second bite causes her to emit water (the sequence of events here is, of course, the reverse of what actually happens in childbirth).<sup>40</sup> In this case, it is the blood of childbirth, which is even more polluting than the blood of menstruation, that is engendered by the demonic snake. And the combination of blood and water looks remarkably—but probably coincidentally—like a negative mirror image of the Christian cult of the blood and water emitted from the side of the crucified Christ.

In the sixteenth century, Isaac Luria developed a complex myth of how the demonic forces crouch at the feet of the *shekhinah* and drink her menstrual blood.<sup>41</sup> To complicate matters, Luria says that these discharges come from the *shekhinah*’s “foundation” or *yesod*, which, in Kabbalistic symbolism, is the divine phallus. In the androgynous system of the *sefirot*, the male genitalia are the paradoxical source of the *shekhinah*’s menstrual bleeding. The demonic forces can, however, be tamed by turning the blood into preserved wine.

Both Adam and Eve were victims of the snake. In the seventeenth-century *Toledot Adam* (*The Life of Adam*), written by Isaiah Horowitz, who contributed much to the popularization of the Kabbalah, we find the following passage connecting the Fall with blood:

All was good and not evil [that is, in the Garden of Eden] except that the power of the snake and Samael seduced Adam and Eve and they brought out evil from potentiality to actuality. Where Adam had been worthy of being true, that is to say, eternal, he now was bound up with

lack. The *alef* was separated from Adam and he remained *dam* [the last two letters of *adam*, meaning “blood”], which indicates redness, the power of judgment. And the *alef* was separated from *emet* (truth) and it remained *met* (dead). *Demut* [the likeness of God] became *dam mavet* [“blood of death” by separating the letters of the word *demut* into two words], *dam* from Adam and *mavet* from Eve, who was the cause of death in the world.<sup>42</sup>

As opposed to the Bible, which associates blood with life, here blood is connected to death, just as Adam is connected to Eve. And it is God himself—or his likeness—that has been sundered into “the blood of death.”

Blood in the Kabbalah therefore had various contradictory valences, but the purpose of the commandments was to maintain the purity of God's own blood, an idea clearly familiar to medieval Christian piety. For both medieval Christians and medieval Jews, then, the body of God—and especially His blood—stood at the center of spirituality. By partaking in this blood, whether through the Eucharist, the cult of blood relics, the rituals of circumcision, or even proper acts of intercourse, one might become part of this divine body.

#### BLOOD AND THE COVENANT

As we observed in chapter 2, the “covenant of blood” between God and his people was anything but exclusively Christian. Like Rupert of Deutz, medieval Jewish thinkers returned to the strange blood ritual of Exodus 24:8 as a sign of the covenant. The eleventh-century commentator Hananel ben Hushiel remarked:

The sprinkling of blood on them was in order that they should enter the covenant with God through blood. And they called the stain of blood on their clothing “ornament” [*adi*] since it was an ornament for them and a great honor. And it gave them testimony [*edut*] and a sign that they had entered the covenant with God. And therefore, when they sinned with the calf and transgressed the covenant, he said to them: “take off your ornaments,” that is, take off from your garments that which had been ornaments for you . . . those clothes on which the blood of the covenant had been thrown that were the witness and sign between God and themselves. And why did God use blood to make a covenant with them? A hint [*remez*] to them that if they keep the Torah, it will be good, but if not I will allow your blood for *karet* and for death.<sup>43</sup>

Hananel's interpretation runs diametrically counter to what we recall from the book of *Jubilees*: instead of warning against bloodstains on clothing, he celebrates these stains as “an ornament” and “great honor,”

just as the literature of martyrdom from late antiquity, as well as after the Crusader massacres, might speak of the blood of Jewish martyrs staining God's coat. Moreover, these bloodstains, which, of course, are not mentioned at all in the biblical text, were a "sign" and a "testimony" that the Israelites had entered into the covenant (Hananel makes a word play between the Hebrew words for ornament and testimony). After breaking the covenant by building the golden calf, the people removed the clothing that signified that covenant.

Even more dramatically, Isaac Magrisso, who completed the eighteenth-century Ladino commentary on Exodus of the compilation entitled *Me-am Loez*, wrote on the same verse that the bloodstains on the clothing were both a sign of covenant and magical protection. The blood signified that the Israelites were pure, but it was also a sign to sinners that they would be killed if they transgressed. He continues:

Moses separated the blood of the sacrifices into two parts, throwing one part on the altar and the other on the people, and hinted with this that they were united with God in heart and in soul. They committed themselves not to separate from [God] and not to do anything that is not commanded, even if it should require them to undergo martyrdom. And for this reason, the Israelite nation is called by the name "Adam," as it is written: "You are Adam" (Ezekiel 34). You are called Adam and there is no other nation in the world called Adam, because they did not receive a covenant that was contracted with blood. But because Israel took upon themselves a covenant that was contracted in blood, they are called Adam. Of this, Scripture says: "Live in your blood" (Ezekiel 16), since the two parts of blood gave life to Israel and they became sons of God [*banim la-makom*].<sup>44</sup>

The covenant of blood unites Israel with God: they become, as it were, part of God's body ("united with God in heart and in soul"). Here the association of blood (*dam*) with the name Adam is thoroughly positive and signifies the covenant contracted in blood. Even more extraordinary is that because Israel was the only nation, according to Magrisso, to contract a covenant in blood, only Israel is called Adam. The rest of the nations of the world—and Magrisso must have had in mind particularly Christians—occupy a lower rung in his religious anthropology.

This eighteenth-century text is admittedly very late relative to the arguments we have been following from the High Middle Ages. It is nevertheless quite possible that Magrisso may have given expression to Sephardic collective memory going back to the Iberian Peninsula in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It was there, the place from which both the author and his audience originated, that the fifteenth-century

doctrine of the “purity of the blood” (*limpieza de sangre*) took hold.<sup>45</sup> Reacting to the enormous wave of Jewish conversions to Christianity starting with the pogroms of 1391, Catholic authorities in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries enacted increasingly severe laws to distinguish Old from New Christians, laws that explicitly used blood language strikingly similar to that seen in nineteenth-century racial anti-Semitism. Conversion could not expunge Jewish blood. As if to counter the claims of Old Christians regarding the purity of *their* blood, then, Magrisso seems to propose that the covenant of blood at Mount Sinai created the pure nation of Israel, whom he calls the “sons of God,” a not-so-veiled appropriation of a classic Christian topos. Indeed, Sephardic Jews at times borrowed the protoracial ideas of Christian Iberia and saw themselves as possessing superior blood. This sense of superiority was even at times directed at other Jews: when they established a community in Amsterdam in the seventeenth century, the Portuguese Jews discriminated against their Ashkenazic coreligionists by, for example, either imposing sanctions on or even forbidding marriage with them.<sup>46</sup>

This ideology of something like racial superiority may have also been linked to the sufferings of the Iberian Jewish conversos at the hands of the Inquisition. In an allusion to this suffering, Magrisso holds that the blood covenant obligated the Jews to adhere to their faith even at the risk of martyrdom. In the section that follows this commentary, he cites the Second Temple story of the martyrdom of Hannah and her seven sons as an example of how the Jews’ covenant in blood inoculates them against idolatry even at the cost of their lives: the covenant of blood leads to the shedding of Jewish blood. By arguing that the Jews maintained their faith even in the face of martyrdom, Magrisso was contradicting what he knew full well: that many Sephardic Jews had, in fact, betrayed their faith by converting, willingly or not, to Christianity. But by grounding their identity in an indelible stain of blood, Magrisso suggested that such conversion was an illusion, a dissembling that could not erase their covenant of blood.

#### CIRCUMCISION POLEMICS

As this last text suggests, the language of each religion’s blood covenant was often bound up with polemic against that of the other. Given the centrality of circumcision and menstruation to medieval blood language, it is no surprise that these two themes recur repeatedly in medieval Jewish-Christian polemics. A general theme of Jewish apologetics



over circumcision was that the excision of the foreskin was responsible, either physiologically or symbolically, for Jewish moral virtue, especially in the controlling of excessive sexual desire.<sup>47</sup> Joseph Kimhi, a twelfth-century polemicist from Provence, extended this claim by arguing that circumcision inoculated the Jews against violent and aggressive behavior. The Christian claim to be “circumcised in the heart” (i.e., moral), was spurious because they did not circumcise the flesh: so much for the Christian boast that they were “Israel of the spirit.” As a result, Christians were more prone to violent crimes: “Whoever transgresses the commandments and murders, fornicates, steals, oppresses, speaks abusively to people and mocks and robs them is uncircumcised in heart. You [Christians] are uncircumcised in the heart and uncircumcised in the flesh while Israel are circumcised in heart and in flesh. You will not find a Jew who has been hanged or who has had his eyes gouged or who has had one of his limbs cut off on account of crimes he has committed.”<sup>48</sup> By removing the foreskin, the Jews prevented the commission of crimes whose punishment was some form of amputation: the minor mutilation of circumcision was a prophylactic against later major mutilation.

Debate between Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages was conducted in formal, public polemics but also in many less formal interactions, such as in the marketplace. Some of the polemics that were written down were designed for use against the other side, while others were more for internal self-justification. Kimhi's text, for example, appears to be intended for use in actual public polemics against Christians. This was also the case for the thirteenth-century *Sefer Yosef ha-Mekane*, written by Joseph Official, a French polemicist, whose father, Nathan Official, also took part in polemics. Joseph builds an argument for the redemptive power of the blood of circumcision over against the water of baptism in response to a polemical challenge.<sup>49</sup> The challenge comes from an apostate who claims that it was Christ whose blood redeemed those souls condemned to hell, thus fulfilling the passage in Zechariah 9:11: “For the sake of the blood of the covenant I have redeemed your prisoners from the pit. . . . I announce this day that I will repay you twice.” The apostate had argued that this verse meant that, by virtue of baptism (the “pit”), the Christian earns the new testament (the second “payment”), which is akin to redemption.

Joseph counters that the biblical verses promising redemption have not been fulfilled and that the verse in Zechariah means that the Jews are saved from coerced baptism (*shemad*) by virtue of both the blood of circumcision *and* the covenantal blood that Moses threw on the

people at Mount Sinai (Joseph follows rabbinic tradition in conflating the two). This twofold blood of the covenant guarantees the second payment, which is the coming redemption (the first redemption having been at the time of Ezra). The context of this polemic is clearly the phenomenon, however widespread, of both voluntary and coerced baptism in thirteenth-century France, which Joseph Official seeks to counter by claiming that the Jews have a more powerful fluid of salvation than do the Christians.

This Jewish claim that blood trumped water may well have resonated later among Sephardic Jews as they confronted the purity-of-the-blood statutes. The Jews agreed with the Christians that blood was stronger than water, for just as the Christians held that the water of baptism could not really expunge Jewish blood, so Jews themselves believed that the conversos remained true Jews "under the skin," even if they had sinned.<sup>50</sup> Neither Christians nor Jews were prepared to accept the idea of a Jewish-Christian hybrid, even one that was the result of seemingly sincere conversion.

This argument over the blood of circumcision versus the water of baptism was taken up by the thirteenth-century anonymous compendium *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan*, which also appears to have been intended for use in actual polemics. The text contains an imagined disputation between Jews and Christians over the atoning qualities of the blood of circumcision and the water of baptism, based on the verse in Ezekiel "Then I washed you with water and washed away your blood from you and anointed you with oil" (Ezek. 16:9).<sup>51</sup> The Christians say that this refers to the water of baptism, but the Jews answer with another, earlier verse: "And when I passed by you and saw you wallowing your blood, I said to you, live in your blood, live in your blood" (16:6). The Jews then say to the Christians: "So you see that blood is better than water, as it is written, 'Live in your blood.' Now what is the blood of a man in which he lives? It must be the blood of circumcision. This is also what Zechariah meant when he said, 'As for you also, by the blood of your covenant I have sent you forth prisoners out of the pit' [Zech. 9:11]." <sup>52</sup> Here, too, there is no mention of water as the agent of salvation.

There is corroboration in medieval Christian sources for this dispute between circumcision and baptism. As Richard Schenk has demonstrated, medieval scholastics were often preoccupied with the sacramental status of circumcision in relation to baptism, because Jesus himself was circumcised, a fact that some rationalized as proving that he had a body.<sup>53</sup> Some of the Christian polemicists clearly preferred water over

blood. Thus, Israel Yuval has shown how the Christian blood-libel narratives often involved rivers, since the Jews were believed “to prefer blood over water, death over salvation.”<sup>54</sup> On a more theological plane, Petrus Alfonsi argued that the practice of baptism was unknown to Moses as a procedure for conversion and was only learned by the Jews from Jesus.<sup>55</sup> The Jews, for their part, insisted that blood is the main Jewish sign of difference and identity, while the Christians resorted to the “weaker” sign of water. Of course, this argument took place at a time when, as we have seen, the Christians themselves had embraced the blood—and body—of Christ as the most powerful sacrament.

The primary issue here, though, is circumcision. Let us examine the way the Jewish exegete used the text from Ezekiel 16 to establish the primacy of the blood of circumcision over the water of baptism. The verses from Ezekiel refer expressly to a *woman* who symbolizes Israel. The blood of circumcision that the exegete identifies in Ezekiel is, in actuality, the blood of childbirth in the case of the first verse and the blood of virginity in the case of the second. The text turns the female imagery of Ezekiel into male blood. This exegetical move mirrors a similar inversion that can be found in the rabbinic circumcision liturgy itself, where the verses from Ezekiel are recited after the circumcision has been completed. Here, too, the female imagery of Ezekiel is applied paradoxically to a male child. One is struck by the gender fluidity that is associated with blood in both of these texts, as if the verses in Ezekiel could not be allowed to mean what they self-evidently mean, perhaps because only male blood, the blood of circumcision, is given positive valence in Jewish tradition.

As we have seen, the redemptive power of the blood of circumcision had already emerged in rabbinic literature and was given new power in the Middle Ages. One medieval Ashkenazic custom that made this blood public and visible was the habit of taking the cloth with which the *mohel* (the ritual circumciser) had wiped his hands of the blood and hanging it in the door of the synagogue in which the circumcision had been performed.<sup>56</sup> The source that describes this custom specifies that the practice replicates the salvific smearing of the blood on the doorposts of the Jews in Egypt as protection against the Angel of Death. Yet the practice was enacted in the context of a Christianity that also publicly displayed icons of the blood of Christ.

In the circumcision ritual, several drops of wine are put in the infant's mouth. As in the Eucharist, the wine would appear to stand for the blood that has been spilled, in this case as a result of the operation.

Just as blood atones for blood in the sacrificial cult, so perhaps the wine suckled by the infant may have been thought to constitute a remedy for the circumcision. Consumption of blood is even more explicit in the custom of the *mohel* sucking several drops of blood from the wound (although he would not actually swallow the blood). The justification for this rabbinic custom of *metzitzah* was generally medical: it was believed that sucking the blood would prevent infection.<sup>57</sup> However, it is hard to avoid the suspicion that something more ritualistic was at stake. These Jewish practices might be called the mirror image of the Eucharist. In both cases, blood appears to be consumed, although in fact it is not.

Christians knew of Jewish circumcision practices, at least in some distorted way. In the thirteenth century, Raymond Martini wrote of the practice of *metzitzah*: "And with what great guilt is that most abominable mouth, which quite often has blasphemed the Lord Jesus Christ, infected and punished. For as often as they circumcise an infant or an adult, they suck the penis orally for as long as the blood emerges from it."<sup>58</sup> Martini goes on to refute the health argument for *metzitzah* by showing that the Muslims practice hygienic circumcision without sucking the wound. He inverts the Jewish belief in the salvific properties of the blood of circumcision. The Jews are punished "measure for measure": instead of promoting health, they suffer infections in their blaspheming mouths. Here we have an accusation that the Jews consume blood, but the context is not that of ritual murder.

At times, though, circumcision was connected directly to the blood libel. In the testimony recorded after the Endingen blood libel in late fifteenth-century Germany, the Jews ostensibly confess to needing Christian blood in order to cure the wound of circumcision.<sup>59</sup> The assumption here is that Jewish blood is unhealthy and requires Christian blood to heal it. The Christians challenged the Endingen Jews to make their blood healthy by accepting baptism, but the Jews rejected this as "devil's work." The Christians evidently held that their blood was healthy because the Christian body passed through the water of baptism, while Jewish blood remained tainted because the Jewish rite of membership was based on blood rather than water. This association of ritual murder with circumcision can be found in the iconography of some of the blood libels from this period, such as the woodcut depiction of the murder of Simon of Trent in 1475, which shows the Jews extracting blood from the penis of a Christian child using implements that seem to resemble those of the *mohel*.<sup>60</sup> Responding to this kind of

thinking in the early sixteenth century, Johannes Pfefferkorn denounced vulgar Christians who thought that the Jews needed Christian blood as a result of circumcision.<sup>61</sup> But the association between circumcision and blood libel suggests that a link, albeit distorted, did exist between what Christians thought Jews did and actual Jewish practices and beliefs.

#### MEDICINE AND FOLKLORE

The belief that the Jews needed Christian blood for medicinal purposes suggests embedding the blood libel in a larger field of medieval and early modern medicine and folklore, which contained many prescriptions for the curative power of various types of blood.<sup>62</sup> These claims were based on the magical belief in the poisoning properties of unlike substances and, conversely, the curative properties of like substances. The blood of martyrs was often assumed to be curative. Thus, for example, the thirteenth-century *Golden Legend* (*Legenda Aurea*), which recorded the lives of saints, related that the water in which Thomas Becket's blood-stained clothes were washed had healing powers, as did the blood of the martyr Peter, who was killed by Catharite heretics.<sup>63</sup> Even the blood—and fat—of executed criminals might serve this function, as Kathy Stuart has shown in a study of sixteenth-century Germany.<sup>64</sup> Here the “polluted” trade of executioner took on a paradoxical healing function, as did the blood of criminals. Such blood might even be equated with the blood of Christ, as we can see in a remarkable letter of Catherine of Siena relating how she attended the execution of Niccolo di Toldo: “I stretched out his neck and bent down to him, reminding him of the blood of the Lamb. His lips kept murmuring only ‘Jesus’ and ‘Catherine,’ and he was still murmuring when I received his head into my hands. . . . My soul rested in peace and quiet in such a fragrance of blood that I could not bear to wash away his blood that had splashed onto me.”<sup>65</sup> Catherine's search for mystical union with the blood of Christ found its realization here on the executioner's block.

To eat or drink blood might be demonic in the case of Jews, but it was not always negative. A story reminiscent of Constantine's cure from leprosy discussed in chapter 2 was told about Louis XI: “Every day he grew worse and the medicines profited him nothing, though of a strange character; for he vehemently hoped to recover by the human blood which he took and swallowed from certain children.”<sup>66</sup> There were even rumors, which led to rioting in France in 1750, that King Louis XV had abducted children in order to cure his leprosy, a charge

that had nothing to do with Jews.<sup>67</sup> The blood accusation against Jews clearly must be situated in this wider field of folk beliefs.

Jews were certainly not the only ones thought to consume blood for nefarious and benign purposes. Since witches were believed to use blood for magical purposes, perhaps these practices might be harnessed for more salutary ends.<sup>68</sup> Here, for example, is a prescription for consumption of blood by the fifteenth-century physician and philosopher Marsilio Ficino:

It is an ancient and common opinion that certain crones, called witches, suck the blood of infants in order to rejuvenate themselves as best they can. Then why might not our elderly, finding themselves all but without hope of survival, suck the blood of a lad? Of a lad, I say, of stalwart forces—healthy, cheerful, well-tempered, having excellent blood that might by happy chance be excessive. Let them suck, then, like a leech—that is, a bloodsucker—from a slightly opened vein in the skinny part of the arm, an ounce or two, then immediately take the same amount of syrup or wine. This should to be done precisely when they are hungry and thirsty, and at the waxing of the moon.<sup>69</sup>

Ficino might be seen as an early pioneer of blood transfusion as a weapon against aging, as opposed to the more common resort to bleeding (phlebotomy) in premodern medicine.<sup>70</sup> Some may have imagined that the Jews, like witches, were on to something in their lust for the blood of Christian children—only they took it too far.

#### MENSTRUATION POLEMICS

We have seen that Jews regarded the blood of circumcision and the blood of menstruation as binary opposites. This dichotomy can be observed quite clearly in Jewish anti-Christian polemics. Jews used the negative valence of menstrual blood as an argument against the divinity of Jesus. According to one of the Crusader chronicles, the Jews who were about to commit suicide cried out: “Look and see, God, what we do for the sanctification of your great Name, rather than to abandon your divinity for a crucified one, . . . a bastard and a child of menstruation and lust.”<sup>71</sup> Jesus was doubly cursed because not only did his mother become pregnant as a result of adultery (a common theme in anti-Christian polemics going back to the Talmud and the *Sefer Toledot Yeshu*), but she did so during her menstrual period. Nathan Official (the father of the aforementioned Joseph) argued that if Israel was punished for worshipping something clean like the gold of the golden calf, how much more should

Christians be punished “for saying that something holy entered into a woman in that stinking place—for there is nothing in the world as disgusting as a woman’s stomach, which is full of feces and urine, which emits discharge and menstrual blood and serves as the receptacle for man’s semen.”<sup>72</sup> Similarly: “Adam was greater than [Jesus], for God took him out of pure holy earth; he had no father or mother and did not stink in a woman’s stomach,”<sup>73</sup> thus making the first man the functional equivalent of the immaculately conceived Mary.

Nathan’s contemporary from southern France, David Kimhi (1160–1235, the son of the above Joseph Kimhi), made a similar argument, claiming that Adam was created able to walk, since he, like the animals, was nourished on arterial, rather than menstrual, blood. But all subsequent human beings are fed in the womb by menstrual blood, which is “a virtually fatal poison” and which does not impart strength to the fetus. As a consequence, human beings since Adam have been unable to walk at birth, an innovative version of the Fall. Since Jesus did not walk or talk at birth, he must have been sustained in Mary’s womb by menstrual blood. Similarly, the fact that he suckled at Mary’s breast is another indication that she menstruated, all of which leads Kimhi to the conclusion that Jesus could not have been conceived by the Holy Spirit.<sup>74</sup>

These arguments came uncomfortably close to turning against Christians actual discussions among medieval Christian theologians, who faced a serious conundrum around the question of whether Mary herself had menstruated.<sup>75</sup> On the one hand, the doctrine of Immaculate Conception, which was widely debated in the Middle Ages (it did not become dogma until 1854), implied that since Mary was born without sin, she did not menstruate, a consequence of the Fall according to both Christian and Jewish texts. On the other hand, if she did not menstruate, then Jesus himself lacked the same bodily origins as other human fetuses, clearly a problem given church dogma about his humanity. The problem became particularly acute when the medieval Marian cult focused in iconography and texts on the Blessed Virgin nursing the baby Jesus. Since medieval medicine held that breast milk was produced from the menstrual blood that remained “bottled up” in a lactating mother, an amenorrheic Mary could not have nursed her child. Thomas Aquinas tried to solve these dilemmas by holding that Mary did, indeed, menstruate, but that her menstrual blood, with which she, like all other mothers, furnished the female substratum for conception, was not tainted by the lust of

sexual intercourse (*impuritatem libidinis*).<sup>76</sup> Her menstrual blood was therefore somehow qualitatively different from that of other women. But the blaspheming Jews violated the pure body of Mary in both their actions and their words, thus violating as well the very social body of the church.<sup>77</sup>

Given these scholastic gymnastics, as well as Christian popular beliefs, it is small wonder that Jewish polemicists felt they had a winning argument when they claimed that Jesus could not have been divine if he was conceived and nurtured in a human womb. Indeed, the very potency of menstrual accusations lay in the common ritual language of church and synagogue, since, as Dyan Elliott has shown, medieval Christianity developed its own powerful taboos around the female body, including menstrual blood.<sup>78</sup> Even though the menstrual prohibitions were irregularly enforced by the church—and sometimes not at all—medieval canon law did not disagree in principle with the Jews that menstrual blood produced an impurity that ought to be avoided.<sup>79</sup>

One might think that menstrual bleeding condemned Jewish women to exclusion from the covenant, but Jewish polemicists, surprisingly, turned this misogynistic possibility on its head.<sup>80</sup> Let us return to the text from the *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan* that elevated blood over water. Christians evidently made an argument that baptism applied equally to both men and women, but the Jews, sensitive to this medieval version of gender “equality,” responded: “The heretics ask: We baptize both males and females and in that way we accept our faith, but in your case only men and not women can be circumcised. One can respond: Women are accepted because they watch themselves and carefully observe the prohibitions connected with menstrual blood.”<sup>81</sup> This is an astonishing move, because it turns menstrual blood into the female equivalent of the blood of circumcision. The *Nizzahon Yashan* also contains a remarkable revision of the old midrash that the Jews of Egypt were redeemed as a result of the blood of circumcision and the blood of the Paschal lamb. To these two types of redemptive blood, it adds a third: the blood of the menstruous woman.<sup>82</sup>

Although this was a period when the already strict menstrual laws of the Talmud became even stricter, here menstrual blood was conceived to have a positive, magical function as a form of protection against God's murder of the firstborn during the Egyptian exile. Indeed, the increasing severity of menstrual customs, which reflected in part the influence of the *Baraita de-Niddah*, may have been both the cause and the effect of polemics with Christianity. Since Christians were perceived as lax regarding the Levitical menstrual prohibitions,



the Jews turned their own adherence to these laws into a point of pride. Just as Jewish men are distinguished by the blood of circumcision, so Jewish women are elevated above Christian women by their scrupulous avoidance of sex during menstruation. Jewish men and women each have a blood marker of identity to counter the Christian water of baptism, or, as the twelfth-century exegete Joseph Bekhor Shor (who may have been the first to suggest this idea), put it, the blood of menstruation for women is “covenantal blood.”<sup>83</sup>

Yom Tov Lipmann Mühlhausen suggested a variant of this idea, at least for when the temple still stood. It is not the blood of menstruation, but the blood of childbirth, that serves indirectly as covenantal blood for women: the obligatory sacrifice that women bring after purifying themselves from the impurity of childbirth is the female equivalent of circumcision. To be sure, as Shaye Cohen shows, he makes this equivalence while asserting that it is not the ritual that makes a Jew, but faith, a curiously Christian argument used in polemic against Christians.<sup>84</sup>

The purity of Jewish women had an unexpected eugenic consequence. One of the most remarkable texts in the *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan* asks this surprising question: “Why are most Christians fair-skinned and beautiful while Jews are dark and ugly?” The Jewish polemicist evidently accepts a Christian standard of beauty in the very way he poses the question. One is instructed to answer such Christian arguments as follows:

This is similar to a fruit; when it begins to grow it is white but when it ripens it becomes black, as is the case with sloes and plums. On the other hand, any fruit which is red at the beginning becomes lighter as it ripens, as is the case with apples and apricots. This, then, is testimony that Jews are pure of menstrual blood so that there is no initial redness. Christians, however, are not careful about menstruant women and have sexual relations during menstruation; thus, there is redness at the outset, and so the fruit that comes out, i.e., the children, are light.<sup>85</sup>

External appearance actually conceals its opposite: the very fairness of Christians gives away their impure origins. One might call this a nonliteral interpretation of the body, that is, a reading of the body as signifying the very opposite of what it appears “literally” to signify.

This is hardly the only text in the Jewish canon that assumes negative consequences for the fetus if the parents engaged in sex during the mother’s menstrual period, but it is striking in the way it harnesses embryonic eugenics for the service of anti-Christian polemic.

Here, though, is an Italian Renaissance text that quotes an ancient medical theory of menstruation to produce the *opposite* aesthetic: "Nature's marvelous order has willed it . . . that, each month, through the most secret places of her body, she discharge the superfluities she has amassed, and of these be wondrously purged. In men, these superfluities continuously issue through the face, which is the most worthy part of the human body, but which remains ever sullied by such humors, and blemished with countless hairs. This does not happen to women's faces: these we see to be ever clear and delicate—a most telling argument for the purity and luster of their souls."<sup>86</sup> A woman's bleeding purges her of the blood that would otherwise collect and coarsen her appearance. While this text has nothing to do with polemics, it suggests the fluidity of discussions of menstrual blood, which might be mobilized for a variety of contradictory purposes.

An example of such usage is the way Christians seized on the negative Jewish discourse about menstruation and turned it against them. Already in the thirteenth century, the Jews were thought to suffer from anal bleeding, a belief that evolved into the better-known idea that Jewish men menstruate.<sup>87</sup> The thirteenth-century author Jacques de Vitry was the first to make this a monthly occurrence, claiming that the Jews "have become unwarlike and weak even as women, and it is said that they have a flux of blood every month."<sup>88</sup> The thirteenth-century gynecological text *De Secretis Mulierum*, falsely attributed to Albertus Magnus, also holds that Jewish males bleed regularly but attributes the bleeding primarily to supernatural causes, presumably as a punishment for deicide.<sup>89</sup> In the sixteenth century, Johannes Eck held that the blood curse suffered by the Jews for shedding Christ's blood caused Jewish men to menstruate.<sup>90</sup> As we might expect, the only cure for male menstruation was the blood of Christian children. The Jews therefore had to repeat the original crime of shedding God's blood in order to suppress this transsexual malady. But as long as they refused to accept the sacrament of Christ's blood, they would continue to be cursed by being transformed into women. As Irvn Resnick perceptively points out, the claim that Jewish men menstruated brought together a theological accusation with a widespread and largely nonjudgmental medical theory that certain personality types of cold and melancholic humor need to rid themselves of excess blood, either by bleeding involuntarily or by phlebotomy.<sup>91</sup> Jews and women both happen to have this makeup.

It was in this polemical context that Jewish mystical texts mapped the binary opposites of circumcision blood and menstrual blood onto

a quasi-racial dichotomy between the blood of Israel and the blood of the Gentile nations. The Kabbalah is famously xenophobic—one might even say even racist *avant la lettre*—in terms of blood. The non-Jewish nations are irredeemably identified with the demonic *sitra ahra*, and non-Jews are explicitly said to lack the spiritual souls that only the Jews possess.

Basing itself roughly on Galen's physiology, the Zohar says that the liver "swallows" blood from food and then passes it on to the heart, where it is spiritually refined (what Galen referred to less theologically as combination with the *pneuma*).<sup>92</sup> The Zohar then maps this physiology onto the Jacob and Esau story. Esau is called the *admoni*, or ruddy, since he is associated with the blood of the liver, which is the blood of materiality. The food that he desires—red lentils—corresponds to his "red" nature, a trope we already observed in late antiquity. Jacob is associated with the heart, the organ that "thinks" and contains the spiritual blood. The blood of Jacob or Israel is therefore different in nature from the blood of Esau, who, in rabbinic typology, stands first for Rome and then for Christianity. In light of this nexus between food and blood, it will not surprise us that the Jews saw their dietary laws not as isolated, distinctive practices, but as part of a larger web of characteristics that sustained and guaranteed the essential difference of the Jews.

Following Jewish polemics of the time, the Zohar specifically associated Christianity with the pollution of menstrual blood, based in part on the accusation we now recognize that Mary conceived Jesus while she was menstruating, and in part on the fact that Christians in general did not observe the Jewish menstrual laws. As Elliot Wolfson has shown, the Zohar conflated sexual relations with a non-Jewish woman with sexual relations with a menstruating woman,<sup>93</sup> an association that may have reflected the widespread miscegenation between Jews and non-Jews in Spain, or at least the perception by rabbinic elites that miscegenation was widespread.<sup>94</sup> The author of the Zohar, Moses de Leon, was particularly obsessed with the issue of sexual relations between Jews and Christians. By applying the language of menstrual blood pollution to relations with Christians and arguing that it caused "the sister of God to consort with foreign gods," de Leon was using the strongest symbols at his disposal to combat a perceived social reality. Thus, the two types of blood distinctions we have traced converge: male blood, the blood of circumcision, is Jewish; and female blood, the blood of menstruation, is Christian. If some medieval Christian polemicists "feminized" male Jews by arguing that they menstruated, texts

like the Zohar reversed the gender roles: the model of the Jew is male, the Christian female.

Although the author of the Zohar lived a century before the pogroms of 1391, which are usually considered the watershed in the history of the Jews in Christian Spain, David Nirenberg has shown that even during the so-called golden age, relations between Christians, Jews, and Muslims were extraordinarily tense and sometimes violent.<sup>95</sup> The Zohar's distinction between the blood of Jacob and the blood of Esau uncannily anticipates the later Spanish Christian doctrine of *limpieza de sangre* (purity of the blood), which was used against Jewish converts to Christianity and which, in turn, is often considered a precursor to nineteenth-century racial theory.<sup>96</sup> As Barry Mark has suggested, racism in Spain was not a one-way street from Christians to Jews: the Kabbalah developed its own racial concepts long before the purity statutes of the mid-fifteenth century.<sup>97</sup> The reversal of the *limpieza de sangre* into the racial superiority of the Sephardic Jews therefore had its origins long before they were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula.

One should, of course, qualify this use of the term *racism*. Jewish law allows for conversion and therefore the possibility of escaping the blood pollution of Esau: this possibility clearly distinguishes the Kabbalistic doctrine from early modern and modern racism. Yet the social and religious exigencies of medieval Spain made conversion to Judaism largely a theoretical possibility; and therefore, in practice, the categories of Jew and goy remained quite fixed. Blood in all its manifestations—circumcision, menstruation, and the ancient covenant of blood—became the irreducible dividing line between Jews and Christians.

#### NAHMAN OF BRATSLAV ON BLOOD, MONEY, AND IDOLATRY

Several remarkably rich texts by Nahman of Bratslav, the Hasidic master who died in Russia in 1810, recapitulate many of these themes in a different historical context. Here, too, as with Isaac Magrisso's Bible commentary, eighteenth-century reflections echoed with medieval ideas. Nahman was the great-grandson of Israel Baal Shem Tov, the legendary founder of Hasidism, and was a particularly original thinker who used profound insights into his own complex psychology to weave innovative mystical doctrines. Building on the Zohar's myth of divine menstruation, Nahman taught:

The evil ones cause a division between the Holy One Blessed Be He [that is, the male divine potency] and the *shekhinah* because they cause her to have menstrual blood. . . . For this reason, the wicked are called the men of blood. The 365 prohibitions depend upon the 365 *gidim* which are the channels of the blood. When the wicked transgress the negative commandments, they cause the *shekhinah* to menstruate since there are several types of blood. So, it is necessary “to sweeten” these kinds of blood, that is, the negative commandments which are the veins and arteries and turn them white, as it says [in the Talmud], “the blood becomes cloudy and turns into milk.”<sup>98</sup> You should keep your clothing white—[pun on “clothing,” *begadim* and *gidim*] in order to turn them [*the gidim*] white.”<sup>99</sup>

Nahman here refers to a traditional trope that the rabbinic 613 commandments are divided into the 248 positive commandments and the 365 negative ones. The association of the 365 negative commandments with the *gidim*, or sinews, of the body is specifically Kabbalistic.<sup>100</sup>

The context of this teaching is the necessity of purifying one's speech, which Nahman associates with white clothing. Red clothing is a sign of impurity (*zohama*). To purify one's clothing, which is to say, one's speech, is to purify the *shekhinah* of her menstrual blood. Those who transgress the divine prohibitions turn the veins and arteries of the *shekhinah* red and prevent the blood from being formed into milk. Actions like purifying one's speech “sweeten” or repair the defect in the divine circulatory system.<sup>101</sup> Putting these associations in the larger context of Nahman's teachings, it is clear that speech was a source of deep anxiety for him: he feared uncontrolled speech and advocated both silence and wordless shouting as forms of prayer.

Yet another one of his obsessions appears to have been the desire for money. He connects this desire, unexpectedly, with the blood of circumcision and menstrual blood:

By means of the blood of circumcision, one can repair the blood of menstruation, which is the lust for money [*taavat mamon*], as it is written: “Also with the blood of your covenant, by the blood I sent your prisoners out of the pit” [Zech. 9:11]. The “pit” is the spleen, the black bile (as it is written), “you shall eat in melancholy.” The covenant is the salt which sweetens the bitterness and melancholy of [the need] to make a living. . . . This is what the verse means “do not withhold the salt of the covenant from your God” [Lev. 2:13]. It says “your God” specifically because by adhering to God, one separates oneself from idolatry. . . . By repairing the covenant, he causes the light of the face of the King of life to shine on him. This is what the phrase “salt lacks money” [b. *Ketubot* 66b] means, because by means of salt, the lust for money decreases.<sup>102</sup>

This is a very complicated text, which requires unpacking. Nahman seems to promiscuously throw in everything from pecuniary lust to various kinds of blood, black bile, and idolatry. But in fact it all hangs together. The desire for money (Nahman clearly means more than just the need to make a living) creates sadness. But this sadness can be “sweetened,” or repaired, by salt, which Nahman equates with the covenant. The covenant is circumcision, but the phrase “repairing the covenant” (*tikkun ha-berit*) means something more specific in Nahman’s vocabulary. It is not precisely the act of circumcision he is thinking of, but rather the restraint of sexual desire, another of his primary sources of anxiety. In fact, Nahman understood the pain of circumcision as a necessary way to curb sexual desire, but curbing desire was a continual process, requiring constant acts of “repair of the circumcision.”<sup>103</sup> In another text with similar wording, Nahman says that whoever desires money not only causes the *shekhinah* to menstruate but will also have no money, and “this is a defect of the covenant.”<sup>104</sup> The latter phrase almost certainly means masturbation.

Nahman thus equates or conflates the desire for money and the desire for sex, and these, in turn, cause melancholy. Nahman himself was plagued by bouts of severe depression, which he translated into mystical terms and which inform central themes in his teachings.<sup>105</sup> He associates depression with evil desires, which he calls idolatry. Suppressing these desires brings one back into connection with God and the alleviation of melancholy.

We therefore have a series of positive and negative equivalents. The blood of circumcision is equated with sexual and monetary restraint, communion with God, and (by implication) happiness. The blood of menstruation is equated with male sexual and monetary lust, idolatry, and melancholy. Putting our two texts together in a conflation of physiology, psychology, and theology, purification of one’s own desires purifies the divine: the blood of circumcision cures the blood of divine menstruation.

In introducing idolatry into this complex list of equivalents, Nahman speaks to our second binary of blood: Israel versus the nations. Menstrual blood is associated with idolatry, and despite the philosophical and legal arguments that Christianity was not really idolatry, there can be no doubt that Nahman—like other Kabbalists going back to the thirteenth century and, indeed, Jewish popular opinion—considered it exactly that. In one text Nahman states that “he who has business dealings with non-Jews during their holidays and even not during their holidays,

whose dealings with them give them goods for idolatry, causes his wife to bleed just before she goes to the mikveh.”<sup>106</sup> That is, just after a woman finishes her menstrual period plus the required seven “white” days afterward, her husband’s business dealings with non-Jews either during their holidays or (if his business dealings involve goods that have some connection with their religion) at other times will cause her to start menstruating again. He is therefore punished because he cannot have sexual relations with her. Since sexual relations within marriage were considered by Ashkenazic culture to be essential to preventing masturbation, blocking these relations through business contamination by idolaters virtually guaranteed that one would fall into this cardinal sin.

Here it is not the *shekkinah* who menstruates, but the wife of the man who deals with idolaters; however, the woman clearly symbolizes the *shekkinah*. Nahman’s ruling is based on a Talmudic source that legal authorities had nullified in the Middle Ages for dealings with Christians. But the consequence of violating this law was Nahman’s own innovation. Desire for money leads to business with idolaters, which leads to menstruation, which leads to sexual desire, culminating in masturbation. The blood of menstruation is equivalent to idolatry, while the blood of circumcision stands for all the other commandments and thus Israel’s covenant with God.

This radical distinction between Israel and the nations was a common theme in Hasidic texts, as it was in the earlier Kabbalah, and some of these texts specifically invoke blood language. Thus, for example, Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl stated flatly that all animals and nations have a soul, called *nefesh*, that is associated with blood, but only Israel has a higher soul called *neslama*, which is connected to the Hebrew letter *aleph*. Combining *aleph* with the word *dam* yields *adam*, and therefore only Israel is called Adam, a theme we have already encountered.<sup>107</sup> Adam refers not only to human beings but also to the divine *anthropos*, so only Israel is a true *imitatio dei*. Moshe Hayyim Ephraim of Sudylkov, the Baal Shem Tov’s grandson, argued similarly that only Israel is called Adam because it possesses a special type of “vivifying” blood (*dam mehayeh*) as opposed to “natural blood” (*dam tiviim*).<sup>108</sup> It is the former type of blood that confers on Israel its special divine soul. These kinds of arguments remind us of the roughly contemporaneous Ladino text from *Me-am Loez*, which also uses blood to distinguish Israel from the nations.

Why, we might ask, were these Hasidic leaders so xenophobic, to the point of invoking the most negative blood language they could muster,

as well as other epithets, against Christianity, which was, of course, the only "Other" they experienced directly? The social context in eighteenth-century Poland bears some similarities to the Christian Spain in which medieval Kabbalah arose. As first Bernard Weinryb and, more recently, Moshe Rosman, Gershon Hundert, and Magda Teter have demonstrated, relations between Jews and Poles were more intertwined and even more harmonious than has often been thought.<sup>109</sup> Yet this was a very guarded and tense harmony, and the breakup of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the last quarter of the eighteenth century marked a decided turn for the worse. There were several occurrences of the blood libel, and it is perhaps that fact that may partially explain the evocation of blood language in the Hasidic texts.

Although this argument must be speculative, we might imagine that when the Jews encountered the accusation that they made ritual use of Christian blood, they responded, at least to themselves, that such blood was utterly beneath them. They possessed a higher, more spiritual form of blood, represented by the male blood of circumcision. The Christians, as idolaters, were associated with the impure female blood of menstruation. What need would the Jews have for such blood, from which they sought to purify themselves? Thus, from the High Middle Ages to the end of the eighteenth century, the Jewish mystics from Spain to Poland—following the general trend of Jewish polemics—insisted on a hierarchy of blood: male and Jewish over female and Christian.

#### THE EUCHARIST AND BLOOD LIBEL

With this grounding in the wider field of Jewish-Christian polemics around blood, we may now return to the nexus between the Eucharist and blood libel. I have argued so far that the blood of circumcision and the blood of menstruation were important elements in disputations with Christians and that, in some cases, Jewish beliefs and practices may have had indirect connections with the blood libel. Yet these Jewish beliefs were hardly the *cause* of the blood libel. Gavin Langmuir is undoubtedly right in insisting, as have other scholars of the blood libel, that an inner Christian dynamic was necessary for the charges of ritual murder and Host profanation to become recurrent, starting in the mid-twelfth century.<sup>110</sup> Langmuir has claimed that the libel was a result of Christian doubts about the doctrine of transubstantiation, which was finally declared dogma by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. These



doubts were expressed in debates over the degree to which the presence of Christ's flesh and blood in the wafer and the wine was real or figurative.<sup>111</sup> By projecting onto the Jews the related accusations of Host desecration and ritual murder, Christians sought to quiet their doubts about the reality of the Eucharist: after all, if the unbelieving Jews murdered Christians for their blood and pierced the wafer in order to make it bleed, then surely believing Christians could not doubt the underlying Eucharistic principles that these actions symbolized.

Alan Dundes has suggested a different, although related, etiology of the blood libel.<sup>112</sup> He argues that consuming the Eucharist involved unconscious guilt over eating God and that Christians sought to ameliorate their guilt by "projective inversion," projecting onto the Jews something that was the opposite of Jewish practice. Here it is guilt rather than theological doubt that informs the blood libel, but in both cases the cause lay in some form of Christian uneasiness about this central sacrament.

Both of these theories, as suggestive as they seem on first glance, fail to persuade, because the evidence of Christian doubt or guilt seems exceptionally meager. Even if scholastics might have debated the doctrine of the "real presence," there is little reason to assume that such doubts existed on the level of popular belief, which is where the blood libel seemed to originate (we do not actually know how or where it started, but we do know that it did not derive from either theological or ecclesiastical elites). Instead, I would suggest that the opposite process was at work: the blood libel emerged as a negative by-product of the very increase in popular Eucharistic piety.<sup>113</sup> This was an age when many miracles connected to the Eucharist were reported, miracles that were undoubtedly popular responses to the high theories of church scholastics. All of these beliefs point to a deep desire to make this mystical sacrament real and visible. What is particularly striking in the blood libel is the role the Jews played in doing exactly that: bringing the Eucharist down to earth, so to speak. By profaning the Host and causing it to bleed and by extracting blood from Christian children for ritual purposes, they were literally "substantiating" Christian belief in transubstantiation and in the spiritual efficacy of blood.

One example of this Christian notion of Jewish literalism is a twelfth-century illuminated manuscript that depicts the Jews desecrating a crucifix by stabbing the image of Jesus in his side and collecting his blood in a vessel.<sup>114</sup> Here the wound in Jesus that the Gospel of John holds was caused by a Roman soldier and that was the scriptural ground for the

cult of blood relics is replicated by medieval Jews: whereas a medieval icon might only portray the blood of Christ using pigments and paint, the Jews could actually make the icon bleed, although, of course, the Jews are making it bleed only *in the manuscript*.

As a number of historians have noted,<sup>115</sup> the blood libels were almost invariably accompanied by miracle narratives associated with the Jews' putative victim. The Jews were therefore pressed into Christian theological service by adding visible proof to the otherwise ethereal doctrine of the real presence. If eating the Eucharist represents a transformation of the material into the spiritual, Jews in this projection become the "dark side" of the Eucharist, those who turn the spiritual—that is the blood of Christians—into the demonically material. This was, of course, a venerable role that Christians had assigned to Jews since late antiquity: to serve as witnesses of the literal text to which Christianity gave the true, figurative interpretation. In the blood libel, then, the old conflict between Jewish "literalist" hermeneutics and Christian "figurative" hermeneutics was replicated. Thus, the thirteenth-century French monk Thomas of Cantimpré explained ritual murders as a result of Jewish misunderstanding:

I heard one of the most learned Jews, who converted to the faith during our time, make this statement: "A kind of prophet, just before he died, prophesied to the Jews, saying: 'Know this for certain that you will not be relieved of that shameful punishment [i.e., the blood punishment for killing Christ] with which you are afflicted except through Christian blood.'" "Now," continued this learned Jew, "the Jews, always blind and impious, precipitously embraced these words and deduced that they were to shed Christian blood every year in every province so that they would be cured with this blood. . . . [But] every Jew who converts to the faith and receives the blood of Christ as is suitable is immediately healed of this ancestral curse."<sup>116</sup>

The Jews are not so much evil as misled by their "Jewish" literalism: instead of understanding that the Christian blood through which they can be redeemed is the blood of Christ, literally present in the Eucharist, they rush off to kill Christian children. Yet one might add—tongue-in-cheek—that the fault lies as much with Christian doctrine, for if Christ is in those who eat the wafer and drink the wine, then perhaps his blood is indeed to be found in every Christian. Similarly, one might argue that the Jewish insistence that Jesus was born of a "menstruous mother" involved a deliberately literal echo of what the Christians themselves had to admit. Finally, by accusing the Christians

of idolatry, the Jews were, in a sense, charging them with a “materialist” form of religion, the exact opposite of their professed “Israel of the spirit.” In the end, the conflict reflected here is actually not so much between “literal” and “figurative” hermeneutics, as between two very different kinds of literalism.

This ostensible Jewish literalism was matched by a literal Christian interpretation of the Jews’ alleged behavior. Thus, Martin Luther, in his notorious diatribe, *The Jews and Their Lies*, argued that the Jews were responsible for “the blood of the children they have slain (which still shines forth from their eyes and their skin).”<sup>117</sup> Just as the blood of Christ was taken literally into the body of the communicant, so the Jews incorporated the blood of their Christian victims into their very eyes and skin, from which it was visible: Jewish physical difference was, at least in part, a product of their ghastly practices.

In a similar literalist interpretation of Jewish behavior, the thirteenth-century canonist Henry of Segusio wrote: “There are some, who having Christian wet-nurses, do not allow them to breast-feed their sons after having received Christ’s body, unless they had over the previous three days expressed their milk into the latrine: since they understand that Christ’s body had been incorporated into the wet-nurse’s body and would descend to evacuation.”<sup>118</sup> Given the medieval medical belief that breast milk was produced from menstrual blood, it made perfect sense for Jews to conclude that the milk of wet nurses who had taken the Eucharist was “contaminated” with the body and blood of Christ. Of course, such a conclusion also meant that the Jews “believed” in the Eucharist no less than the Christians. The three days that the text alleges the Jews poured the milk into the latrine must have come from Christian knowledge of the Talmudic law on not contracting business with idolaters three days before or after their festivals, proof again that Jewish popular belief identified Christianity with idolatry. Finally, if the body of Christ was nothing but food, then the association with the latrine made perfect sense, since the waste products of the Eucharist would end up as feces. Here the Jews raised—or were believed to raise—in perhaps overly literal fashion a problem that also perplexed medieval scholastics.

That this accusation about the Jews had some basis in reality is attested by Isaac ben Moses ‘Or Zarua’ (1180–1250), who ruled a generation later that Christian wet nurses should not be allowed to eat nonkosher food.<sup>119</sup> Although this ruling clearly contradicted the Talmudic opinion that what the wet nurse ate had no influence on

her milk, the Christian dogma of the Eucharist must have persuaded Jews that “you are what you eat.” The essence of impurity in nonkosher food—as well as, obviously, the Host—would therefore be passed through the blood of the wet nurse into her breast milk and ultimately into the Jewish child.

In a more subtle association between Christian breast milk and blood, Nicholas Donin, the Jewish apostate involved with the trial of the Talmud in 1240, was spoken of in this way: “This apostate went before the king superior to all kings in name and honor and spoke lies and made false accusations that on Passover nights we slaughter young boys still accustomed to their mothers’ breasts and that the Jews had adopted this custom and that the hands of merciful women cook the children and we eat their flesh and drink their blood.”<sup>120</sup> In a bizarre echo of the book of Lamentations (2:20), where the women of Jerusalem eat their own babies, the Jews are said to steal Christian children from their mothers’ milk and turn them into food. It is the Jewish women who, instead of nursing as Christian women do, cook the children and serve them up to their coreligionists. These women therefore act against female nurturing (“merciful women”) by serving flesh and blood rather than milk (the polarities of the laws of *kashrut* are taken here to an extreme). The Jews reverse the order of nature and enact literally the eating of body and blood.

Christians applied the same kind of arguments against converso wet nurses in the Iberian Peninsula. The children of “Old Christians,” said one late seventeenth-century writer, should not be suckled by “Jewish vileness because that milk, being of infected persons can only engender perverse inclinations.”<sup>121</sup> The presumed impurity of Jewish blood polluted breast milk, which in turn produced immoral consequences.

Thus, in their symbiotic discourse of blood, the traditional relationship between Jewish and Christian hermeneutics was not only reproduced but also complicated. The doctrine of transubstantiation was itself supposed to be literal: the bread is, after all, *literally* the flesh and the wine is *literally* the blood of Christ. Of course, the fact that the bread and wine retained the external, accidental properties of their material form suggests that this was a kind of *symbolic* literalism. One might say, especially also given the Jewish abhorrence of eating blood and of contact with menstrual blood, that in their attitudes toward blood, the Jews moved *away* from the body, while the Christians moved *toward* it. In the physicality of eating, the Eucharist represents a kind of “Jewish” principle, a symbol understood literally.

Who, then, in this relationship is the real “carnal Israel?” Jewish polemicists were, in fact, aware of this surprising inversion between “literalism” and “allegorism.” The fifteenth-century Spanish Jew Profiat Duran, in his refutation of the doctrine of transubstantiation, argued that Jesus intended an allegorical interpretation of the bread and wine.<sup>122</sup> By showing that the Christians betrayed their own allegorical principles with respect to the Eucharist, Duran ridiculed medieval Christian dogma for its literalist misunderstanding of Jesus’s teaching.

Indeed, much of Jewish polemic and of Christian counteraccusations directed at the Jews involved ridicule and inversion as a device for the one and as a deep-seated anxiety for the other.<sup>123</sup> In texts like the *Toledot Yeshu*, the biography of Jesus was mocked by subjecting it to a kind of *hypercorporality*: instead of conceiving without sexual intercourse, Mary committed adultery *and* did so during her menstrual period. Christian polemicists knew of such texts and accused the Jews of blasphemy by ridicule. In this hypersensitivity, one does see evidence of Christian doubt or, at least, unease, about beliefs that might appear absurd if stripped of their mystical—or *hyperethereal*—overlay. The Jews were demonic not only because they used Christian blood for their own nefarious purposes, but because they did so while mocking Christian belief. In light of the danger of ridicule to which literalism might lead, it is small wonder that scholastics tried mightily to argue, as Thomas Aquinas put it, that “Christ’s body as it is in this sacrament cannot be seen by any bodily eye.”<sup>124</sup> Yet it is equally small wonder that others, unschooled in such fine distinctions, might attribute to the Jews a demonic form of making visible what they, in their new Eucharistic piety, so deeply believed.

The Jews themselves were not immune to Christian ways of thinking about blood and the body. As Magda Teter has recounted, in eighteenth-century Poland a nobleman converted to Judaism and was burned at the stake as an apostate.<sup>125</sup> According to the Hebrew and Polish manuscripts describing these events, Jews managed to sneak into the place of execution and obtain some ashes “of the holy and pure body” plus “the blood of the holy and [most] faithful *ger zedek* [righteous convert].”<sup>126</sup> Like a tale of Christian martyrdom, this Jewish martyr’s body and blood became prized, ritual objects for the Jews, who, by their actions, endorsed a peculiarly Christian literalism.

Similarly, Jews might embrace legends of infanticide that look suspiciously like the very ritual murders of which they stood accused. David Malkiel has described a series of illuminated Passover Haggadot

that portray the rabbinic story according to which Pharaoh needed the blood of Israelite children to cure himself of leprosy.<sup>127</sup> This midrash was popularized in the eleventh century by Rashi, who turned the children of the legend into babies. In the late fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, Haggadot suddenly began to feature the story in various forms, often with gory scenes of slaughtered babies. Malkiel argues that these illustrations bring together several motifs: the shared Jewish-Christian belief in the medicinal use of blood to cure leprosy, a Jewish response to the wave of ritual-murder accusations from the late fifteenth century, and the memory of Jewish martyrdom from the Crusades and the Black Death. These Haggadot distract from the accusation that Jews ritually slaughtered Christian children by drawing attention to the legend that Jewish children were similarly treated by persecutors of the Jews, from Pharaoh on. And these Jewish children, like the Christ Child of this common discourse, were martyrs to the true faith.

#### BLOOD AND VIOLENCE

The shared language of martyrdom was a language of bloody violence. So, too, the ritual-murder accusation had violence at its core, for it was a claim that the Jews, besotted with blood lust, visited uncontrollable violence on Christians. As Thomas of Cantimpré argued, this Jewish bloodlust was ostensibly the legacy of the original crime of deicide. But the rationale for *Christian* violence against Jews was equally connected to the killing of Christ. The Ordinary Gloss, for example, interprets Matthew 27:25 as demanding that Jewish blood pay for the blood of Christ.<sup>128</sup> Even if Christianity had replaced the Old Testament religion with a New Testament teaching of love, the biblical doctrine of blood vengeance lived on in Jewish-Christian relations. Or, as Christopher Ocker has put it, a theology of love was just as responsible for the blood libel as a theology of hate.<sup>129</sup> Violence against the Jews became a necessary component of Eucharistic piety. And Jewish martyrdom, like the Passover iconography of infanticide, was itself a sanctification of violence in response.

I should like to conclude this examination of blood in medieval Jewish-Christian relations by considering the violent language with which Christians and Jews described their interactions. Bloodshed was considered essential to the coming apocalypse, in which a resurrected Christ would defeat his enemies. Penitential movements that sought the *eschaton* by self-flagellation held that “just as Christ had changed water into wine,

so they had replaced baptism with water by baptism with blood. God had kept the best wine for last—the blood of flagellants.”<sup>130</sup> As Israel Yuval has argued, this eschatological blood language was not limited to Christians. The Jews, too, cultivated the idea that the blood of their martyrs would call down God’s vengeance in a final messianic massacre. Borrowing a midrashic motif, liturgies of lamentation connected the ten plagues visited upon the ancient Egyptians with the plagues to be inflicted in the *eschaton* on their medieval successors: the rhyming scheme of one of these *kinot* uses a feature of Hebrew grammar to end every line with the syllable *dam* (blood).<sup>131</sup>

The language of violently spilled blood was scarcely limited to eschatology, however, but was endemic to medieval culture in general.<sup>132</sup> Peggy McCracken has described the dichotomy between male blood shed in battle and female menstrual blood: “In medieval fiction, only men bleed in ways that have consequences beyond their own bodies. . . . Women’s blood is linked to the body, and to embodiment: the virgin’s blood [in the story of Perceval’s sister] cures the body of the leprous lady, but cannot save her from moral and physical destruction.”<sup>133</sup> Men take part in war, and if women (such as Joan of Arc) appear in combat, they can do so only as virgins. Moreover, the blood spilled by men was frequently associated in this literature with the blood of Christ, for, as we have already seen, following Caroline Bynum, the cult of Christ’s blood relics was suffused with the language of bloodshed. As McCracken has convincingly argued, the Jews were often viewed in the same class as women, such as by those who thought that male Jews menstruate. The passage quoted above from the thirteenth-century Jacques de Vitry holds that Jewish men are “unwarlike” and that the proof is that they have a monthly flux of blood. To be unwilling or unable to shed blood in the medieval code of honor was not to be a true man.

The Jews themselves were scarcely immune to this mentality, even as they translated it into a different idiom. The Hebrew chronicles of the First Crusade demonstrate that Jewish authors were no less enamored than Christians of the language of blood violence when it came to martyrdom.<sup>134</sup> In these texts, the Jews vigorously reject any claims that they were “unwarlike.” The chronicles are permeated with descriptions of Jews taking up arms, defending themselves, and, only when faced with the choice of baptism or death at the hands of their enemies, slaughtering themselves and their families. The texts are extraordinarily violent, even “pornographic” in their violence. Their heroes are hardly passive martyrs, at least

in their own self-presentation in the chronicles, which seem to have been written in the twelfth century based on tales of the survivors.<sup>135</sup>

There is a remarkable similarity between the rhetoric of the Hebrew Crusader chronicles and Christian chronicles of the same era. The theology of the Crusades converted the Crusaders to Christian martyrs; their armies were the *ecclesia militans*.<sup>136</sup> The Hebrew chronicles are similarly preoccupied with martyrdom, with blood serving as a leit-motif: the Jewish martyrs are graphically described writhing in blood before they die. The Hebrew chronicles use such language both to denounce their Christian enemies and to glorify the martyrs. The Crusaders themselves were responsible for initiating the blood vengeance that suffuses these texts. One of the documents refers to a duke named Godfrey who sets off on the crusade with an oath "that he would not depart on his journey without avenging the blood of the Crucified with the blood of Israel."<sup>137</sup> As a result, "they have killed our pious ones and for a foul corpse [i.e., Jesus] they have spilled the blood of saintly women and for the words of an 'enticer and beguiler' [a traditional way of designating Jesus] they have spilled the blood of infants and sucklings."<sup>138</sup> Jesus himself is described in these texts once again by a variety of expletives, but perhaps the most recurring is "son of a menstruous woman" (*ben niddah*). The violation of the menstrual-blood taboo was perhaps the original sin, the precipitating cause of the cycle of violence that culminated with the Crusader pogroms.

The Jews themselves entertained several conflicting theories about why their generation had been subjected to such persecutions, at one point wondering "how could the sin of the innumerable people [i.e., the Jews] be so heavy and how could the souls of these saintly communities be so destructive, as though shedding blood [i.e., could they have committed a sin as grave as murder to deserve such punishment?]."<sup>139</sup> But for the most part, the chronicles have little doubt that the generation of the Crusade was utterly blameless, indeed, perhaps the most saintly of all generations: "For from the day that the Second Temple was destroyed there were none like them in Israel and after them there will be no more."<sup>140</sup> And since the generation was so uniquely pure, "May the blood of his pious ones serve for us as merit and atonement for succeeding generations and for all our descendents forever, like the binding of our ancestor Isaac."<sup>141</sup> This last idea looks suspiciously like the Christian doctrine that the crucified Christ had atoned for the sins of all succeeding generations, a suspicion strengthened by the reference to Isaac, who was, of course, held by the church to be a prefiguration of Jesus.



The Jews did borrow widely from Christian motifs in describing the martyrs. According to one of the chronicles of the Second Crusade, the twelfth-century Rabbi Jacob ben Meir—known as Rabbenu Tam or “the innocent rabbi”—was assaulted by Crusaders: “They inflicted five wounds on his head, saying: ‘You are the leader of the Jews. So we shall take vengeance upon you for the crucified one and wound you the way you inflicted the five wounds on our God.’”<sup>142</sup> As Ivan Marcus has argued, the story of Rabbenu Tam’s martyrdom turns him into a thoroughly Christ-like figure.<sup>143</sup> Both Christians and Jews believed in the persistence of blood vengeance a millennium after the death of Christ, but with persecutors and victims continually changing roles.

As many readers of these texts have noticed, the mass suicides of the Jewish martyrs are described in highly ritualistic, sacrificial language. The Jews repeatedly inspect their knives to make sure that they have no defects, much as a ritual slaughterer might do. In one story, a certain Isaac takes his children and slaughters them in the synagogue before the holy ark: “He spilled their blood on the pillars of the holy ark, so that it would come as a memorial before the unique and everlasting King and before the throne of his glory.”<sup>144</sup> In one of the most graphic passages in the chronicles, all of the Jews of Mainz, regardless of gender or age, became greater sacrifices than those performed in the ancient temple:

The saintly and pious women stretched forth their necks one to another, to be sacrificed for the unity of the Name. Likewise men to their children and brothers, brothers to sisters, women to their sons and groom to bride, and betrothed to his betrothed. They sacrificed each other until the blood flowed together. The blood of husbands mingled with that of their wives, the blood of parents with that of their children, the blood of brothers with that of their sisters, the blood of teachers with that of their students, the blood of bridegrooms with that of their brides. . . . Were there ever so many sacrifices like these from the days of Adam? Were there ever a thousand one hundred sacrifices on one day, all of them like the sacrifice of Isaac the son of Abraham?<sup>145</sup>

Here, and elsewhere, the Ashkenazic writers hark back to an old midrashic tradition that Isaac was actually sacrificed by Abraham—and then resurrected (some say on the third day).<sup>146</sup> Regardless of whether this tradition originally anticipated or reflected late antique Christianity, by the time it resurfaced in the twelfth century, the resonance with Christian theology was unmistakable.

As this last text suggests, women took no less a part in these sacrifices than men, perhaps reflecting a certain gender equality among

these Ashkenazic Jews.<sup>147</sup> Ivan Marcus may be correct that the portrait of martyred women who killed their children was a conscious refutation of the Christian cult of celibate female saints: a Jewish saint could be both martyr and mother, a “married Madonna.”<sup>148</sup> If redemptive bloodletting was generally reserved only for medieval men, as McCracken has argued, the martyrdom of these Jewish women was a striking exception. Just as the menstrual laws might be pressed into service as a female form of covenantal blood, so could the blood of the female martyrs bring them as close to God as their male coreligionists. Both men and women are portrayed as heroic warriors for God, a refutation of the Christian stereotype of the Jews as unwarlike.

The poets and chroniclers of the Crusader massacres saw the blood shed by the martyrs as the culmination and personification of all the forms of blood whose careers we have charted in chapters 1 and 2. The poet Joel ben Isaac Levi, who composed a series of *piyyutim* that were adopted into the Ashkenazic liturgy, followed the convention of the time in comparing the martyrs to the biblical Isaac. He then goes on to mobilize other biblical references to blood: the blood smeared on the doorposts of the Jews in Egypt (Ex. 12), the blood of circumcision shed by Moses's wife Zipporah (Ex. 4), and finally the atoning blood of the temple sacrifices. All of these come together as prefigurations or archetypes of the blood of the martyrs. In the absence of a temple, their blood took the place of the blood of sacrificial animals and, in its eschatological function, would bring about the rebuilding of the temple: the ritual sacrifice of the martyrs was necessary to reestablish the sacrifices themselves. The *piyyut* concludes: “For your sake they were killed—innumerable souls. Avenge the blood of your servants that has been spilled in our days and before our eyes speedily. Amen.”<sup>149</sup>

The blood of these Jews called on God to wreak messianic vengeance, a call that echoed in subsequent Ashkenazic culture. In the early thirteenth century, the *Sefer Hasidim*, the core text of Ashkenazic pietism, decreed that the owner of a house in which someone has been martyred should not plaster over the blood spilled on the wall: “As long as the blood is not covered, God will take vengeance and when it is covered, He will not hurry to avenge.”<sup>150</sup> To those who might question why God should need to see the blood, since, after all, he scarcely needs reminders, the *Sefer Hasidim* responds that one leaves the blood visible so that the *world* will know that God does not forget.<sup>151</sup>

Here the biblical idea that blood was the link between God and his people found its medieval expression. Although blood continued to serve

as a memorial of the covenant, as it did in late antiquity, these Ashkenazic Jews seemed to believe that the blood of the martyrs was, in a very real sense, God's own blood that cried out to be returned to its source. In this belief they were not far at all from Catherine of Siena's ecstatic immersion in the blood of *her* God. Far more than she was aware, blood did, indeed, mark the chasm between medieval Jews and Christians, but those on both of its sides spoke a remarkably similar language.

Blood never took such a leading role in later Jewish martyrologies, even in narratives of the Holocaust. But the memory of these texts echoed for centuries: as late as the early twentieth century, the Russian folklorist S. Ansky reported a Jewish folk belief that if one sticks a knife into the earth on Christmas Eve, blood will pour out, since Jewish blood had been spilled in the name of Jesus.<sup>152</sup> With the modern period, the common Jewish and Christian discourse that wove together holy blood with blood spilled in violence unraveled, but instead of vanishing, it reemerged in a new, secular vocabulary.

## Power in the Blood

### *The Medieval and the Modern in Nazi Anti-Semitism*

On May 17, 1934, Julius Streicher published his notorious special issue of *Der Stürmer* on the subject of ritual murder.<sup>1</sup> A storm of international protest broke out, and as a result Hitler ordered the suppression of the issue, although several hundred thousand copies were already in circulation. The official reason given for the issue's suppression was that *Der Stürmer* had explicitly compared Christian communion with the alleged Jewish consumption of Christian blood. But there can be little doubt that the motivation was purely opportunistic, since Streicher returned to the subject unhindered in a number of subsequent special issues. The real problem evidently was his timing, for the 1934 publication came after the first wave of anti-Semitic actions from the spring of 1933 had already crested and during a period when the regime was consolidating itself. International public opinion still counted for something, although far less than many believed at the time.

Why was it the blood libel, rather than one of Streicher's other, equally offensive obsessions, that aroused such international opprobrium and led to the relatively rare phenomenon of Nazi self-censorship? On one level, it seems obvious that the ritual-murder accusation was seen universally as a medieval superstition that had no place in a modern state. But perhaps it was its very familiarity that gave it its notoriety, compared to other, newer themes in *Der Stürmer* that were arguably much more dangerous. As we shall see, the playbook against the blood libel was well-worn by the time the Nazis came to power. The Jews and their defenders may have

been outraged by the special number of *Der Stürmer*, but it was a *familiar* outrage, and the arguments mustered against it were equally familiar. To fight Nazi anti-Semitism on this ground must have been unconsciously comforting, for the enemy was a well-known one whose capacity for evil may have been real, yet circumscribed.

Who, then, was this enemy? Streicher and his scandal sheet occupied a rather ambiguous place in the pantheon of Nazi anti-Semitism. As is well known, Streicher was the only one of the Nuremberg defendants to receive the death sentence solely for crimes against humanity, a sentence based on the incitement for which *Der Stürmer* was justly infamous. Yet Streicher himself was a relatively unimportant member of the Nazi hierarchy. He peaked with the anti-Jewish boycott of April 1933. This was the first and last nationwide anti-Semitic action for which he was responsible, and its results were mixed, to say the least. While he saw the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 as a kind of reward for his persistent agitation against *Rassenschande* (race pollution), he had no role in their formulation. *Der Stürmer* enjoyed a certain degree of circulation during the Nazi period, especially attracting attention to its display cases by bus stops, but it was still read by only a few million of Germany's sixty million population. By 1940 Streicher was under attack for sexual misconduct and corruption within his own Franconia district. Only Hitler's lingering loyalty from the *Kampfzeit* kept the full wrath of his enemies from ousting him totally. He had no direct role in the Holocaust, about which he claimed, rather implausibly, to have been totally ignorant.

Yet the Nuremberg Tribunal was certainly onto something in singling out Streicher for special treatment. *Der Stürmer* unquestionably played an important role in popularizing Nazi anti-Semitism. To be sure, as Jeffrey Herf has recently argued, the core of Nazi propaganda revolved around the charge, taken over from the notorious forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, that the Jews controlled the world.<sup>2</sup> But even though the blood accusations we will follow here may not have appeared explicitly in these spurious claims of Jewish power, they lurked in the background, providing additional mythic ammunition to those susceptible to them. Thus, *Der Stürmer* both gave voice to and shaped the kind of folkloric myths that fueled the Nazis' genocidal project. We will never be able to tell whether, absent such propaganda, the Holocaust would still have taken place. But it seems safe to assume that the demonization of the Jews that was the relentless purpose of *Der Stürmer* and similar publications made it easier for the Nazis to isolate their victims and then deport them to their deaths. Whether

the “ordinary men” of the death squads were driven by “eliminationist anti-Semitism” or by the pressure of their comrades, the propaganda of the regime must have given some coherent meaning to their crimes, even if only as rationalizations.<sup>3</sup> As Claudia Koonz has argued, the way racism was cast into a coherent ethical system—a Nazi “conscience”—was crucial to legitimating what had previously appealed only to the margins of society.<sup>4</sup>

But this propaganda was not of a piece; or, rather, it was made up of a patchwork of pieces that only vaguely held together.<sup>5</sup> *Der Stürmer*'s gutter anti-Semitism utilized several discourses of blood, discourses that both reinforced and competed with one another. These different discourses—and their interrelationships—may tell us something about the larger question of whether Nazi anti-Semitism represented a continuation or a disruption in the long and sorry history of anti-Jewish polemics. On the one hand, there was ritual murder, the archotypically medieval accusation. Here the claim is that the Jews, vampire-like, suck the blood out of Christians for their religious rites, much as they were said to suck the wealth out of the body of the German nation. Insofar as they allegedly consume this blood in *matza*, they may be said to incorporate it into their own bodies. On the other hand, *Der Stürmer* was perhaps even more obsessed with *Rassenschande*, the contamination of the blood of the Aryan people by the sexual predations of the Jews.<sup>6</sup> Here, rather than removing blood for their own secret purposes, the Jews *injected* their blood into that of their hosts, polluting from within. This latter, racist discourse appears on the face of it quite the opposite of the anxieties of the blood libel, although, as we shall see, the two are dialectically linked. The first was medieval in origin, a kind of anti-Jewish version of phlebotomy (bloodletting); the second was modern, analogous to the new medical procedure of transfusion. Even if Streicher himself, who was anything but an intellectual, was not fully conscious of this difference, his promiscuous mixing of the two discourses points to the explosive nature of Nazi anti-Semitism as *both* medieval and modern.

The Nazis envisioned the proper response to both of these imminent dangers to be “blood for blood.” This third discourse was the one that did not remain in the realm of words, but was put into all-too-bloody action. As with the medieval debates over God's blood and its human equivalents, in the modern period blood both expressed and led to orgiastic violence. Here, too, we must ask whether this violence, which culminated with the Nazi genocide, ought to be understood as old or new.

In the pages that follow, we will examine these three discourses of blood that reached a crescendo in Nazi anti-Semitism but had their origins in earlier cultural and political formations. In addition to discussing these three languages of blood as they culminated in Nazi anti-Semitism, we shall also see how these discourses have enjoyed a disturbing afterlife into our own time. After attending to blood in anti-Jewish rhetoric, I will turn in chapter 5 to the Jewish responses to these manifold attacks, responses that at times echo the very language they seek to refute.

#### BLOOD LIBELS: OLD AND NEW

Streicher's exploitation of the medieval blood-libel tradition tended to be devoid of its earlier theological overtones.<sup>7</sup> To be sure, he repeatedly recycled the old narratives, such as the 1475 life and death of the child "saint" Simon of Trent.<sup>8</sup> And in a special ritual-murder issue from May 1939, he celebrated the Middle Ages as the greatest period of German history.<sup>9</sup> Far from constituting the "dark ages," a term he claims the Jews invented, it was a time when the *Volk* rose up against the Jewish "bloodsuckers," a model for how they ought to be treated in modern times. Yet *Der Stürmer's* more contemporary ritual-murder narratives did not turn the putative victims of criminal homicides into religious saints. In fact, these narratives were anything but original—and therein lay their power. They owed less to the medieval blood-libel tradition and much more to its modern revival, a revival that outstripped the medieval version. As Hillel Kieval has shown, there were well in excess of one hundred ritual-murder accusations against Jews between the early 1880s and the Beilis trial of 1911–13, while the number between the twelfth and eighteenth centuries ranged at most in the scores.<sup>10</sup>

Michael Walser Smith has studied in depth the ritual-murder case in Konitz, a small town in Western Prussia, that took place in 1900.<sup>11</sup> Here it was a young man of nineteen—different from the more common instances, which involved young girls or children—who was murdered and his body carved into pieces. Suspicion came to rest on Adolph Levi, a Jewish butcher, largely as a result of a manifesto by his neighbor, a Christian butcher. The accusation received some credence because the way the victim's body was dismembered suggested the work of a professional adept at carving meat. Of course, the accuser had equal qualifications for such a murder, and in fact there is good reason to suspect that he was the real culprit.

What is fascinating for our purposes, though, is the way in Konitz—as eight years earlier at Xanten and eighteen years earlier at Tisza-Eszlár—Jewish ritual slaughter became conflated with ritual murder. This was something new and unattested in the medieval blood libels. It may well reflect the accusations, examined most recently by Robin Judd, that Jewish ritual slaughter was a barbarous practice that bespoke the Jews' bloodthirstiness: just as they butchered their animals "inhumanely," so the Jews would no doubt be wont to do to their neighbors.<sup>12</sup> The attacks on Jewish ritual slaughter originated in animal rights campaigns starting in the 1850s, which had little to do with the Jews. It was only with the rise of political anti-Semitism in the 1880s that humane-slaughter activists turned their wrath on the Jews or, more commonly, that anti-Semites exploited the new language of animal rights to attack Jewish practices. Interestingly enough, it was not only the alleged barbarity of *shehitah* that anti-Semites used against the Jews, but also the culinary claim that meat with its blood still in it was both tastier and more healthful. The Jews were not only murderers but also bad cooks. The defenders of Jewish ritual slaughter responded in kind: the Jewish practice was said to be *more* humane, since the animal died more quickly; furthermore, draining the blood was more healthful because blood carried diseases like syphilis and tuberculosis. Thus did medical and nutritional arguments come to replace earlier religious claims. And both sides of the *shehitah* debate rested their arguments on the very modern fiction that killing animals could be done humanely, an idea that would have seemed meaningless in the Middle Ages and antiquity.

To be sure, this debate had little, on the face of it, in common with the blood libel, since that accusation assumed that what the Jews practiced was *the opposite* of the process of kosher slaughter, in which the blood is thoroughly drained and discarded. But in the typically paradoxical logic of anti-Semitism, the fact that Jews are forbidden to consume animal blood says nothing about their consumption of *human* blood. A common argument held that since Talmudic texts prohibiting the consumption of animal blood do not also explicitly prohibit human blood, the latter is not only permitted but perhaps even encouraged. And the very fact that Jews are prohibited from consuming animal blood was interpreted by anti-Semites as evidence that they must be doing something worse in secret.

The *shehitah* controversy permeated Nazi discourse, as can be seen from repeated references in *Der Stürmer* to the way barbaric Jewish



rites of slaughter extended from animals to human beings. It also played a central role in the notorious 1940 Nazi propaganda film *The Eternal Jew*, which opens with a scene of an ostensibly barbaric slaughter of a cow. So, even though the Nazi regime outlawed Jewish ritual slaughter in 1933, it continued to be obsessed with the issue both in terms of propaganda and in persistent legal efforts to root out illegal *shehitah*.

Ritual slaughter and its connection to the blood libel not only permeated gutter anti-Semitism, however, but also bubbled up to more respectable discourse. For example, in Thomas Mann's great novel *The Magic Mountain*, Leo Naphta, who passes from Orthodox Judaism to revolutionary socialism and finally becomes a Jesuit, is the son of a *shohat*. Mann describes the father as a spiritual, gentle man, in contrast to the Gentile butchers. But the contrast hardly redounds to the father's credit: "The boy Leib felt that the stupid *goyim* were actuated by an easy and irreverent good nature, which paid less honor to the deity than did his father's solemn mercilessness; thus the conception of piety came to be bound up in his mind with that of cruelty and the idea of the sacred and the spiritual with the sight and smell of spurting blood."<sup>13</sup>

It is perhaps the contradiction between piety and cruelty that explains the schismatic nature of not only the father but also the son, whose intellectual fanaticism leads him ultimately to apostasy. In any event, the father's occupation also results in his demise in a pogrom inspired by a ritual-murder accusation: "It was precisely this aura of uncanny piety, in which the odour of his blood-boltered calling played a part, that proved his destruction. There had been an unexplained death of two gentile boys, a popular uprising, a panic of rage—and Elie had died horribly, nailed crucifix-wise on the door of his burning home."<sup>14</sup> In this account the bloody rituals of the Jewish religion lead directly to the blood libel, for which the Jew most connected to those rituals pays the ultimate price. And perhaps this horrific event partly explains the son's later turn to Christianity, for the father dies as a Christ figure. The extent to which Mann was giving voice to anti-Semitism in this depiction of Leo Naphta and his father remains highly controversial, but there can be little doubt that this complex portrait of the relationship between Jewish ritual slaughter and ritual murder fit into the larger political discourse of its time.<sup>15</sup>

The same can be said for the conservative Catholic political theorist Carl Schmitt, in his 1938 essay on Hobbes's *Leviathan*, written under the Nazi regime. Although Schmitt, who joined the Nazi Party in 1933, had fallen out with more radical elements in the party by the

time he wrote this essay (he was viciously attacked in the SS paper *Der schwarze Korps* in 1936), the passage in question shows that he still labored under anti-Semitic stereotypes. Schmitt quotes a number of anti-Semitic sources, such as Luther's *Table Talks* and Johannes Andreas Eisenmenger's *Entdecktes Judenthum* (1700) on how Jews envision the Leviathan's role in the end of days. Failing to acknowledge that these sources were hardly reliable for actual Jewish opinion, Schmitt assumes the veracity of "Jewish-cabbalistic interpretations" that allegedly show how "the Jews stand by and watch how the people of the world kill one another. This mutual 'ritual slaughter and massacre' [*Schlächten und Schlachten*] is for them lawful and 'kosher,' and they therefore eat the flesh of the slaughtered peoples and are sustained by it."<sup>16</sup> In uncritically quoting anti-Semitic versions of Jewish eschatology, Schmitt gave voice to a slippage between Jewish ritual slaughter, bloodthirstiness, and cannibalism. Ritual murder was the hallmark of this esoteric Jewish teaching.

Why ritual murder enjoyed a modern revival in Central Europe is a question that still requires final resolution, although a few speculations are in order. The Damascus Blood Libel of 1840 was widely reported by newspapers throughout Europe, and this publicity may have played a role in bringing it back to public consciousness.<sup>17</sup> One might also point to vampire tales, which began to circulate in the eighteenth century just as witchcraft trials came to be prohibited.<sup>18</sup> If vampires took the place of witches as those who rose from the dead and lived off of human blood, then the Jews, who were often associated in the Middle Ages with witches, might now be seen as living (as opposed to "undead") versions of vampires.

Hillel Kieval has pointed to a number of other factors, from the rise of political anti-Semitism to ethnic tensions in the Czech part of the Austro-Hungarian empire and urban-rural conflicts. He believes that blood accusations against the Jews probably never vanished from the countryside, where Jews lived in small numbers in towns and villages.<sup>19</sup> The folkloric dimension of these accusations no doubt continued to exert a significant influence.

The question is why government prosecutors in the late nineteenth century took these accusations seriously enough to actually try six cases in Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Germany. One answer is the emergence of new expert witnesses. Although Jewish converts, such as Johannes Pfefferkorn in the sixteenth century, had provided ostensible expertise on Jewish practices in early modern times, the nineteenth-century canons of

*Wissenschaft* seemed to offer a new, more solid foundation for accusations against the Jews. The theologian August Rohling was perhaps the most notorious of these experts in the nineteenth century. Rohling, the author of the anti-Semitic *Talmudjude*, first published in 1871, offered himself as an “expert” in the alleged secret Jewish blood rituals for the Tisza-Eszlár trial in 1883.<sup>20</sup> In this way a folkloric belief that had remained relatively underground in central Europe after the Reformation was now given a certain bogus dignity as ostensibly “scientific.”

At the same time, as Charlotte Klein showed in the 1970s and as has now been confirmed by David Kertzer, official newspapers of the Vatican, such as the *Civiltà Cattolica*, recycled ritual-murder myths, adding a veneer of high church authority to what in the Middle Ages had generally earned the opprobrium of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.<sup>21</sup> The Vatican had more than once condemned the blood libel, starting already in the thirteenth century. But the nineteenth-century church, threatened by modernity, now came to embrace what it had previously rejected. Could ritual murder be a mere folkloric libel if the most sober scholars of the church confirmed it? If one considers the blood libel to be peculiarly “medieval,” then one might say that the Catholic Church was more medieval in the nineteenth century than it was in the Middle Ages. But this congruence of scholarly and ecclesiastical “expertise” actually demonstrates the opposite: that the modern blood libel was exactly that, quite modern.

To be sure, such “experts” were quickly discredited by defenders of the Jews, such as Joseph Bloch, who took on Rohling, and Hermann Strack, the Protestant theologian whose definitive work *Das Blut im Glauben und Aberglauben der Menschheit* went through eight editions between 1891 and 1900. Bloch successfully revealed that Rohling’s expertise was bogus: when challenged to correctly translate a page of Talmud, Rohling declined the honor. In this way, though, the so-called experts in the anti-Semitic camp generated the rise of a parallel expert knowledge that was dedicated to refuting the ritual-murder accusations.

The last ritual-murder trial in Europe took place in Russia just before World War I, but the debate over the alleged practice continued unabated in Germany during the Weimar period. In part, this reflected the rise of the even more virulent anti-Semitism represented by the Nazis, among others.<sup>22</sup> *Der Stürmer*’s agitation in the 1920s was but one expression of a continued obsession. A repeated theme in the newspaper was the “discovery” of ritual murders lurking beneath ordinary homicides or disappearances. For example, on March 17, 1929, the

body of a man named Karl Kessler was discovered in the Manau forest near Hofheim. *Der Stürmer* claimed that the cut in the victim's throat and the fact that the body was drained of blood "proved" that the murder was done by someone versed in Jewish ritual slaughter. But not until 1937 was the agitation around this case able to produce results; at that time the Gestapo arrested nine Jews, who, despite clear alibis, were held for over half a year. (It is nevertheless significant that they were released: Streicher's agitation had failed to persuade even the Nazi legal system.)<sup>23</sup>

Another way in which the Weimar period was different from the period before World War I was the predominance of libel suits against promoters of the blood libel. While the 1885 Rohling-Bloch trial was a nineteenth-century precursor of such cases, in the Weimar period, libel suits against anti-Semites basically took the place of blood-libel trials against Jews. So throughout the 1920s, Streicher and *Der Stürmer* were repeatedly dragged into court for anti-Jewish libels, trials that the Jews and their defenders frequently won.

Nevertheless, every victory of the Jews over their opponents only reinforced the belief in the Jews' esoteric power. Like the Elders of Zion myth, the blood libel was held to be a secret Jewish teaching, confirmed by its very denial. We can see this in *Der Stürmer*'s 1939 ritual-murder special number. Reviewing the history of the blood libel, the newspaper claims that all the libel suits against Streicher during the Weimar period were evidence of how *Der Stürmer* was really onto a secret truth. The success of the Jews was a result of the fact that they had established their control over both liberal science and the Weimar criminal justice system. Much attention is also given to the suppression of the 1934 issue. Here too was proof of the Jews' secret influence. Indeed, international Jewry had raised a storm of protest over the 1934 issue because only *Der Stürmer* was on the trail of the Jews' esoteric blood practices. The suppression of the issue became itself one more incident in the history of ritual murder.

Instead of dismissing such conspiratorial thinking as a psychopathology—although it may well have been that—we need to see it as providing coherent meaning for those whose traditional structures of meaning had collapsed. The "culture of fear" that some argue is epidemic in contemporary America can certainly be found in the industrializing countries of central Europe of the late nineteenth century and, even more so, in Weimar Germany, buffeted by the twin storms of inflation and depression.<sup>24</sup> Most of the modern blood libels took place in villages

or small towns and involved ordinary kinds of homicide. Whatever they may have meant for the residents of these towns, once they became the staples of national or even international news, they provided a context and explanation for social disorder. And when the legal system failed to solve such crimes, the same explanation seemed to account for its failure. By arguing that the most heinous crimes in Weimar Germany were perpetrated by Jews, *Der Stürmer* could present the Nazi party as the party of order against the disorder of the so-called Jewish Republic.

As in the pre-World War I blood libel cases, the Weimar trials typically involved expert witnesses. One such expert, whose work is worth investigating in some detail, was Erich Bischoff (1865–1936). Unlike August Rohling, a self-promoter whose expertise in Jewish legal texts was mostly hot air, Bischoff was closer to the genuine item. He had both the linguistic ability and the knowledge of Jewish sources to give his statements credibility. His books included studies of Jesus and the rabbis, the *Shulhan Arukh*, translations of rabbinic texts, and several works on the Kabbalah, one of which remains in circulation even today. On the one hand, an examination of these books reveals that Bischoff was hardly the objective scholar he claimed to be (“neither a philosemite nor antisemite,” as he put it disingenuously in his book on Jewish blood practices). His study on Jesus and the rabbis, for example, is a concerted effort to show that the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus’s teachings on the kingdom of heaven were utterly divorced from rabbinic Judaism.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, in his 1903 exposition of the Kabbalah (which went through many editions), he largely debunks the idea that Kabbalistic texts contain anti-Christian blood rituals, although he also dismisses a *Jewish* attempt to disprove the same idea as based on “subjective religious lunacy” (*subjektiver religiöser Wahnsinn*).<sup>26</sup> While the blood libel remained at most an unproven suspicion, Jewish refutations of it were evidently equally suspect.

By the post-World War I period, Bischoff’s views appear to have shifted in a more anti-Semitic direction. In the late 1920s, he appeared at a number of libel trials as an expert witness, although he was apparently barred from testifying at a trial of Streicher and his collaborator, Karl Holz, in which they received several months imprisonment for defaming the Jewish religion. He did testify in two trials in Bavaria but evidently failed to persuade the court of his point of view. He was also much exercised by the testimony of an Old Testament professor from Würzburg, D. Hehn, who had appeared in a trial at Nuremberg on the

side of the Jews, although it is unclear whether Bischoff himself actually took part in that case.

It was as a result of these court cases that Bischoff evidently felt compelled to write an extended study of blood in Judaism.<sup>27</sup> An additional motivation in writing this book was to refute Hermann Strack, whom Bischoff refers to—again disingenuously—as a friend and colleague, even though his text contains acid remarks about Strack’s authoritative dismissal of Jewish ritual murder.<sup>28</sup> Strack’s *Das Blut im Glauben und Aberglauben der Menschheit*—discussed in chapter 5—was considered the definitive work on the subject. Bischoff says that he provided Strack material for the latter’s book. But whereas Strack had claimed that the Mishnah does not countenance consumption of human blood, Bischoff argues conversely that its very silence on the matter implies consent. He assumes that the *mohel* in the circumcision ritual probably swallowed the blood after performing the prescribed “sucking” (*metzitza*) of the wound.<sup>29</sup> By the time of the *Shulhan Arukh* (the sixteenth century), there were no longer any proscriptions on drinking human blood, which meant that the law moved increasingly in the direction of permitting it, quite the opposite of what one would assume of a religion trying to liberate itself from its primitive origins. In other words, for Bischoff, Judaism increasingly abandoned those beliefs that were closest to Christianity and moved in the direction of subterranean barbarous practices.

Bischoff never goes so far as to say that rabbinic law specifically ordained the consumption of human blood, only that it did not forbid it. And since it did not, various folk practices explicitly involved such blood.<sup>30</sup> He refers to a variety of such alleged practices, such as the mixing of the blood of bride and groom before weddings in Silesia and southern Russia and drinking from it before breaking the cup. These he believes symbolize the blood of circumcision and the blood of defloration, both of which make possible a fecund marriage. He also finds evidence of the mixing of wine and blood in the circumcision cup, of washing in the blood of circumcision, and of using the dried blood of circumcision to cure the wound left by that ritual.<sup>31</sup> Although he does not say so, Bischoff’s clear inference is that Jewish folk practices might countenance the killing of Christians for their blood, even if Jewish law contains no such prescription.

Surprisingly enough, but perhaps as a way to establish his scholarly objectivity, Bischoff takes pains to debunk the most common myth associated with ritual murder: that the Jews need Christian blood to make

*matza*. He finds no evidence for such a practice in any Jewish source. Instead, he offers what is still a useful analysis of why the *matza* myth might have arisen in the first place. Whereas Strack had speculated that Christians knew that Jews treated the *matza* as a ritual object, much like their own Eucharist, Bischoff thinks that it may have had more to do with the presence of bloodlike symbols at the Passover, such as the red wine used to make *haroset* or the standard sort of wine drunk at the meal. In the latter context, he quotes a seventeenth-century commentary on the *Shulhan Arukh* that recommends using white wine instead of red in places where there are blood libels.<sup>32</sup>

Bischoff's self-restraint disappears, though, when he moves to one of modern anti-Semitism's favorite themes: Jewish bloodthirstiness. The Old Testament, of course, is full of not only the blood of foreigners shed by the ancient Israelites, but also the blood of other Israelites, thus proving that the barbaric character of this people, rather than divine decree, is responsible for such violence.<sup>33</sup> Jewish sacrificial practices are substitutes for human sacrifice, but the latter remains right under the surface. Thus, the Hebrew name for the rooster sacrificed in the folk practice before Yom Kippur—*gever*—also means man (this observation was a favorite of modern anti-Semitic authors). Quoting the Talmud (b. *Yoma* 5a), Bischoff argues that since Jews require blood for atonement (he might have mentioned that so do Christians), absent blood sacrifices, the blood of innocent, non-Jewish children (or any other non-Jews, for that matter) might do.<sup>34</sup> He hastens to say that while such a belief circulated among the common folk, it was rejected by rabbis such as Joseph Karo. Nevertheless, in a discussion of the Xanten ritual-murder case of 1891–92, he accepts the veracity of the charge, even as he claims that it was the result of a Jewish folk practice rather than the official religion. The picture that emerges is of a people obsessed by blood and all too ready to shed it for either ritual or purely aggressive purposes.

Bischoff's somewhat nuanced discussion of Jewish blood practices, grounded in a relatively accurate rendition of rabbinic sources, sets it apart from the blunderbuss approach of *Der Stürmer* (although after the Nazis took power, Bischoff fell fully into lockstep, contributing, in 1934, to an "elucidation" of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*).<sup>35</sup> Yet, for that very reason, it was potentially much more dangerous; or, put differently, the synergy between gutter and scholarly anti-Semitism legitimated what might otherwise be dismissed as the ravings of those on the lunatic fringe. That Jewish ritual murder merited sober scholarship showed that it was not simply the result of hysterical anti-Semitism.

For example, the copiously footnoted entry on “Ritualmord” in volume 7 of the *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* (published in 1935–36) dismisses many of the accusations as unfounded. When the police investigated the death of a child in Breslau in 1926—a case trumpeted by Streicher in his 1934 special issue—they found no evidence of Jewish ritual involvement but instead the work of a sexually deranged student of Slavic origin. Nevertheless, the effect of the author’s long list of cases, beginning in 1148, many of them based explicitly on claims made in *Der Stürmer* itself, was to give scholarly legitimacy to the underlying accusation. Even if most of the thick cloud of smoke was hot air, the reader could be forgiven for assuming that some of it must have originated from fire.

During the Nazi period, expert opinion received the imprimatur of the state, and whole phalanxes of scholars were mobilized to categorize the population by race. Although much of this scholarship was devoted to the connection between blood and race, significant attention was also devoted to ritual murder. And Bischoff’s work became an important source of “scientific” knowledge on the subject. Thus Theodor Fritsch, a venerable theoretician of anti-Semitism, in a revised edition of his anti-Semitic “catechism,” approvingly quotes Bischoff’s translation of a passage, much beloved of anti-Semites, from the *Tikkunei ha-Zohar* that might be incorrectly understood as endorsing human sacrifice.<sup>36</sup>

Another writer of the Nazi period, Gerhard Utikal, who did not claim to be a scholar, also explicitly acknowledged his debt to Bischoff.<sup>37</sup> Utikal was intent on salvaging the wisdom of the *Volk* about the Jews’ nefarious practices. To this end he departed rather dramatically from Bischoff’s relatively restrained views. For example, he states definitively that the Jews use blood in their matza, either kneading it into the dough or spreading it on top, albeit—and fortunately for its eaters—in minute quantities that can be neither seen nor tasted.<sup>38</sup> The Jews also mix blood into the Passover wine (Utikal refers to the Passover as *Oster*, or Easter). Some of his other ideas about why the Jews need Christian blood are more eccentric and probably reflect anti-Semitic folk traditions, since they do not appear in any of the standard written literature on ritual murder.<sup>39</sup> According to one of those ideas, the Jews spread Christian blood on the face of a dying person or soak a cloth in the blood and then put it on his or her head. Then they whisper in the dying person’s ear: “If the Messiah in whom the Christians believe is the true Messiah who is promised to us, then may the blood of an innocent, dead Christian help you to eternal life.” This appears to be a convoluted admission that the



Christians are right after all and therefore that the blood of a Christian, like the blood of Christ himself, will bring salvation. The reason the Jews do this is that, according to Utikal, they do not believe in life after death, a result of their radical materialism. For that reason they greatly fear death and will go to any lengths to assuage the fear.

Another bizarre belief is that in the marriage ceremony (for which Bischoff also believed that Jews used Christian blood), the rabbi gives the bride and groom an egg that has been covered with ashes, which, in turn, come from a burned piece of canvas soaked in blood. Since none of this had any reality in actual Jewish weddings, the origins of the beliefs must lie elsewhere. The egg might have somehow migrated from the Passover meal, where its presence is not explicitly attested in Haggadah, to the marriage ceremony. The burned canvas appears to be a mutant version of the biblical red-heifer ritual for purifying someone contaminated by a corpse, but how it infiltrated the Jewish wedding ceremony remains a mystery. Utikal also refers to a number of more common beliefs about the Jews' use of blood, such as baking it into the *hamentaschen*, the triangular cakes eaten at Purim, as a celebration for the slaughter of what he refers to as 75,000 "Aryan Persians."

If Utikal gave expression to the same kind of "urban legends" found in *Der Stürmer*, Helmut Schramm's 1943 work is a good example of the disguising of old-fashioned anti-Semitism in "scientific" garb. The introduction to the book was written by his mentor, Johann von Leers, a professor of history at Jena who later wrote a notorious book on the criminal nature of the Jews and who seems to have ended his illustrious anti-Semitic career as a propagandist for the Egyptian leader Gamal Abdul Nasser.<sup>40</sup> Von Leers dredges up the hoary canard that since the Jews consider Gentiles equivalent to animals, they are permitted to kill them, and perhaps, since they no longer sacrifice animals, they *have* to kill them. He then praises Schramm as one of the few experts who have no clerical affiliation (*ohne klerikale Bindungen*) and whose work is "profoundly scientific" (*wissenschaftlich in die Tiefe arbeiten*). Of course, it is also essential to have the correct orientation (*richtige Instinkt*), presumably meaning that of the Nazis. Schramm's work, in von Leers's estimation, therefore represents something different from earlier theological treatments of the Jews. With works like Bischoff's and Schramm's, we are far from *Der Stürmer's* pornographic anti-Semitism and in a world of supposedly sober scholarship written by authors with doctorates.

But this was scholarship in the service of the *Volk*, as Schramm himself makes clear in his own introduction: whereas the Jews had attempted

to refute the blood accusation with spurious “enlightenment” scholarship, Schramm—and other anti-Semitic writers—were only recovering knowledge that the *Volk* itself had always preserved. No wonder that the Jews and their defenders attacked the common folk as ignorant and uneducated: only the uneducated retained the true *Wissenschaft*. And no wonder, too, that modern blood accusations typically took place in small towns and villages, for these purportedly backward sites were the last refuge from an urban culture polluted by Jewish influence.<sup>41</sup> The “correct orientation” or “instinct” extolled by von Leers therefore leads to a different kind of science, a *völkische Wissenschaft*, a science coordinated with the deepest understandings of the *Volk*. And this instinct could not be acquired by learning; it came from “the call of the blood,” as opposed to Jewish science, which was founded on the spurious claims of universal reason.

Like many facets of Nazi anti-Semitism, Schramm’s book is cast as a discursive defense of the defenseless *Volk* against the depredations of the Jews, a war by scholars “fighting God’s battle” (von Leers’s words). It need hardly be said that even as Schramm’s book came out in 1943, other Nazis with doctorates were fighting the same war—and not with words, but with bullets and gas. It is even possible that the book played a role in the genocide, since Heinrich Himmler, who greatly admired Schramm’s work, ordered one hundred copies sent to the *Einsatzgruppen*, the mobile squads carrying out mass executions of Jews on the Russian front.<sup>42</sup>

Schramm’s governing assumption was that the Jews thoroughly controlled the discourse around ritual murder, successfully obscuring the truth. When he wrote his introduction—“im Kriegsjahr 1941”—such a position could only be maintained with the greatest cognitive dissonance, although such dissonance was quite characteristic of the Nazis, who assumed that their powerless Jewish victims were still omnipotent.<sup>43</sup>

We have seen that the blood libel served as a kind of bridge between medieval religious and modern secular forms of anti-Semitism, undergoing certain significant changes as it retained other continuities. What had been largely a folk tradition was now given scientific legitimacy by purported academic experts. Another of the shifts that occurred was in the age and gender of the victims. Most of the victims of the medieval and early modern ritual-murder accusations were young boys, usually between the ages of six and ten. Although such victims are not lacking in the modern blood libel, more significant are the adolescent girls, such as those of the Tisza-Eszlár and Hilsner cases. In some of these, rumors

of sexual assault augmented the suspicion of ritual murder. This was a singularly modern aspect of the blood libel, since, to the best of my knowledge, no medieval case trafficked in sexual transgression. While *Der Stürmer* was willing to take up virtually any disappearance or murder as a potential blood ritual, it was particularly eager to make hay from those in which there was a sexual element, because such an element connected to racial anti-Semitism's discourse of blood pollution.

This connection was particularly important because ritual-murder accusations by themselves failed to gain much traction during the Nazi period: no spectacular trials of alleged Jewish perpetrators were staged by the regime.<sup>44</sup> It is equally significant that a fervent believer in the myth of ritual murder, such as Helmut Schramm, was evidently unable to point to a single case after 1913. Perhaps the Jews had succeeded in suppressing the later evidence, but the old motif could find new life once its fortunes were hitched the star of blood and race. And if individual cases of ritual murder were no longer so evident, the Nazis conceived of the "Jewish war," as they typically labeled World War II, as a gigantic attempt at both ritual murder and race pollution by the Jews against their hapless Aryan victims.<sup>45</sup>

#### BLOOD POLLUTION

The racial state constructed by the Nazis was ostensibly based on scientific categories that divided the German nation into people included in the *Volk* and those excluded.<sup>46</sup> Nazi ideology involved the conflation of the theories of race and eugenics.<sup>47</sup> Although the Jews were the most prominent of the ones excluded on the basis of race, others, such as the mentally and physically handicapped, were also seen as threats to racial purity. So, too, were homosexuals, whose failure to procreate seemingly challenged the natal policy of the regime, itself a product of racial thinking. Finally, the Roma, a group whose Indian origins might seem to have included them in the Aryan race, came to share the fate of the Jews because they were considered a threat to social order.

The racial state as envisioned by the Nazis required the protection of the blood of the *Volk* from pollution. If, as suggested earlier, the blood libel reflects fear of the *extraction* of Christian blood for Jewish rituals, "race pollution" involves the *injection* of alien blood into the bloodstream of the Aryan nation. *Rassenschande* (race pollution) may be said to involve the modern concept of the circulation of blood through the body of the nation, a circulatory system that must be kept free

of contamination or poisoning.<sup>48</sup> So, in 1935 a Nazi publication accused the Jews of inventing inoculations as a way of corrupting Aryan blood.<sup>49</sup> In the same year, an SS man received a blood transfusion from a Jew and was compelled to face a disciplinary court over the question of whether he had been racially corrupted.<sup>50</sup> These two cases force us to recognize that the Nazi anxiety over blood pollution was literal and corporeal. The extensive scientific research that went into establishing correlations between blood types and racial groups was part of this corporeal literalism. As we shall see, this hyperliteral or physical understanding of blood contradicted the Nazis' insistence that they represented the "spiritual" (*Geist*), contrasting with Jewish materialism.

The main corporeal anxiety was sexual. As Dagmar Herzog has argued, sexuality in the Nazi regime involved a complex dialectic of "incitement and disavowal," in which sexual restraint was often cloaked in highly erotic terms.<sup>51</sup> *Der Stürmer*, for example, attacked the Jews as hypersexual, while good Aryans were modest and restrained. But it did so in blatantly pornographic terms, thus undermining its explicit message. Moreover, in their efforts to create a strong Aryan *Volk*, Nazi ideologists at times promoted an open and frank sexuality, which provoked opposition from some Christian quarters. A healthy attitude toward sex between Aryans seemed the prerequisite for avoiding race pollution by the Jews, who lurked in wait around every corner.

In a physiological metaphor borrowed indirectly from Galenic medicine, the Nazis referred to sperm as the distilled essence of blood and held that one drop of Jewish "albumin" would irreparably pollute the pure blood of an Aryan woman, not unlike the infamous "one drop rule" in American racist thinking or the much more legitimate contemporary fear of contracting AIDS from a drop of contaminated blood. Streicher's collaborator, Fritz Fink, wrote in a pamphlet on the dangers of allowing Jews into the educational system: "Racial defilement is bloodless murder. A woman defiled by a Jew can never rid herself of the transfused poison of foreign blood. She is lost to her people."<sup>52</sup> Because this kind of pollution required injection of the pure essence of blood, the obvious vector was a Jewish man assaulting an Aryan woman. While the blood libel was less gender-specific, *Rassenschande* had a rigid gender code.<sup>53</sup>

In this way the accusations of Jewish blood pollution symbolized the modern fear of Jewish integration, rather than the medieval fear of a segregated group practicing alien rituals. But these anxieties were mutually reinforcing. Jewish integration was dangerous precisely because

the Jews were not what they seemed, namely, good bourgeois Germans; instead, they had to be portrayed as criminals disguised as upstanding citizens. Thus, it is no surprise that *Der Stürmer* focused less on the high intermarriage rate of Jews and Christians in Weimar Germany than on sex crimes by Jews. These crimes were naturally the result of nefarious and secretive Jewish practices, which, if not precisely rituals, had at least a family resemblance to ritual murder. Streicher regularly published sadoomasochistic narratives, whose ritualistic character exercised a prurient fascination both for his readers and, it seems, for Streicher himself, who was famous for beating his opponents with the same dog whip that he put into the hands of some of his imagined Jewish sex fiends.

As with the blood libel, the Nazis not only claimed to have modern, scientific proof for their accusations against the Jews; they also tried to ground their racial ideas in premodern German folk traditions. To this end Nazi philologists and folklorists demonstrated that old German proverbs already contained the wisdom that was to become state policy under the Nazis. For instance, a Darmstadt professor of philology, Karl Bergmann, published an article in 1936 in the journal *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Bildung* entitled “Völkisches Gedankengut im deutschen Sprichwort” (“A Treasury of Volkish Thought in the German Proverb”).<sup>54</sup> He writes: “The fundamental truth that blood is the noblest thing in man, but can also be the worst thing, was well recognized by our unspoiled, healthy ancestors. Only today’s state has put teeth into this truth through the Law for Preservation of the Genetic Health of the German People. Hundreds of our proverbs emphasize the value of a healthy body and in many of them special emphasis is given to healthy blood. Good blood comes before everything else, including wealth and beauty.”<sup>55</sup> Bergmann quotes one rhymed folk saying along the latter lines: “First healthy blood [*gesundes Blut*], then many possessions [*grosses Gut*] and a pretty hat [*schöner Hut*].” Here is an example of a folk saying that Bergmann believes anticipates the Nuremberg Laws: “Three things make the best pair: the same blood [*gleich Blut*], the same passion [*gleich Glut*] and the same age.” Another proverb makes it clear that the same blood does not mean to marry within the same family: “To marry into the blood [*ins Blut*] is seldom good.”<sup>56</sup> The “same blood,” as opposed to “into the blood,” clearly means for Bergmann the same *race*. These folk sayings proved that the Nazis did not invent this racial principle; rather, they recovered an ancient wisdom that, like the memory of Jewish ritual murder, had been preserved by the *Volk*.

In an article from 1934, Bergmann noted in anticipation of the Nuremberg Laws of the next year: “Adolf Hitler had to appear in order to shake up the conscience and to redeem the German folk through legal measures from the ‘sin against blood and race’ as the original sin [*Erbsünde*] of this world.”<sup>57</sup> In referring to a “sin against blood,” Bergmann was explicitly borrowing from what was perhaps the best-selling work about racial pollution from the Weimar period, Artur Dinter’s 1918 novel *Die Sünde wider das Blut* (*The Sin against the Blood*). The novel—often considered the first *Rassenroman*—enjoyed multiple printings, with some estimates claiming that it was read by one and a half million people.<sup>58</sup> The novel’s success impelled Hermann Strack to dedicate part of a small pamphlet to refuting Dinter’s ideas, reaching the conclusion that that “*The Sin against the Blood* is a sin against art, against science and against the Fatherland.”<sup>59</sup>

Dinter himself (1876–1948) subsequently joined the Nazi party, was expelled, and led a movement for *Geisteschristentum* that the Nazis ultimately banned. But although he had a falling out with Hitler and remained a marginal, even at times persecuted, figure during the Nazi period, his novel and other anti-Semitic writings had a profound effect in shaping German attitudes toward the Jews and for stoking the critical category of *Rassenschande*.<sup>60</sup> Even though Dinter was ultimately purged from the Nazi movement, his novel serves as an important bridge between nineteenth-century racial anti-Semitism and Nazi ideology. It is therefore instructive to examine the novel in some detail for both its narrative and its ideology.

As a number of critics have correctly pointed out, the novel is a pastiche of contrived situations and from a literary point of view oscillates between sentimental kitsch and erotic suggestion. The story serves as a vehicle for the author’s propagation of racial pseudoscience (*Rassenkunde*)—the book is dedicated to “the German Houston Stewart Chamberlain.” The seventy pages of notes—some 20 percent of the text—demonstrate that Dinter thought he was not so much writing a novel as composing a scholarly treatise in fictional form. As in the ritual-murder literature, here, too, anti-Semitism put on a laboratory coat. And in fact, the hero of the book, the iconically named Hermann Kämpfer (fighter—a term much beloved by the Nazis later), described as a blond, strong, honest, methodical, unselfish, humble, nature-loving, and talented exemplary German, turns out to be a lecturer and assistant in organic chemistry. Science was the ground on which Jews and Aryans were going to stake their final battle.

Closely linked with Dinter's anti-Semitism is his antimaterialism, which is expressed through Hermann's dissatisfaction with his experiments in organic chemistry. The modern materialist concept of science disregards everything that is beyond empirical phenomena and cannot be "broken into atoms." In the novel, this purely quantitative and materialist understanding is associated with Jewish racial traits and is opposed to the "Germanic trait" of understanding life in its wholeness and inner essence, a creative and spiritual understanding of reality that is allegedly inaccessible to the Jews, who think exclusively in terms of numbers and profits.<sup>61</sup> This revolt against materialism was to produce a very peculiar, even paradoxical, understanding of the meaning of blood.

Frustrated with his research—an attempt to create synthetic life, which is later appropriated by a Jewish rival—Hermann falls in love with Elisabeth, a beautiful, blond society girl, who, it turns out, is the daughter of a wealthy industrialist, *Kommerzienrat* Burghamer. The rich but crude Burghamer's physical description meets every racist stereotype of the later *Stürmer* Jewish caricatures. Hermann is puzzled by the contrast between the dark and repulsive industrialist and the blond, Aryan beauty of his daughter. Later, the reader learns that Burghamer—a Galician Jew named Hamburger before his conversion—had seduced and raped Elisabeth's German mother—also blond and beautiful—and had then been required to marry his victim.

Here we encounter one of the central themes in Dinter's novel. Indulging in a kind of pulp eroticism, Dinter plays on the same sexual anxieties and desires that later drove *Der Stürmer*. While good Aryans, like Hermann, are by nature chaste, Jewish blood is hypersexual. Not surprisingly, the condemnation of Jewish sexuality contradicts the ostensibly chaste Aryan reader's own excitement at these forbidden relations. As opposed to *Der Stürmer*, however, *Die Sünde wider das Blut* focuses not on licentious Jewish men raping young Aryan girls, but rather on the opposite: the dangers to pure Aryan men like Hermann of relations with seemingly pure Aryan women who are, in fact, polluted by Jewish blood. One might argue that because these German women are polluted by Jewish men, they can be seen as racial transvestites: the female principle of Aryanism is sexually and racially infected by the male principle of Judaism. Hermann, although strong and chaste, plays a curiously passive, perhaps even effeminate, role until the end of the novel; it is the Jewish men who are aggressive and physical. Thus, the sexual and racial economy of the novel reveals a deep anxiety about

gender roles and about the purity of blond Aryan women: physical appearance is no guarantee of racial purity.

Hermann gives up his university job and marries Elisabeth. But her Jewish blood prevents her from fulfilling her desire to be a good German *Hausfrau*:

The will to life of her mother's pure Germanic blood, was not diminished by the dark, chaotic blood from her father's veins, even if it hemmed in all its nobler desires. Passion and sensuality, lust for pleasure and lack of any restraint, the inherited remnants of our animal development were heightened through the cursed mixture of blood; everything great and good, pure and true, noble and profound, everything that strives from the animal-like to the spiritual [was] lowered, paralysed, or even stifled. This was the curse of the sin against the blood to which she owed her being.<sup>62</sup>

The unconscious call of the blood overrides one's conscious will.

Hermann and Elisabeth pay for the "sin against the blood" by conceiving a son who, shockingly, resembles not Hermann but his Jewish grandfather. As Dinter insists by citing Houston Stewart Chamberlain's "scientific" observations of animal breeding, the "lower" races' traits almost always suppress the "higher" ones. This was a deep anxiety in all of racial anti-Semitism: that the Jews possessed a dominant gene that consistently trumped the Aryan. No wonder believers in this pseudoscience feared that they were engaged in a battle with one hand tied behind their genetic back.

Elisabeth dies in childbirth after conceiving another Semitic baby, who also dies (death is nothing if not a central protagonist in the novel). After her death, Hermann discovers that he had much earlier fathered a son by a pure, blond German girl with whom he had had a brief fling, although the mother had since then died from pneumonia. The novel's seeming approval of this nonmarital sexual relationship prefigures what later became the positive attitude of Nazi groups like the SS toward unconventional relations, as long as they produced Aryan offspring.<sup>63</sup> Hermann takes the boy—blond like him and appropriately named Hermann—to live with him, and the chapters following, which describe the educational experiences of Hermann and his Semitic half brother Heinrich (the boys are only one year apart in age), serve to illustrate the alleged "natural" differences between German and Jewish blood. While Hermann is creative, bold, and selfless, Heinrich is greedy, weak, and uncreative, excelling in nothing but math. Conveniently enough, both boys drown in a boating accident.

Deprived of his fortune and his one son—Hermann, of course, does not consider Heinrich as his real son—Hermann makes one more attempt



to procreate, this time with the nurse Johanna, whom he marries in spite of a dark secret in the woman's past. This secret, not surprisingly, is a past sexual relationship with a Jewish man, which, despite Hermann's and Johanna's untainted German blood, produces a Jewish-looking child. The novel explains, with more "scientific" footnotes and zoological examples, that a previous blood mixing of two races can "poison" the nobler race's blood even if the nobler individual subsequently tries to breed with a member of her or his own race. Here Dinter's science departs from even partial adherence to Mendelian genetics and ventures into mystical territory.

As the long-suffering reader approaches the conclusion of Dinter's novel, Johanna kills herself and the unlucky offspring, and Hermann tracks down and shoots the Jewish offender, an army officer. The last chapters depict Hermann's trial, in which he steadfastly holds his own against a Jewish prosecutor and uses his defense for a one-and-a-half-hour-long explication of the Jewish threat to the German race, calling for "defanging the Jewish vampire that sucks [the German people's] unsuspecting heart's blood."<sup>64</sup> Thus the older discourse of Jewish blood rituals comes together with the new doctrine of blood pollution. With the applause of the audience, Hermann is acquitted. The book ends with his heroic death as a volunteer in the Great War: death in battle provides the necessary balm for *Rassenschande*.

Dinter not only recycled in fictional form the extreme ideas of earlier racial anti-Semitism, but, in a move that he also inherited from the nineteenth century, he tied these ideas to a modern version of Marcionite Christianity. In a long ideological chapter,<sup>65</sup> Hermann/Dinter denies any connection between the God of the New Testament—a God of love and goodness—and the Old Testament's Jahwe, whose emphasis on sacrifice and retribution reflects the Jewish, racially determined inability to understand religion in anything but business terms. The real objective of religion and of earthly life—as expressed by "Aryan" philosophers like Plato—is the return of the human soul to "the father."

The materialist Jewish religion reflects unchanging *racial* traits. Thus, the Jewish problem for Dinter is not a question of confession but of race: "religion *is* race." In a trope associated with the blood libel, ritual sacrifice is described as the essence of Jewish religion and interpreted as a mere business transaction between man and God. It is this idea that the Jews have used to corrupt original Christianity:

The view, still held by many Christians even today, that Jesus's suffering and death was a sacrifice for our sins and effected a general pardon for every sinful human, is of course only the thoughtless application of barbaric

Old Testament notions to the teachings of Christ. The early Christians, still influenced by Jewish concepts, were not able to comprehend the unprecedented selflessness of Jesus's life and death as an exemplary model. They were unable to free themselves from the concept of "sacrifice," which is closely linked to the Jewish notion of "making a deal." Jesus himself never taught anything like this, he stated that he came to serve as our example. The vengeful and profit-greedy Jew God Jahwe could apparently be reconciled through sacrifices and made to close new deals. But what use should such sacrifices, or even death sacrifices, have for our God, who after all is our father and love?<sup>66</sup>

Under Jewish influence, this meaning of Christianity became distorted; however, the evident contrast between the spiritual teachings of Christ and the materialist Jewish religion proves for Dinter the Aryan racial origin of Jesus. In his detailed footnotes to Hermann's ruminations, Dinter draws mainly from Theodor Fritsch's *Beweismaterial gegen Jahwe* to "prove" that the real basis for the Old Testament is the destruction of the Indo-Germanic cultivators of the land by Semitic invaders, an idea that Fritsch took from a variety of nineteenth-century writers.

By the time he wrote his novel, the issues that Dinter raised in his book had been circulating for nearly a half century. Dinter's belief that Jewish blood always trumped the Aryan pointed to one of the most vexing problems facing racial theorists: the question of the supposed "purity" of the Jewish race. On the one hand, there were those who held that the Jews originated the idea of racial purity in their doctrine of the chosen people. The anthropologist Richard Andree, who wrote an ethnographic study of the Jews in 1881, gave a scientific veneer to the increasing sense among Germans that emancipation could not erase the effect of Jewish racial purity:

Surely, it [the German language] "brought him nearer." The old, often barbaric conditions disappeared, [as well as] the customs and traditions of the Jews, who used to be imprisoned in the old Jewish alleys, where the closing of Ghetto gates had gone along with a closing of hearts, callous prescriptions of the Talmud were forgotten, Judaism adjusted at least outwardly to the rest of the population. It did not succeed, however, in breaking that which is inherent in the Jew through a hereditary mind and continuous inbreeding, and which is unspoiled by mixture; all this was preserved and—just as the physical traits—constitutes a distinguishing barrier up to this day.<sup>67</sup>

As a result of inbreeding, the Jews have the capacity to overcome any admixture of foreign blood. No amount of German culture can overcome *their* "call of the blood."

A remarkable short story from 1893, by the deeply disturbed German author Oskar Panizza, entitled "The Operated Jew," worked out some of these ideas in grotesque fictional form. Playing upon common stereotypes of the Jewish body as ugly and deformed,<sup>68</sup> Panizza has his grotesque protagonist, Itzig Faitel Stern, try to assimilate by undergoing a fantastic operation in which his whole body is stretched and distorted until it assumes the shape of a good German. Realizing that a German body was of no use without a German soul, which, of course, is to be found in the blood, Itzig undertakes (in his characteristically Jewish form of speech) to "buy me sum Chreesten blud!"<sup>69</sup> After finally persuading "seven strong women from the Black Forest" to participate (all others refuse on the grounds of "the blood spilt on the Cross because of the Jews"), Itzig's blood is replaced by eight pints of German blood. But despite this transfusion, Itzig does not acquire a German soul, thus foreshadowing the end of the story, in which, under the influence of alcohol, the operated Jew's true identity comes out. Panizza's story, which can be read either as anti-Semitic or, conversely, as a critique of anti-Semitism, ends with the ambiguous conclusion that even replacing a Jew's blood with German blood will not turn a Semitic frog into an Aryan prince.

The implication of this racial trope is that the purity of Jewish blood has not necessarily produced a noble race. On the contrary, the Jews are physically ugly and socially repulsive. One non-German writer who seems to have anticipated these ideas before they became popular in Europe was Herman Melville:

You cannot spill a drop of American blood without spilling the blood of the world. . . . We are not a narrow tribe of men with bigoted Hebrew nationality whose blood has been debased in the attempt to ennoble it, by maintaining an exclusive succession among ourselves. No: our blood is as the flood of the Amazon, made up of a thousand noble currents all pouring into one. We are not a nation so much as the world, for, unless we may claim all the world for our sire, like Melchisedec,<sup>70</sup> we are without father or mother.<sup>71</sup>

For Melville, the lack of "father or mother" was precisely what gave America its distinctive strength. Those who could trace their ancestors to a common progenitor, like the Hebrews, were in danger of debasing their blood by inbreeding. The result of such "bigoted" inbreeding was a race inferior to those who lived in a genetic melting pot. But despite Melville's very nasty assault on Jewish ethnicity, his "racial multiculturalism" was far from the anti-Semitism of an Artur Dinter, who, dreading

anything resembling “a thousand noble currents,” insisted instead on the Germans’ own pure genealogy.

In contrast to Andree and Melville, many racial anti-Semites—including Dinter—considered the Jews a bastard race lacking any kind of racial purity. Their blood contained a promiscuous mixture of foreign blood. A mongrel people, their racial essence was that they lacked an essence. It was precisely against this bastardized blood that the purity of Aryan blood might be defined and measured. Houston Stewart Chamberlain devised a neat solution to this contradiction between two definitions of Jewish blood: the division between Sephardim and Ashkenazim. The former preserved their racial purity: “The principal stem remains spotless, not a drop of strange blood comes in.” The latter—which, of course, included the German Jews—created “thousands of side branches . . . employed to infect the Indo-Europeans with Jewish blood.”<sup>72</sup> Ironically, German Jews themselves often saw the Sephardim as a kind of Jewish nobility,<sup>73</sup> but they would hardly have concurred with Chamberlain’s assessment that Jewish intermarriage was creating a “herd of pseudo-Hebraic mestizos, a people beyond all doubt degenerate physically, mentally and morally.”

#### THE ARYAN JESUS

With its promiscuous brew of kitsch and death, to use Saul Friedländer’s formulation, Dinter’s *Die Sünde wider das Blut* anticipates the culture of Nazism.<sup>74</sup> But it also mixes religion and racism in a lethal combination that sheds a different light on Nazi culture. The relationship of Nazism to Christianity is a complicated and vexed question. Although Nazism often appeared to be anti-Christian—and even though Dinter himself ran afoul of it on these terms—the Nazi regime made pragmatic compromises with the German churches.<sup>75</sup> In reality, the relationship between Nazi ideology and Christianity was dialectical: the Nazis evacuated Christianity of its religious content and filled it with new racial meaning. Just as the modern blood libel was a mutated form of the medieval, so the modern racialist fear of miscegenation had its own medieval religious roots. Uli Linke has perceptively pointed out that Nazi race theorists like Alfred Rosenberg secularized in the form of a *Blut-mythus* the traditional Christian preoccupation with the holy blood of Christ.<sup>76</sup> As Rosenberg wrote in his virtually impenetrable *Myth of the Twentieth Century*: “Today a new faith is awakening—the myth of the blood, the belief that the divine being of mankind generally is to be

defended with the blood. The faith embodied by the fullest realization that the Nordic blood constitutes that mystery which has supplanted and surmounted the Old Sacraments.”<sup>77</sup> The blood of the Germans now took the place of the blood of Christ.

This process of secularizing Christian topoi involved some interesting dialectics in which Christianity itself was turned into a racial religion.<sup>78</sup> The creation of a “German Christianity”—to which Dinter made an important contribution—was a project with deep roots in the nineteenth century. Its origins are in the scholarly movement to recover the historical Jesus, which, in turn, led to those who wanted to wrench their Savior out of his Jewish context. One of the most virulent of these was Paul de Lagarde, a New Testament professor and theologian.<sup>79</sup> But perhaps the most striking and important, given his stature, was Richard Wagner.

Wagner’s views of the Jews as a force for degeneration in German culture, expressed in his notorious “Das Judenthum in der Musik” (1850), are well known, but perhaps less attention has been paid to the way blood came to play a central role in his later thought, especially in his 1881 essay “Religion und Kunst.”<sup>80</sup> Wagner’s racism was intimately linked to his Schopenhauerian veneration of India and to his vegetarianism. The pacifistic religion of the Hindus was bound up, in his view, with their refusal to spill the blood of animals. To be sure, the pure blood of this Aryan race had an environmental component, since Wagner suggests that once human beings moved to colder climates and had to eat meat for sustenance, their blood lost its original purity. But these northern races—one assumes the Germans—“knew themselves guilty of a crime with every beast they slew or slaughtered and had to expiate it to the god.”<sup>81</sup> However, the Old Testament undermined this compassion for animals and celebrated their slaughter for food. The evidence? The God of the Hebrew Bible preferred the animal sacrificed by Abel to the grain offerings brought by Cain. Since Wagner equated the souls of animals with those of people, he labeled Judaism a cannibalistic religion, thirsty for innocent blood. The carnivorous Jews found economic expression for their dietary customs in greed for money. Here Wagner echoes the views of Karl Marx and Moses Hess, who had argued that money is congealed blood. But he also reflected the anti-Semitic argument we have already encountered that the Jewish method of ritual slaughter is particularly horrific and is symbolic of the Jews’ blood-thirsty character altogether.

For Wagner, all that was wrong with the Christianity of history and of his day could be attributed to the malign influence of Judaism

and particularly to its pollution of the blood of Christians through the practices taken over by Christianity. Some of this pollution was, of course, directly a result of miscegenation. The blood of the Jews, he argued—echoing the new racial theories and anticipating Dinter—was so indelible that “even commixture of blood does not hurt [the Jew]; let Jew or Jewess intermarry with the most distinct of races, a Jew will always come to birth.”<sup>82</sup> But through their cultural practices, the Jews were able to pollute Christianity even without what the Nazis would call *Rassenschande*.

Since the problem was not only literal, the solution, for Wagner, could also draw from religious symbolism: “Notwithstanding that we have seen the blood of the noblest races vitiated by admixture, the partaking of the blood of Jesus, as symbolized in the only genuine sacrament of the Christian religion might raise the very lowest races to the purity of gods.”<sup>83</sup> Christ’s death was a bloodletting that should have stopped all future bloodletting, as well as consumption of meat. But since Judaism had contaminated the early church, these cardinal lessons went unlearned. In fact, in a move that echoes the late seventeenth-century German pietist Gottfried Arnold,<sup>84</sup> Wagner suggests that the true history of the church was to be found among its heretics rather than the orthodox. In his operas, especially in *Parsifal*, which is based on the myth of the Holy Grail—the chalice believed to have caught the blood of the crucified Christ—Wagner developed a counterhistory of Christianity in which the holy blood of Christ has come into the custody of German knights.

The question of whether Wagner’s operas reflect the same anti-Semitism as his essays remains hotly debated among Wagner scholars.<sup>85</sup> Even if we do not accept the contention that characters in *Parsifal*, like Klingsor or Kundry, represent the Jews, there can be little doubt that the Christianity of the opera flowed from a profoundly anti-Semitic sensibility. Recovery of the primal message of Christianity required the purging of all the malign influences of Jewish bloodlust; Christianity, based on the “only genuine sacrament,” would then marry the blood of Christ with the blood of the true Aryans.

Writing in 1881, Wagner suggests that Christ himself was not biologically Jewish and that Aryan blood ran in his veins.<sup>86</sup> This was a thesis taken up by a chorus of anti-Semitic thinkers at the fin de siècle, among them, most notably, Houston Stewart Chamberlain.<sup>87</sup> As we have seen, the thesis was put into fictional form by Dinter. I want to focus for a moment on a contemporary of Chamberlain, Max Brewer (1861–1921),

a poet and essayist, who anticipated Chamberlain by a few years in developing this idea.<sup>88</sup> Bewer argues that the Galileans from whom Jesus descended were themselves the descendants of northern Germans who had migrated to Galilee some 1,500 years before Jesus's birth. So, for that matter, was his putative ancestor, King David, whose characteristic red hair was proof positive of his northern European racial origin. These Galileans had blond or reddish-blond hair and were agriculturalists, as opposed to the dark-haired, swarthy Jews, a motley race that came out of Egypt and was preoccupied, even in biblical times, with commerce. Here, then, for Bewer, was proof that, even in their own land, the Jews never had *völkisch* roots in the soil.

For Bewer, all the epic struggles in the Bible—Cain versus Abel, Jacob versus Esau—were in fact between “foreign blood and Jewish blood.” He, too, seems to have subscribed to a counterhistorical, even Gnostic, interpretation of the Bible. The Christian kingdom of heaven promised in the New Testament means the final victory of German blood over Jewish, the return of Jesus to his racial origins: Siegfried would conquer Samson; “God in him had triumphed, German blood over Jewish blood.”<sup>89</sup> For Bewer, the very physical qualities of Jewish blood and German blood were different: the first was dark and corrupt, the second light red and pure. Thus, the triumph of the Aryan Jesus over the Jews was not just spiritual but also physical: blood is the essence of both body and spirit.

Bewer argued that Germany had never been fully Christian because it had never fully divorced itself from the Jewish contamination of Christianity. Thus, the first kingdom—or *Reich*—was Catholic, the second Protestant, and only the third, by overcoming these artificial distinctions, would be fully Christian, that is, fully Aryan. Although Bewer was not the direct source for the Nazis' adoption of the name *Das dritte Reich*—the honor belongs to Moeller van den Bruck, whose work of that name was published in 1922<sup>90</sup>—he represents a very important link in the dialectical chain: by transforming Joachim of Fiore's thirteenth-century apocalyptic doctrine of a third empire corresponding to the age of the Holy Spirit into a racialized form of Christianity, Bewer paved the way both for the German Christianity of the Nazi period and for Nazism's even more radical anti-Christianity.

The late nineteenth-century idea of the “Aryan Jesus” had a precursor in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spanish discourse of the “purity of the blood” (*limpieza de sangre*), which we encountered in chapter 3. As Jerome Friedman has pointed out, those who wanted to insist on the absolute difference between “Old” and “New” Christians

had a problem with Jesus and with “the most famous *converso* in history . . . Paul.”<sup>91</sup> The solution then, as later, was to argue that Jesus and Paul were biologically different from the Jews of their day. Friedman demonstrates that the Spanish originators of blood racism sometimes went further than their German successors. For instance, those whose Christian lineage had been questioned needed to prove that there was no Jewish taint to their blood for as many as six generations. In comparison, the Nuremberg Laws look almost lenient. There were even cases in which the bones of the deceased ancestors of Marranos burned at the stake for Judaizing were exhumed and burned.<sup>92</sup>

The link between the Spanish *limpieza de sangre* and Nazi laws of blood remains a highly contested one. Although modern anti-Semites may well have been aware of the early modern precedents to their own racism, the actual intellectual filiation was probably indirect. Friedman has argued that the Iberian distinction between Old and New Christians infiltrated northern Europe, where converts to Christianity played an important role in shaping the Christian Hebraism of the Reformation.<sup>93</sup> For their efforts, they and others, like Johannes Reuchlin, became the targets of charges of “Judaizing.” For instance, Luther’s own vituperative remarks about the Jews seem to conflate converted and authentic Jews: conversion did not wipe out the Jewish blemish. Reformation authorities were therefore no less hostile to converted Jews than were their Iberian contemporaries. The wave of Jewish conversions to Christianity that started in Spain and ultimately produced the doctrine of pure blood swept over northern Europe as well, if in lesser numbers, and had similar effects. It was in this way that the seed of Spanish racism entered into German culture, where it germinated and eventually flowered in the late nineteenth century. New historical circumstances were, to be sure, essential to the later development, but the seeds can be traced to their early modern origins.

Another link in the chain between premodern Christianity and Nazism was the radical apocalyptic ideas that circulated in Germany at the time of the Reformation. Norman Cohn has called attention to a text that remained in manuscript in the sixteenth century and which later scholars labeled the *Book of a Hundred Chapters*.<sup>94</sup> In contrast to other traditions, which trace German ancestry back to a descendant of the biblical Japheth, the Book holds that Adam himself was a *tuscher man* (German man).<sup>95</sup> His language, which would be passed on to Noah’s sons, was “All man’s” (*allemanisch*), that is, German. Japheth and his sons brought this language to Europe before the Tower of Babel, the destruction of which gave rise to all other languages, including Hebrew



and Gallic. This linguistic heritage makes the Germans in effect the chosen people; allegedly, the book of Daniel predicts that the “sacred” language German will ultimately do away with all other languages. As the chosen people, the Germans had a law code long before the Jews, who “lived like animals” before Moses gave them the law, while “we Germans had seven commandments” (a number that is, surprisingly, identical to the Talmudic seven Noahide commandments that Jewish law attributes to the non-Jewish nations).<sup>96</sup> Since the Jews were steeped in sin, Jesus had to come to absolve them and only them. The Bible—New Testament and Old—appear to be books aimed only at the Jews. Here, instead of trying to create an Aryan Jesus, the text appears to bifurcate the founder of Christianity into two: the “primordial” Jesus, associated with Jupiter and Mercury, as well as the ancient German tribes, and the Jesus of the New Testament. The *Book of a Hundred Chapters* is not notably anti-Semitic (it tends to attribute avaricious traits to Italians rather than Jews). But its radical dissociation of biblical Christianity from German nationalism prefigures the Nazis’ own hostility toward historical Christianity.

This doctrine, which, borrowing from Ernst Nolte, might be characterized as a revolt against transcendence, must be understood as itself a dialectical product of Christianity. One of the characteristics of this racial philosophy was the inversion of the traditional Christian categories of “spirit” and “flesh.” While the first was Christian, the second was famously Jewish, the carnal Israel. The Jews were crude materialists, while only Aryans possessed true *Geist*, a theme we encounter repeatedly in Dinter. The Nazis frequently adopted this very distinction. So, for example, one Nazi racial theoretician, Wilhelm Kinkel, wrote that God’s world is the one where racial differences are recognized as divinely decreed.<sup>97</sup> The disenchanted and materialist world of modernity is the world of the devil, and salvation from this world will come when Germans embrace the teaching of Jesus that “my kingdom is not of this world.”

Yet the kingdom of Jesus is also the kingdom of blood, the spiritual substance that is also material. Only by “reenchanting” the world with blood can the demonic world of the Jews be defeated. So it is a physical fluid that contains the essence of the German *Geist*. By turning blood into the central “myth of the twentieth century,” Nazi thinkers thus made the carnal primary; or, as Karl Kraus put it, they “literalized the body.”<sup>98</sup> The spiritual is conveyed by something entirely physical. This too was a dialectical product of Christianity, for the doctrine

of the real presence held that the actual, physical body and blood of Christ were in the Eucharist.

Martin Heidegger gave this idea its most philosophical, if not its most comprehensible, expression in his notorious inaugural speech as rector of Freiburg University. Heidegger claimed that the spiritual (*geistige*) world of a people is not its cultural superstructure (*Überbau einer Kultur*) or its arsenal of usable knowledge and values (*Zeughaus für verwendbare Kenntnisse und Werte*), but rather “the power that is in the most profound preservation of its earthly and bloody [*erd- und bluthaften*] forces as the power of the innermost arousal and broadest agitation of its existence [*Erschütterung seines Daseins*].”<sup>99</sup> Heidegger thus seems to disavow any immediate connection between the spiritual or intellectual and culture. Rather, the spirit takes its power from the material forces of earth and blood, the raw elements of existence (*Das-ein*—the word is, of course, highly pregnant in Heidegger’s vocabulary). Even though the Jews may have embodied the principle of pure materialism, the German soul was no less bound up in the material.

Some have called this worldview a secular form of Gnosticism, but this label seems to miss the radical inversion of Christianity that even Gnosticism was not able to accomplish. To be sure, like Marcion, Nazi anti-Semites wished to sever the connection between the Old and New Testaments, and like many of the Gnostics, they did so by profoundly rejecting this world. But instead of seeking salvation in a spiritualized *Deus absconditus*, they found redemption in the very blood flowing in the veins of Christ and his putative Aryan descendants. This redemption required the destruction of the Jews, the race devoted to the pollution of this pure blood. From this point of view, the fact that Jews sought the blood of Christians for their rituals might be seen as a variant of their desire to inject their own blood into Christian bodies, since in both cases Jewish blood and Christian blood were fundamentally different.

#### REDEMPTION THROUGH BLOOD

These two discourses of blood, the one based on ritual murder, the other based on race, both of which involved the modern transformation of medieval religious concepts, converged in Nazi anti-Semitism, and the solution to both was by means of blood. In his Reichstag speech of 1942, when the Holocaust was already in full gear, Hitler stated: “For the first time, the others will not be the only ones to lose their blood, but for the first time the authentically ancient Jewish rule will apply:

‘eye for eye, tooth for tooth.’” This statement reflects a typical Nazi trope: it was the Jews who had pioneered racial thinking with their biological doctrine of the chosen people, and the Nazis were only following suit. Similarly, since the Jews were the most bloodthirsty of people, they would now pay with their own blood. We are now very far from Wagner’s pacifistic, vegetarian vision of the Aryans; but had he lived that long, he too might have come to the radical conclusion that only by adopting the ostensibly Jewish teaching of blood vengeance, might the Aryan race survive.<sup>100</sup>

Nineteenth-century anti-Semitism, for all its aggressive statements against the Jews, did not have quite this obsession with the salvific promise of shedding Jewish blood. One can, of course, find occasional threats to annihilate the Jews. But even a writer like Artur Dinter, who does at times indulge in such language, comes down in the end on a less violent note. In his speech at the end of the novel, Hermann holds that the Jews might be constrained by “simple legal measures” since they “cannot be brought down with a sword in the hand.”<sup>101</sup> One could even argue that the laws instituted by the Nazis during the 1930s against the Jews—most notably, but not exclusively, the Nuremberg Laws of 1935—represent this legal approach, which coexisted uneasily in Nazi culture with more bloody measures.

This third discourse of violent blood directed against the Jews seems to have been primarily the product of World War I. It is no accident that Dinter’s Hermann dies at the front in the war, a martyr for Germany under the heel of the Jews. Alfred Rosenberg expressed the connection between the blood spilled in World War I and the Nazi redemption of German blood: “The blood that perished [in World War I] is coming to life again. In its mystical sign, the soul of the German people is renewing its life-cells.”<sup>102</sup> In his study of “male fantasies” in Weimar Germany, Klaus Theweleit has shown how protofascists like Ernst Jünger and Ernst von Salomon depicted the war experience as an orgasmic, eroticized experience in which blood is “the embodiment of the soldier’s male desire for eruption and life, and the only thing permitted to flow within him.”<sup>103</sup> Jünger speaks of the 1914 declaration of war eliciting an image of “the crest of the monstrous wave of blood that rose up before them.”<sup>104</sup> In his novel *Comrade Berthold*, written immediately after the war, Thor Goote describes his hero, despondent at Germany’s loss of the war, envisioning “the red street of blood that runs toward him.”<sup>105</sup> And Bernhard Kellermann, in his novel *Der 9. November*, portrays the war in apocalyptic terms: “For months, for years, a

cloud of dust flickers high above the battlefield, it rains black blood—the apocalyptic riders move over the clouds and pour out their vessels over Europe.”<sup>106</sup> The bloodbath of the war was not only a memory for the demobilized soldiers who flocked to the proto-Nazi *Freikorps*, but also a harbinger of the future: only the blood of those responsible for the humiliating defeat—chief among them the cowardly Jews—could atone for the blood of the martyred soldiers.

It is, of course, a commonplace to assert the importance of World War I in explaining the rise of Nazism generally and the appeal of Nazi anti-Semitism in particular.<sup>107</sup> But the violence of the Nazis has to be understood against these apocalyptic visions of blood running freely in the streets that the war’s unimaginable slaughter provided. This post-war discourse fed the two other discourses of blood that have informed our discussion here and prepared the ground for what Saul Friedländer has astutely called the “redemptive antisemitism” of the Holocaust.<sup>108</sup> The culture of bloody death spawned by World War I was endemic in the Weimar Republic. The Nazis were eager to embrace this secular cult of martyrdom in the history of their own movement. Thus, once they won power, they turned those of their movement who died during the *Kampfzeit* into national icons.

In Victor Klemperer’s brilliant study of the Nazi perversion of the German language, *The Language of the Third Reich*, he notes the use of blood imagery in creating the political religion of Nazism: “In the cinema scenes of the Nuremberg Rally, Hitler consecrates new SA colors by touching them with the Blood Banner [*Blutfahne*] of 1923 [the bloodied flag from the failed Munich putsch]. . . . The word *Blutfahne* says it all. ‘Noble brothers, look hither: we are suffering blood-soaked martyrdom!’ This whole National Socialist business is lifted from the political realm to that of religion by the use of one word.”<sup>109</sup> Among the many transformations the Nazis imposed on the German language, Klemperer points to the evocation of violence in song and speech. The “Horst Wessel Lied,” commemorating the death in 1930 of an SA man (a death that may not have been in defense of the party after all), speaks of “Comrades shot by the Red Front and the Reaction,” while another that made it into a standard school songbook in 1934 states:<sup>110</sup>

The brittle bones of the world tremble  
In the face of the red war  
We have broken the terror.  
It was a great victory for us.  
We will march on

When everything is smashed to pieces  
 For Germany belongs to us today  
 And tomorrow the entire world.

And, of course, mention of the Jews was frequently in a violent context. Klemperer notes the clipped—and crude—slogans of Nazi Party rallies: *Deutschland erwache!* (Germany awake!), *Juda verrecke!* (Judah croak!).

As with both ritual murder and race pollution, the Nazis harnessed their violent language to German folk traditions. In 1942 Ernst Hiemer published, via Streicher's *Der Stürmer* publishing house, a rabidly anti-Semitic collection of proverbs titled *Der Jude im Sprichwort der Völker*. Hiemer sought to show that all peoples have popular sayings against the Jews. The most vituperative of these, appropriately enough, were German.<sup>111</sup> Many of the sayings compare the Jews to insects like lice and bedbugs and emphasize that "if there were no Jewish scum [*Judengeschmiss*] the world would be a paradise." The proverbs know how to create this earthly paradise: "cut the throats of the damned Jewish pack" and, even more graphically:

Spit blood, Jew.  
 Spit! into a corner with you.  
 Tomorrow you'll croak.

In his mordant study of Nazism, written in 1933 but published posthumously in 1952, Karl Kraus pointed out the way this kind of violent language was made literal and corporeal.<sup>112</sup> The Nazis, he says, have taken such expressions as "putting the knife at the throat," "showing him the fist" and "to rub salt into the open wound," and they have actually made them real (Kraus relates an anecdote in which a group of Nazis force an old man who has cut his hand peeling potatoes to hold the bloody wound in a sack of salt). And where they have not, Kraus suggests prophetically, it is only a matter of time before they will. If the Nazis represented a revolt against transcendence, they also revolted against metaphor. Where speech must be made literally real, so must the bloodiest fantasies.

In the Nazi imagination, the Jews stood, as Josef Goebbels wrote in his diary, for "all this filth of lies, dirt, blood and bestial savagery."<sup>113</sup> Klaus Vondung has explained the way the Nazi apocalypse was conceived as purification of filth and impurity. This impurity was most closely associated with the Jews and their pollution of German blood.<sup>114</sup>

The weapon of choice against this pollution was the very weapon of the enemy: blood. But if Nazis generally combated the silent pollution of *Rassenschande* with law, their response to the presumed violence of the Jews was violence in return. In this sense, the Holocaust might be seen as an act of ritual murder against those who had, for centuries, allegedly committed ritual murder of Christians. So although ritual murder came to play a relatively minor role in the Nazi propaganda arsenal, it may be the key to understanding the violence of the Holocaust. The appropriate response to those who would murder and steal the blood of Aryans was, in Hitler's words, to turn the same measure of violence against them. It was only through this apocalyptic cleansing through blood that the new Germany might arise.

We have traced the trajectory of genocide back from the killing pits and gas chambers of the Holocaust to the trenches of World War I. But apocalyptic thought in Germany had a longer and deeper history. Once again, we return to the sixteenth-century text *Book of a Hundred Chapters*, which Norman Cohn has called "the last and most comprehensive expression of the popular eschatology of the Middle Ages."<sup>115</sup> In a threat directed evidently at both Jews and Muslims, but also no doubt against those Christians who would not accept his revolutionary doctrine, the author warns: "Soon we will drink blood for wine" (*wir bald blut für win trinken*),<sup>116</sup> and "those that will not accept baptism are no Christians nor people of the Holy Scriptures, so they are to be killed, then they will be baptized in their blood [*in ieren blut getouft*]."<sup>117</sup> Here "baptism in blood," the phrase stemming from Christian martyrdom, is a synonym for murder (*totschlagen*). And since this apocalyptic text holds that only Germans are the true people of Christ, this kind of baptism in blood is the only alternative for those who are not.

The bloody languages of ritual murder, race pollution, and violent apocalypse that found expression in Nazi anti-Semitism were at once medieval and modern, or, better, modern, secular versions of medieval religious tropes. We therefore have to revise Jacob Katz's conclusion, at the end of his magisterial survey, that modern anti-Semitism is continuous with its medieval Christian precursor.<sup>118</sup> All of Katz's arguments for these continuities remain compelling, but we need to understand also how the theological discourses of an earlier age were secularized and even inverted as they found radicalized expression in Nazi anti-Semitism. The dialectical trajectory of anti-Semitism is thus but one refracted instance of the larger story of modernization, a story

that, as Amos Funkenstein argued, cannot be told without its medieval roots.<sup>119</sup> And as we confront new versions of post-Holocaust anti-Semitism, we cannot ignore the way this seemingly new bottle contains some very old wine.

#### AFTERLIFE

Just as the various discourses of blood in Nazi anti-Semitism cannot be divorced from their medieval origins, so they did not end with the defeat of the Third Reich. The afterlife of these ideas testifies at once to the persistent influence of Nazi culture and to the folkloric nature of beliefs such as ritual murder. The hysteria around Satanic rituals in child-care centers in the late 1980s is an example of the continuity of such beliefs.<sup>120</sup> While the association of Jews with blood rituals has undoubtedly waned, it has not entirely disappeared. Contemporary anti-Semitic literature generally does not emphasize the blood libel, but when it does, it is almost always derivative.<sup>121</sup> For example, in 1976, the white supremacist *Christian Vanguard* published an English translation of Streicher's 1934 ritual-murder issue and, in good Streicher tradition, called him "a victim of the horrible Talmudic Blood Rite known as the Nuremberg trials."<sup>122</sup> Another anti-Semitic organization reprinted a 1938 pamphlet on Jewish ritual murder by Arnold Leese, the notorious English fascist who had the dubious distinction of first advocating gassing the Jews in 1935.<sup>123</sup> Leese's pamphlet has perhaps reverberated in America more than anything put out by the Nazis directly. For instance, the murders of four children in Chicago in 1955 were labeled a ritual murder by anti-Semites relying on Leese. A search on the Internet reveals numerous Web sites featuring Leese's work.

While the blood libel has been largely marginal to right-wing racism in the United States, it appears to play a greater role in the former Soviet Union, where it probably never vanished from folk culture during the seventy years of Communism.<sup>124</sup> In 1999, for example, a publication called *Orakuly (Oracles)* from Georgia wrote melodramatically: "The preparation of matzo, that terrible custom of the Jewish followers of the cabala over the course of centuries, has stunned the entire world. The barbaric claws of the matzo have spread throughout Europe and Russia, the Caucasus and the Balkans."<sup>125</sup> In one of the occasional tropes in this literature, the article exonerates the Jews generally but claims that the "barbaric claws of the matzo" stem from "Hasidim," who ostensibly follow the Talmud, but not the Hebrew Bible. This secret "cabal"

(literally, since they are disciples of the Kabbalah) goes back to the crucifixion of Jesus.

The article is filled with descriptions of unspeakable tortures, but, surprisingly, as many, if not more, of these are perpetrated on the guilty “Hasidim” as have been visited by the Jews on their victims. In one purported case in fifteenth-century Hungary, fifty-five Hasidic Jews had their eyes gouged out for their alleged crimes. But they were to blame for the death by torture of additional hundreds of presumably innocent Jews. These “cabalistic” Jews were not content to assault Christian children; in at least one case, twenty small *Jewish* children became their victims, only to be saved at the last minute by Franciscan monks who converted them to Catholicism. This Jewish cult is shown to be as dangerous to the Jews as to the Christians; perhaps the author is inoculating himself against charges of anti-Semitism. In a kind of sadomasochistic revenge fantasy, the article reports that “hundreds of Hasidic Jews had their skin ripped off and the leaders of the sect were stoned, their corpses strewn across accursed fields.”

To establish that Jews themselves reject the nefarious cult of the matzo, the *Oracles* author concludes: “One well-known Jewish doctor attending a special conference devoted to this terrible phenomenon called matzo the national disease and a disgraceful blemish on the history of the Jewish people. Several Jewish rabbis have severely rebuked the followers of the Hasidic sect and condemned them to exile.” It was, of course, a frequent strategy of anti-Semitic literature to enlist an ostensible Jewish authority to confirm that the Jews have secret teachings; but in contrast to medieval and early modern testimonies, these modern experts are not always converts.

While the blood libel is evidently alive and well in the former Soviet Union, it seems to have its greatest currency in the Arab world, to which it was imported starting with the Damascus case in 1840. Although the libel’s original *Sitz im Leben* was clearly Christian Europe, with the Israeli-Arab conflict, the Islamic world has probably become its center. Rivka Yadlin has argued that the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel escalated this kind of rhetoric, because those opposed to the treaty saw it as an attempt by the Jews to infiltrate and dominate the Arab world.<sup>126</sup> The advent of the Internet presented new modes for disseminating anti-Semitic arguments, especially once the Second Intifada broke out in 2000. Arabic Web sites, such as [www.islamzine.com](http://www.islamzine.com) and [www.jeeran.com](http://www.jeeran.com), traffic in the conviction that Jews have historically perpetrated ritual murder and are continuing to do so today on the bodies of Palestinians. As Joel



and Dan Kotek have shown, this Arabic anti-Semitism has developed its own grisly iconography, depicting Israeli leaders like Ariel Sharon swimming in a sea of Palestinian blood, or the angel of death, wearing a Star of David and a yarmulke, holding his scythe while drinking a vessel of blood, presumably also Palestinian.<sup>127</sup> The Jews not only shed copious quantities of non-Jewish blood but also, continuing their older traditions, consume it. And, perhaps most bizarrely, in November 2001 Abu Dhabi television depicted Sharon as a lover of blood who was responsible for the death of Dracula. Jewish vampires trump the Christian.

Here too, academic “experts” provide a veneer of legitimacy to what were essentially new arguments for the Arab world. A professor in the Department of Muslim Philosophy at Cairo University, Muhammed Abdallah al-Sharqawi, compiled an anthology of “Talmudic Infamies” with a cover showing how Jews use Christian blood for ritual purposes.<sup>128</sup> In 2002 a lecturer from Saudi Arabia’s King Faisal University named Dr. Umayma Ahmad Al-Jalahma published an article in the newspaper *Al Riyadh* describing how Jews kill Christian *and* Muslim children in order to make their pastries for Purim. The connection of the blood libel with Purim was described already in the 1930s by Cecil Roth, and, as we have seen, it made its appearance in Utikal’s book, as well as in *Der Stürmer* and in Leese’s *Jewish Ritual Murder*.<sup>129</sup> In fact, Streicher’s belief in Jewish ritual murder at the time of Purim is captured in his last words, shouted out before his hanging at Nuremberg: “Purim Festival 1946!” According to Leese, who was probably the source for the *Al Riyadh* article: “The blood was dried and the powder mixed into triangular cakes for eating; it is possible that the dried blood of a Purim murder might sometimes be used for the following Passover.” Leese may also be the source for another “tradition” known to the estimable Dr. Al-Jalahma: that the Jews use an adult or adolescent at Purim, but a child at Passover. Thus, the blood-libel tradition, which went largely underground in the western Christian world after the Holocaust, has surfaced most prominently as a particularly nasty feature of the Israeli-Arab conflict.

The post-Holocaust discourse of blood pollution, however, appears far less prevalent and can be found most significantly among white supremacist groups like the Aryan Nation, with its ideology of purifying the true, “white” Christianity from Jewish pollution. Michael Barkun, who has written extensively on these movements, shows the way racial and religious ideas reinforce each other in this ideology. Very little of it is new, but it has undergone interesting metamorphoses after the

Holocaust, since it now typically combines Holocaust denial with anti-Zionism. One particular argument that has surfaced as well in Arab anti-Zionism is the claim that the Ashkenazic Jews are not Semites at all; in a move anticipated by Houston Stewart Chamberlain, the Semites are a race whose pure blood can be found only in traces among the Sephardic Jews.<sup>130</sup> Echoing with approval the eccentric argument of the Jewish author Arthur Koestler,<sup>131</sup> these anti-Semites claim that the Ashkenazim are descendants of the Khazars and therefore have no historical claim on Palestine. They have concocted the Holocaust myth in order to sell their fraudulent Zionism to a gullible world. In this latest twist on an old motif, these anti-Semites have taken the Semites out of anti-Semitism.

In the epilogue I will return to these ideas about the racial origins of the Jews, which have taken on a life of their own with the development of the new field of population genetics. As we shall see in chapter 5, Jews were scarcely immune to racial thinking about their own identity, at least before the Nazis irrevocably polluted this discourse. Yet the reemergence of such thinking in the scientific language of DNA demonstrates that this impulse was not laid to rest with the apocalyptic denouement of the Holocaust.

## From Blood Libel to Blood Community

### *Self-Defense and Self-Assertion in Modern Jewish Culture*

The onslaught of modern anti-Semitism made it impossible for Jews to ignore the symbolism of blood, whether in the form of the ritual-murder accusation or in the pseudoscientific language of race. A literature of self-defense emerged in the nineteenth century to counter the modern revival of the blood libel, a literature that was much more extensive than anything produced in medieval polemics. But even as Jews were vigorously rejecting the claim that human blood played a role in their rituals, some adopted the blood language of modern nationalism. If Jews had to insist that they did not steal blood from Christians, they also came to insist on conserving their own blood for national survival. It is, of course, no surprise that Jewish nationalists might use blood in much the same ways as their non-Jewish counterparts. It was altogether common among many nationalist movements to speak of a “blood community,” at least before the Nazis. A discourse that appears in hindsight to lead ineluctably to genocide was not necessarily understood in such terms before the Holocaust.

That modern Jewish identity owes much to the interaction between Jews and their neighbors should also not surprise us. Jean-Paul Sartre may have gone too far in his famous essay *Antisemite and Jew*,<sup>1</sup> in claiming that the anti-Semite defines the Jew, but it is nonetheless true that Jews often shaped their identities in reaction to the way the majority cultures understood them. This dynamic in identity formation was true for all periods of Jewish history, especially when Jews were a minority

people, but it was perhaps most true when modernity radically destabilized both Jewish identity and the place of Jews in society.<sup>2</sup> Medieval polemics against the Jews and against Judaism, which reflected religious enmity, took on very different meaning when they persisted into the modern period. Whereas the Jews were presumed by others as well as by themselves to be *different* in the Middle Ages, the new principles of equality and religious toleration assumed—at least theoretically—that they were now the *same* as Christians. The recurrence of the blood libel in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries seemed to challenge the assumption of equality by arguing that the Jews really were different from their neighbors. The kinds of responses the Jews fashioned were therefore new, both reflecting and shaping new, modern identities.

In this chapter we will look first at some responses to the blood libel and then turn to the way Jews incorporated the language of blood into what became one of the main responses to modern anti-Semitism, namely, Jewish nationalism. Although, on the face of it, these two themes may seem as unrelated as the two types of anti-Semitic blood accusations discussed in chapter 4, I want to claim that they, too, are linked both historically and conceptually.

## NO BLOOD!

The defense against the blood libel was anything but a modern invention. In the later Middle Ages and the early modern period, Jews, Jewish converts to Christianity, and Christians were all involved in countering the claims that Jews needed blood for their rituals.<sup>3</sup> A tradition of scholarly defense began during the Reformation and continued as part of the German Enlightenment. The arguments developed in this tradition did not change substantially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Throughout this literature, one finds the Jews and their defenders showing that the proponents of the blood libel have either misinterpreted, distorted, or fabricated passages from the Talmud and, on occasion, the Kabbalah.

The modern arguments often borrowed directly from the earlier literature, but they did differ importantly in nuance and framing. I do not propose to provide here a thorough history of the modern defense against the blood libel, but instead to offer a few examples that illustrate what might be considered new and different about it. In particular, the arguments against the blood libel were at times embedded in narratives that were peculiarly modern. Since it has been argued that

the blood libel itself followed a narrative or narratives,<sup>4</sup> the defense against it can be seen in terms of counternarratives, some of which also featured “Orientalist” elements. To project the ritual-murder accusation onto the mysterious and barbarous East was a way of distancing it from the arena of modernization and integration. Framing the blood libel as an Orientalist “nightmare” might therefore indirectly reinforce these projects.

For reasons not entirely understood, ritual-murder trials in central Europe waned in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but recurred in eastern Europe in several places in the eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup> In the nineteenth century, the modern discourse around blood libel received its greatest impetus with the Damascus Blood Libel of 1840, masterfully dissected by Jonathan Frankel.<sup>6</sup> Yet the first modern Jewish defense predated the Damascus Affair by a few years in a work written in Hebrew in 1833 but first published in 1837, by the Russian *maskil* (Enlightener), Isaac Ber Levinsohn. Entitled *Efes Damim* (roughly translated as “No Blood”), Levinsohn’s book initially appears to be a traditional text, replete with rabbinic approbations (*haskamot*) typical of such a book. Levinsohn claims that a number of prominent rabbis had commissioned him to write the book because he ostensibly had the ability to reach a non-Jewish audience. But departing from tradition, he calls for translations of his book into Polish and Russian to be distributed free of charge to Christians, an ambition that does not seem to have been realized.

In 1841, in the wake of the Damascus Blood Libel, the book did appear in English, and there—but not in the original—the translator, Louis Loewe, claims that its impetus lay in a contemporaneous, but otherwise undocumented, blood libel in the Polish town of Soslow.<sup>7</sup> Frankel, in contrast, holds that the book must have been a response to the Velizh ritual-murder case from the vicinity of Vitebsk, which lasted from 1823 to 1835.<sup>8</sup> But Levinsohn makes no mention of either case. What he does state early on is that the blood libel was current in the vicinity of Cracow, without, however, referring to any specific case. But he also argues that in Europe generally the blood libel had stopped circulating fifty or sixty years before he wrote his book.

Why Levinsohn felt compelled to write *Efes Damim* therefore remains unclear. It may well have been an exercise in apologetics less motivated by a pressing challenge than by his underlying agenda of enlightenment. Demonstrating the falsity of Jewish ritual murder was a way of arguing for the modernity of the Jewish religion. So, Levinsohn

connects the presumed waning of the blood libel with the rise of enlightenment. Without this incitement, Jews and Christians are able to live together more easily. Not only are Christians less suspicious of Jews, but Jews are less hostile to Christians. It is therefore in the interest of Christians, says Levinsohn, to fight the blood libel as a way of ensuring that the Jews will embrace European culture. Here is an entirely new way of arguing against ritual murder: it is bad not only for the Jews but also for the Christians.

*Efes Damim* contains an interesting literary frame that tells us rather more about its author's intentions than he reveals explicitly. It is in the form of a dialogue in Jerusalem between a Jewish sage, named Jacob Maimon, and Simmias, the Greek orthodox patriarch of Jerusalem. Simmias profusely thanks Maimon for the latter's intercession on behalf of the Christians in the Ottoman Empire, whose church was in danger due to an edict of the sultan. Maimon's brother, a minister of the sultan, had acted to remove the evil decree. Thus, the Jews and the Christians are allies against the nefarious Muslim "priests." Simmias quotes the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder that in Christian Europe (as opposed to the Ottoman Empire), the time will come when no one asks who is a Jew and who is a Christian.

By setting his dialogue in the Ottoman Empire, with its contemporary reputation for despotism and degeneration, Levinsohn was making a complicated argument. The Christian spokesman is easily persuaded by his Jewish interlocutor, but the fact that they are both representatives of minorities in the Muslim Orient deflects attention away from the much more difficult majority-minority relations of Christians and Jews in Europe. Perhaps in the East, Jews and Christians might realize the camaraderie that eluded them in Europe, a literary trope that is reminiscent of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's play *Nathan the Wise*. However, religious intolerance is displaced onto the Ottoman Muslims, whose medieval obscurantism forms the backdrop for the dialogue. Levinsohn thus uncannily anticipates the Damascus Blood Libel, which, at least initially, reinforced European views of the Orient as cruel and superstitious. Only later did it become apparent that the Affair was in large part a European, Christian import.

By naming his Jewish protagonist Maimon, Levinsohn telegraphed the rationalist tradition with which he wanted to connect his narrative. The reader would associate this Maimon not only with the great twelfth-century Maimonides but also with his eighteenth-century namesake, Solomon Maimon, whose *Lebensgeschichte* makes a cameo appearance

in the book.<sup>9</sup> And indeed, Levinsohn's text has all the trappings of an Enlightenment scholarly treatise: footnotes, references to works in a host of languages, and arguments couched in terms of reason. Although the *haskamot* at the beginning suggest a rabbinic book, Levinsohn is intent on developing a new form: a Haskalah apology. While he does borrow quite extensively from Solomon ibn Verga's sixteenth-century *Shevet Yehuda*, he also argues that no prior Hebrew source really came to grips in a systematic, scholarly way with the blood libel. To be a modern Jew required knowing how to respond to such accusations in a discourse recognizable to European scholarship.

Two modern arguments in particular catch our eye. Levinsohn notes that one of the typical arguments by proponents of the blood libel is that even if there is no Talmudic text that proves Jewish ritual murder, there exist secret cabals of Jews who practice blood rituals unknown to most of their coreligionists. These cabals might include Kabbalists, Hasidim, or members of some unknown sect. Levinsohn argues that most of the information about these alleged secret sects came historically from apostates who were from the lower, uneducated classes (an elitist assumption that was certainly not always true). These apostates wanted to inflate their importance within the Jewish community by claiming to know about nonexistent rituals. Yet how could such ignoramuses know of the hidden practices of rabbis and other elites? In modern times, though, when prejudice against conversion has waned, it is the upper class of Jews that is more likely to convert. Since these latter Jews had no reason to make up stories about their erstwhile religion, one of the causes of the blood libel had therefore, rather implausibly, disappeared.<sup>10</sup> Thus, Levinsohn comes out in favor of conversion—as long as the converts were from the educated elite—as a way of defusing the blood libel. And in a kind of feedback loop, the waning of the blood libel in turn promoted Jewish acceptance of Christianity.

A second set of arguments is less philo-Christian. Levinsohn notes that if Jews needed non-Jewish blood, wouldn't ritual murders have taken place in the Muslim world and China? The blood libel exists only in the Christian world, a generalization that was disproved a few years later in Damascus. He brings evidence from the ancient world that Christians were the first to be accused of ritual murder, based on pagan observation of the Eucharist. He does not draw the conclusion, made by the folklorist Alan Dundes and discussed in chapter 4, that Christians engage in "projective inversion," attributing to the Jews what they themselves do, but his argument comes close.

The ritual-murder accusation is implausible, says Levinsohn, because, in contrast to Christians, the Jews are by nature pacific, even cowardly.<sup>11</sup> It is no coincidence that they have not had an army since antiquity. They have also refrained from killing their own internal enemies such as the Samaritans, the Karaites, and the Sabbatians (Levinsohn believes the last group still exists). Christians are much more accustomed to killing than are Jews. While Christians hunt game, Jews need specialists, namely ritual slaughterers, to kill animals for meat. These *shohatim*, as well as circumcisers (*mohalim*), are born under the sign of Mars, so they have a violent nature, but they are the violent exceptions that prove the irenic rule. Although the arguments tying ritual slaughter with ritual murder did not surface until a half century later, Levinsohn anticipates them.

Levinsohn even goes so far as to argue that Jews never use weapons when they want to commit suicide; they either hang or drown themselves instead. This last point demonstrates how remote Levinsohn's argument is from a medieval one: the Hebrew chronicles of the Crusades celebrate the way the Jews used weapons to kill themselves and their families rather than convert. And since those accounts claim that the Jews used ritual slaughtering knives, they all became, in a sense, *shohatim*.<sup>12</sup> Levinsohn's Jewish pacifism is therefore singularly modern.

We now move nearly a half century later to the wave of ritual-murder trials that swept across Europe with an intensity unknown even in the Middle Ages. The first and perhaps most influential of these was the case of Esther Solymosi from the Hungarian village of Tisza-Eszlár, who drowned in the river Tisza in 1882.<sup>13</sup> Jews were accused of kidnapping her, taking her into the synagogue, and slaughtering her for her blood, which they supposedly drained into a basin. The main witness against the Jews was a fourteen-year-old Jewish boy, Moritz Scharf, the son of the synagogue's beadle. After a lengthy trial, all the accused were acquitted and released. It was this trial that launched the dubious career of August Rohling, the author of *Der Talmudjude*, and created a public debate about ritual murder that lasted for decades.

The Tisza-Eszlár case also prompted a literary response, in the form of a play by the well-known Jewish writer Arnold Zweig (1887–1968), first, in 1914, under the title *Ritualmord in Ungarn* and then as *Die Sendung Semaels (Satan's Mission)*.<sup>14</sup> Like Levinsohn, Zweig chose a literary frame to attack the myth of ritual murder. Although his play hardly rises to the level of Bernard Malamud's *The Fixer* (1966), which is a brilliant fictional account of the Beilis trial (1911–13), Zweig's



was in a sense more important, because it appeared just as the wave of ritual-murder trials was cresting. Going through many editions in the space of a few years, it evidently struck a public chord, quite possibly due to the recent trauma of the Beilis trial. In fact, it is likely that Zweig chose to write his play in reaction to the Beilis case.

Zweig introduces a theological frame for his account, starting with God summoning Semaël, a Kabbalistic name for Satan. God charges Satan with bringing the blood libel down to earth as a way of purifying the Jews and thus facilitating the coming of the Messiah. The frame is therefore reminiscent in some ways of the book of Job, where the tribulations of man are the result of a divine wager. At various points in the play, biblical figures like Abel, Noah, and Isaac, as well as Rabbi Akiva and the Baal Shem Tov, are brought in to discuss the fate of the Jews of Tisza-Eszlár. These debates invoke the problem of free will: should God intervene in the torment of his people, or should he allow man to choose evil over good?

In Zweig's account, it is the local baron who molests young Esther and who, we are led to believe, may well be implicated in her death (a literary conceit that has no grounding in the historical record). The sexual overtones of the modern blood libel are thus turned against a non-Jewish target. But suspicion falls on the Jews when Gypsies interpret a dream of Esther's mother to point in their direction. The Gypsies deny that they could have anything to do with it, since, as they put it, they steal hens and not young girls. Of course, the myth that Gypsies *do* steal children makes this statement doubly ironic. Zweig repeatedly inserts Gypsies into the play's scenes as part of the anti-Jewish crowds, thus suggesting that these other outcasts are nevertheless much closer to the European consensus than are the Jews. But the implication of the play is that it is these Oriental others—and the demons that impel them—who are the truly bloodthirsty ones, a case of displacing the accusation from one marginal group to another.<sup>15</sup> In this respect, Zweig seconds the general line of Jewish self-defense that it is the Gentile world that thirsts for Jewish blood.

Zweig describes in gruesome detail the tortures visited upon young Moritz to make him implicate his father and the other Jews. Here Zweig is drawn to one of the most disturbing features of this case. Like a good many of its medieval predecessors, the Tisza-Eszlár trial involved confirmation of the ritual-murder accusation as a result of torture. But this was the only modern case where such a Jewish confession played such a role, and it was deeply perplexing to contemporary observers.

There is historical evidence that Moritz was, in fact, tortured. After his testimony was discredited and the case thrown out, he remained with his family for some years, but then eventually emigrated to Amsterdam, where he returned to orthodox Judaism, possibly in penance over his role in one of the most spectacular anti-Jewish trials of the time.<sup>16</sup>

Zweig turns Moritz into an improbable Jewish martyr. The patriarch Isaac pleads before God that the fate of God's people rests on the shoulders of Moritz, who is likely to break under torture. If he does, the people of Israel will fall into the realm of Samael.<sup>17</sup> By putting this concern in the mouth of Isaac, Zweig conjures up the biblical story of the binding of Isaac (Gen. 22), which was the archetype for medieval martyrdom. Meanwhile, Moritz's father, Josef Scharf, holds himself guilty for not giving Moritz a Jewish education because he had wanted him to move to the big city and not feel foreign there.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Moritz becomes the martyr of a rather unlikely strategy for assimilation. Zweig implies that there is an indirect connection between assimilation and blood libel, the opposite of Levinsohn's position.

At the end of the play, Moritz commits suicide and is taken up to heaven, where the Baal Shem Tov compares him to those children who sanctified God's name in the time of the Maccabees (*Epiphanes Zeit*): the historical villain is thus turned into a fictional hero. In the play's final speech, a surprising sermon for Zionism, the Baal Shem Tov promises Moritz that he will be reborn in the land of his fathers, where he will become a productive farmer of the holy soil. His betrayal of his people turns out to have been a vehicle for the coming of the Messiah, thus fulfilling God's original intent.

Although Zweig's play contains a number of speeches debunking the blood libel, his defense of the Jews is cast more in terms of the malign motives of the anti-Semites. But scholarly expertise also came to the aid of the Jews in disputing the veracity of the accusations. As we have seen in chapter 4, one factor that may have fed the new ritual-murder myths was the availability of ostensibly "expert" witnesses who claimed knowledge of secret Jewish practices.<sup>19</sup> The Tisza-Eszlár case was probably the first to involve a string of such witnesses.<sup>20</sup> To counter these witnesses and their allies in the press, the defenders of the Jews had to muster their own experts. Yet such expertise was not always easy to come by. Joseph Bloch, who led the charge against August Rohling, wrote in his memoirs that since apologetics were not a discipline in Jewish academies, one had to virtually create the discipline anew in response to the new anti-Semitism.<sup>21</sup> It was this lack that Levinsohn

had tried to address earlier in the century. There was an additional dilemma, though, facing Jewish experts who wanted to refute those on the anti-Semitic side. When Rohling sued Bloch for libel, Bloch's attorney realized that the most credible witnesses for his side had to be Christian Orientalist scholars, and not Jews.<sup>22</sup> Although Jewish scholars like Bloch had the greatest facility with the Talmud and other relevant texts, they were automatically suspect in the eyes of the anti-Semites. Indeed, one of Rohling's tricks was to "out" various Christian authorities as having Jewish origins.

Perhaps the most influential and authoritative Christian expert to take the Jewish side was the Protestant scholar of rabbinic literature Hermann Strack (1848–1922). Strack's vigorous attack on Rohling and his defenders occasioned a libel suit of its own. In 1891 Strack published his *Das Blut im Glauben und Aberglauben der Menschheit* (translated as *The Jew and Human Sacrifice*). Although the publication of the book coincided with blood libels in Corfu, Greece, and Xanten, Germany, it is clear from the separate chapter devoted to Rohling that Strack was still responding to Tisza-Eszlár. The book went through some nine editions before World War I and became the definitive scholarly defense of the Jews.<sup>23</sup> What makes Strack's book more interesting than other refutations of the blood libel is the strategy that he adopted. Not surprisingly, he deploys his considerable knowledge of rabbinic texts to attack the purported evidence that the Jews used human blood. And he gives one of the first modern histories of ritual-murder cases, examining each for its weaknesses. But these chapters come at the end of the book and amount to only about one-third of the text. The first two-thirds is an extensive ethnography of the use of blood for magical and medicinal purposes in other cultures. Strack's point appears to be that anti-Semites have falsely attributed to the Jews practices and beliefs from their own milieus. To be sure, the Jews have a variety of superstitious beliefs about blood, but where they appear in Jewish texts, they show clear signs of foreign origins: Jewish prohibitions against consuming blood protect against the development of these beliefs into actual practices.<sup>24</sup>

It would appear that Strack was as credulous about the veracity of the tales of blood use by non-Jews as he was skeptical about them when attributed to Jews. For example, he thinks that some of the attacks on Gnostics for using menstrual blood and semen in ritual practices may have been true.<sup>25</sup> But even if some of his evidence should rightly be classified as folklore rather than fact, Strack brings copious evidence that *belief* in ritual and medical uses of blood was very widespread in Christian

Europe. As we saw in chapter 3, going back to antiquity, it was held that the blood and fat of executed criminals was considered highly efficacious for curing a variety of illnesses, especially epilepsy.<sup>26</sup> Strack shows how these beliefs continued well into the nineteenth century. He quotes Hans Christian Andersen about an execution he witnessed in 1823: "I saw a poor sick man, whom his superstitious parents made drink a cup of the blood of the executed person, that he might be healed of epilepsy; after which they ran with him in circles until he sank to the ground."<sup>27</sup>

If the blood of an executed prisoner was not available, it might be necessary to obtain it by taking the law into one's own hands. Strack relates the following particularly gruesome story from the Russian village of Stary-Multan from 1892. As a result of famine and plague, the villagers believed that they must appease the supernatural powers with a human sacrifice, which is called in Strack's source by the clearly Hebraic word *kurban* (i.e., ritual sacrifice). They seized a man from another district, hung him upside down in the town hall, and then fifteen persons stabbed his naked body with knives. They caught his blood, which they then cooked and drank, while they ate his lungs and heart. The villagers were subsequently tried for murder.<sup>28</sup>

It is striking how many such accounts Strack, a Protestant theologian, brings from the world of Russian Orthodoxy, including sectarian groups who, he says, practice all kinds of bizarre rituals such as baptism in blood and imitation of the biblical "sacrifice" of Isaac.<sup>29</sup> As John Klier has shown, Russian Orthodoxy did not have a long blood-libel tradition and only began to manifest it in the nineteenth century. Interestingly, though, an "entire literature existed in Russia providing hysterical descriptions of the horrendous practices of sectarian groups such as the Skoptsy (self-castrators), the Khrlitsy (Self-Flagulators) and the Molo-kane (Milk-drinkers)."<sup>30</sup> Strack's suspicions thus corresponded to and indeed may have derived from a Russian Orthodox antisectarian tradition that was not initially anti-Semitic. Strack, though, was just as credulous as his Russian sources were. He reports these stories as fact rather than as what seems more probable, largely urban (or rural) legends. Although he also brings quite a bit of evidence from his own, German, milieu, the extremeness of these cases from eastern Europe suggests that Strack was hardly immune to a certain Orientalism of his own.

In the context of such stories, Strack also refers to a number of vampire myths, including the famous one of the seventeenth-century Hungarian noblewoman who killed some 650 young girls so that she could use their blood to beautify herself.<sup>31</sup> It has, of course, long been

noted that vampire stories and the blood accusation against Jews have a family resemblance, if not more.<sup>32</sup> Although vampires are presumably dead (or, as some would have it: “undead”), while bloodsucking Jews are alive, the association of Jews with the devil suggests that they, too, operate with a different physiology than normal human beings. As I noted in the introduction to this book, the same kind of anxieties over race, nationalism, and sexuality that pervade modern vampire stories can certainly be seen in the context of the blood libel against the Jews. It may well be a coincidence that Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) was published just as the modern ritual-murder accusation was reaching its crescendo, but both traffic in the same idea that those who threaten the stability of the nation do so by sucking its blood.<sup>33</sup>

An interesting twist on the vampire myth is a piece of folklore that Strack quotes from nineteenth-century Prussia: it is believed that one might be healed from a vampire’s bite by drinking the blood taken from a vampire’s decapitated head.<sup>34</sup> More interesting still, an eighteenth-century French text reports that there were people in Russia who ate their bread kneaded with the blood of vampires.<sup>35</sup> In both of these cases, if vampires could benefit from human blood, then presumably humans could do the same with the blood of vampires. Whether or not this last tale bears any association with the accusation that the Jews used the blood of Christians to make *matza*, one might speculate that making bread with blood has its origins not only in the Eucharist but, more generally, in the observation that bread contains a life force: bread is perhaps the only food that involves transforming inert matter into something living. Yet the *matza*, of course, contains no leavening: the Jews thus allegedly turn the life-giving leaven of blood into something dead.

Like the stories of consuming vampires’ blood, some of these folktales involve the use of the body parts of Jews, thus standing the blood libel on its head. Because Jews are the presumed agents of the devil, their body and blood might be the mirror image of the body and blood of Jesus, but with similar sorts of powers. In Russia, two peasants received six months in prison for exhuming the graves of two Jews, cutting the bodies in pieces, and using the parts to cure disease. As late as 1890, Strack says, a “magician” was condemned to five months’ imprisonment for taking two children’s corpses from a Jewish cemetery in Galicia to fumigate a peasant’s hut of typhus.<sup>36</sup> And although it does not appear in Strack, the 1927 *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* reports that in 1784 two women from Hamburg were put

to death because they murdered a Jew for his blood to use in potions against the devil.<sup>37</sup>

Strack's approach had the virtue of embedding the blood libel against the Jews in a wider network of European folklore. Situating the blood libel in this larger cultural field can also help explain its persistence quite apart from its original theological moorings.<sup>38</sup> But since blood beliefs and practices were so widespread, even as Strack tried to deflect suspicion away from Jews, it was all too easy to redirect it right back onto those Strack held innocent. The European culture that Strack reveals is one so remote from modern rationalism that it might be hard to believe that Jews were any exception. And even if they were, what hope was there of true religious tolerance when such folk beliefs were so deeply rooted? Strack's defense of the Jews worked only if the Jews could be extracted from the popular culture in which they were embedded and turned into a thoroughly deracinated—and thus modern—people. Yet, of course, it was precisely the Jews as deracinated representatives of modernity that attracted the loathing of modern anti-Semites.

Strack's implicit argument, like Levinsohn's, was that Christians were much more likely to commit murders with ritual overtones than were Jews: as opposed to the anti-Semitic image, the Jews were anything but bloodthirsty. Attack thus seemed the best form of defense. A particularly striking example of such an anti-Christian polemic was a pamphlet published in 1929 by the Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens, the German Jewish self-defense organization, entitled *Blood Lies: Folk Tales and Facts*. As we have seen, one of the typical "proofs" adduced for ritual murder was a cut on the throat of the victim similar to that of Jewish ritual slaughter. The pamphlet quotes Thomas Masaryk, the Czech nationalist who had argued for the Jews at the time of the Hilsner trial of 1899, that when such cuts are found, it is likely to be evidence that a *Christian* murderer was deliberately trying to cast suspicion on the Jews. A true ritual murderer, says the pamphlet, would certainly have hidden the telltale signs of such wounds; hence, their very existence disproves a Jewish perpetrator.<sup>39</sup>

Strack may have been credulous toward the folklore he reported as fact, but he certainly did not invent it. The same cannot be said for two Jewish authors who created the story of the Golem, the artificial giant ostensibly fashioned by Rabbi Loew, the famous Maharal of Prague, in the sixteenth century. Yudel Rosenberg in 1909 and Chajim Bloch in 1920 each took the midrashic legend of the Golem, which had become attached to the Maharal in the nineteenth century, and mobilized this

fictitious Golem to defend the Jews of Prague against the blood libel.<sup>40</sup> Presented as historical manuscripts, Rosenberg's *Sefer Niflaot Maharal im ha-Golem* (*Book of the Wonders of the Maharal with the Golem*) was an invention (some might even say a forgery). Bloch's Golem was based on Rosenberg's and served as the conduit in German and English translation for the wholesale adoption of this modern version of the legend as historical truth. As Hillel Kieval has pointed out, although situated in sixteenth-century Prague, Rosenberg's and Bloch's stories were really fantasies of revenge against the modern blood libel.

In 1934 Bloch also published one of the last defenses of the Jews before the Holocaust: *Blut und Eros im jüdischen Schrifttum und Leben*. Although he does not refer directly to the Nazi regime just across the border (Bloch was then in Vienna), it could not have been far from his mind, for *Der Stürmer* had just been forced to withdraw its special "ritual murder" number. Bloch was specifically responding to Erich Bischoff's 1929 book, discussed in chapter 4. He systematically attacks one argument of Bischoff's after another, drawing from the by now well-worn playbook of defense against the blood libel. Within these well-rehearsed arguments, two strategies are of particular interest. First, in addition to his textual arguments, he searches out proponents of the blood libel and shows how they have repented. He offers several parade cases. The first is Moritz Scharf, who was responsible for giving the crucial evidence against his own Jewish community—including his father—in the Tisza-Eszlár blood libel case. Bloch tracks down Scharf in Amsterdam in 1920 and finds him grief-stricken over his role in the case. Far from adhering to his earlier accusations, he now explains his actions to have been the result of abuse by his father and his love for the daughter of a Christian neighbor, who held out the daughter as a prize if young Scharf would testify against the Jews. Given what we know about the case, this tale seems highly improbable, even if Scharf himself did relate it to Bloch. Another case, even more surprising and scarcely more believable, is August Rohling himself, the academic dean of nineteenth-century anti-Semites, whose book *Talmudjude* remained a favorite of the Nazis. Bloch seeks out Rohling in 1930, shortly before the latter's death. It turns out that after his public humiliation in 1885 as a result of his failed libel suit against Joseph Bloch, Rohling had supposedly repented of his earlier anti-Semitism and—improbably—become a believer in Theodor Herzl's Zionism.<sup>41</sup> Thus, given enough time to contemplate their actions, even those who had tried to do the greatest harm to the Jews ended up confessing their sins. In light of Bloch's

credulity—if not outright mendacity—with respect to the Golem, it is hard to credit these stories with much veracity.

Bloch's second strategy is contained in the surprising title of his book: *Blood and Eros*. In the latter part of the book, he turns from blood to the ancient Jewish marital laws, which he demonstrates are much more enlightened and modern than anything else in their cultural environment. Bischoff, who in a 1904 book had celebrated the purity of Jewish sexual practices, argued instead in his 1929 book that the Talmud sanctioned abuse of children, sodomy, and other unnatural acts. All of these are designed to show how the depravity of the Jews feeds into their cruelty. It is not necessary to enter into the details of Bloch's rebuttal of this calumny, but what is significant for our purposes is that he argues that Jewish family laws make the Jews *more*, and not less, prepared for modernity. What may seem to the unlettered eye to be strange and exotic texts reveal customs that, if properly decoded, are thoroughly compatible with contemporary mores.

In this argument Bloch picks up on a theme that was widely current in nineteenth-century German Jewish preaching: the centrality of the family in Judaism.<sup>42</sup> While the family might seem an eternal institution, the family in question here was clearly the *bourgeois* family. In addition, for the modern Orthodox Jews of Germany, the phrase “family purity” (*Reinheit des Familienlebens*) came to designate the laws of menstruation.<sup>43</sup> Whereas in Talmudic law a menstruating woman conveyed a kind of technical impurity, in this new, bourgeois conception, the family as a whole was purified by avoidance of menstrual blood. To be sure, this new idea of family purity had no direct connection to the modern blood libel, but it subliminally conveyed the message that the core of Judaism involved a horror of blood. And from the purity of familial blood, it was not a long step toward the purity of the nation's blood. In this admittedly circuitous way, the Jewish defense against the blood libel might transmute into a defense of the Jewish race. It was this path that the quixotic Jewish socialist and proto-Zionist Moses Hess (1812–75) took.

#### MOSES HESS AND THE SOCIAL COAGULATION OF BLOOD

Paul Lawrence Rose has argued that in the wake of the Damascus Blood Libel, the language of blood came to occupy an increasingly important place in discussions of the Jews and their status: “Much of the crucial debate on the Jewish Question in the 1840s was, in fact, stoked by the



powerful emotional signal of ‘blood,’ whether actual Christian sacrificial blood or the figurative blood of money—‘social coagulated blood’ as [Moses] Hess called it. The blood of Christ Himself, spilled by ancient Jews, had now found a modern secular parallel in the crucifixion of modern mankind by Jewish capitalism.”<sup>44</sup> Rose shows how several German authors drew attention to the biblical cult of Moloch, which they attributed to the ancient Israelites (instead of to the *enemies* of Israel), as the source of the Jews’ thirst for blood. The Jews, in this anti-Semitic trope, sucked the financial blood of German society: the theological became the economic. For radical young Hegelians like Hess and Karl Marx, Judaism and Christianity had transmuted Moloch into Mammon, real blood into socially coagulated blood, or money. But whereas Marx, in his essay “On the Jewish Question” (“Zur Judenfrage”) had collapsed into flagrant anti-Semitism, Rose claims that Hess, in his 1845 “The Essence of Money” (“Das Geldwesen”), tried to rescue the Jews from the blood libel by insisting that the only Christian blood they were interested in was metaphorical.<sup>45</sup> As we shall see, Rose takes a rather too lenient view of Hess.

Hess’s 1845 essay does not mention either Damascus or the blood libel, so it is hard to know if this is what he had in mind at the time. When he came to write his proto-Zionist manifesto, *Rome and Jerusalem*, in 1862, he claimed that already in 1840 he had been deeply disturbed by the reemergence of the blood libel and saw then the need for a reaffirmation of Jewish national identity.<sup>46</sup> Quoting an unpublished manuscript that he says he wrote in the wake of the Damascus Blood Libel, he states that those Jews who had persuaded themselves that the Jews are not a nation could not “give credence even for one moment to so gross a medieval lie as the ‘Mamser Bilbul [blood libel].’”<sup>47</sup> The blood libel thus served to mobilize national feelings even among Jews without a nationalist consciousness. On the one hand, Kenneth Koltun-Fromm has argued that it seems highly unlikely that Hess actually drew nationalist conclusions from the Damascus Affair at the time. Rather, the alleged manuscript may well reflect Hess’s later attempt to rewrite his own history to deal with a contradiction in his Jewish identity. On the other hand, even if Damascus was not an obvious motivation for the 1845 essay, some of Hess’s earliest writings, as Shlomo Avineri has shown, already give the Jews a more central place in world history than did other disciples of Hegel.<sup>48</sup> Either way, even if Hess had not originally responded to the Damascus Affair, his later claim to have done so created a nationalist narrative—current even in

historiography today—leading from the modern blood libel to Zionism, or *from blood libel to blood community*.

Hess and Marx published their essays almost simultaneously in January 1845. But while Marx held Judaism primarily responsible for the principle of money, Hess placed more of the burden of it on Christianity.<sup>49</sup> Let us follow his argument. Hess argues that money is our own flesh and blood, which, alienated from us, we consume in the form of possessions: “Money is the coagulated blood of those who suffer, that itself brings to market its unalienated character, its own means, its life activity, in order to exchange its own dead head (*caput mortuum*) for a so-called Capital and to cannibalistically suck nourishment from of its own fat.”<sup>50</sup> He also states:

We are now at the *culminating point* of the social animal world; therefore we are now *social beasts of prey, perfect conscious egotists*, who *sanction*, by [the idea of] *free competition* the war of all against all; by the so-called *human rights* the rights of isolated individuals, of private persons, of the “absolute personality”; by [the idea of] *freedom of trade* the mutual exploitation, the thirst for money [*Gelddurst*], which is nothing but the *thirst for blood* of the *social beast of prey*. We are no longer *grass eaters*, like our good-natured ancestors, who were also social animals but not yet social beasts of prey; who, in the majority, merely let themselves be *fed* like good-natured domesticated animals—we are *bloodsuckers* who *maltreat and consume each other*. Just as the animal enjoys its own life in the blood, in an *animal-like, brutal* manner—in the same way man enjoys his own life through money in a *brutal, animal-like, cannibalistic* way. Money is the social blood, but the externalized, the *spilled blood*.<sup>51</sup>

The idea that money is spilled blood owes something to the medieval economic theory in which only fixed wealth—and the notion of a “fixed price”—represented real wealth. Although Hess does not say so, it is likely that the Jews were suspect because they did the same thing to money that they were believed to do to blood: they turned what was fixed and circumscribed into what was liquid and ephemeral. Just as they violated the Eucharist (the body of Christ) and the bodies of actual Christians by stealing their blood, so, by taking usury, they transmuted fixed wealth into liquid capital.

However, Hess lays the primary responsibility for the “spilled blood” of money at the door of Christianity, which, he, says “is the theory, the logic of egoism.” The Christian idea of “individual freedom” is more inhumane than ancient slavery because individuals are forced to sell their labor, thereby acting against their own humanistic nature: “The essence of the modern world of haggling [*Schacherwelt*], money, is

the realized essence of Christianity. The state of shopkeepers [*Krämerstaat*], the so-called free state, is the promised kingdom of God. . . . Christianity has uncovered the principle of selling [*Verkäuflichkeit*].”<sup>52</sup> It is even potentially significant that the word Hess uses for “haggling” (*verschachern*) has clearly anti-Semitic overtones, since it appears to derive from the western Yiddish *sakhern*, meaning “to do business.”<sup>53</sup> But whereas Marx uses the same term with obvious glee in describing the “profane Jew,” Hess directs it instead against Christianity.

However, although Hess seems to put the primary onus for capitalism on Christianity, he suddenly—and unexpectedly—introduces Jewish blood sacrifices into his discussion, sounding very much like Wagner, whose vegetarianism, we recall, became one of the grounds for his anti-Semitism:

The Jews, who, in the natural history of the social animal world had the *world-historical* vocation [*Beruf*] to develop mankind into the *beast of prey*, have finally accomplished their *vocational work* [*Berufsarbeit*].—The mystery of Judaism and Christianity has been revealed in the modern *Jewish-Christian grocer's world* [*Krämerwelt*].<sup>54</sup> The mystery of the *blood of Christ*, like the mystery of the *ancient Jewish blood worship*, is finally unveiled as the *mystery of the beast of prey*.—In *ancient Judaism* the cult of blood had only been *prototypical*; in *medieval Christianity* it became *theoretically, idealistically, logically* realized, i.e., the externalized, *spilled blood of humankind* was actually consumed, but only *imaginatively*, the blood of the *divine human* [*Gottmenschen*]. In the modern, Jewish-Christian grocer's world this desire and urge of the social animal world does not appear *symbolically* or *mystically* anymore but entirely *prosaically*.<sup>55</sup>

One might wonder why other religions' sacrifices did not make men as bloodthirsty as the Jewish blood sacrifices. What remains unclear is whether Hess thought the “Jewish blood cult” really involved eating blood—despite the biblical prohibition—or whether, as Rose thinks, he meant it metaphorically. Either way, the Jewish blood cult prepared the ground for Christianity, which turned the Jewish sacrifices into the metaphorical consumption of human blood. In so doing, Christianity laid the foundation for the modern consumption of blood in the form of money, a consumption that is no longer symbolic but now “prosaic” (i.e., profane).

In “Das Geldwesen,” Hess hints that regardless of the role that blood might have played in biblical Judaism, it was Jewish concepts that laid the basis for the utopian escape from money. Thus, he speaks of glimpsing “the beloved land” (*gelobte Land*) and the “promised land” (*Land*

*der Verheissung*) toward which the history of mankind points. In his first publication, *The Holy History of Mankind* (1837), Hess had already gestured at his preference for Judaism by contrasting the Jewish linkage of the spiritual with the political, on the one hand, with Christianity's rejection of the real world in favor of the inner man, on the other. As opposed to Hegel and most of his disciples, Hess put Judaism at the center of world history and considered it the equal of Christianity. It was that first secular Jew, Spinoza, who created modernity by synthesizing Judaism and Christianity in his pantheism, which united the worldly with the spiritual: "The Old Law whose body had been buried with Christ, has been once again resurrected [*wieder auferstanden*] in Spinoza."<sup>56</sup> When "Das Geldwesen" is read on the backdrop of *The Holy History*, Christianity emerges as a necessary stage in the creation of capitalism, but it is the old Jewish law, now secularized by Spinoza, that will create a utopian world. For Hess, who had called himself a "young Spinozist" in reaction to the "young Hegelians," Spinoza is the new Messiah.

Despite its flagrantly defamatory passage about biblical sacrifices, "Das Geldwesen" therefore lays the groundwork for Hess's later nationalism. In the 1845 essay, Hess argues strongly against the way money atomizes human beings one from another, a point made equally by Marx. When he developed his nationalist theory in 1862 in *Rome and Jerusalem*, Hess held that the Jewish belief in immortality had nothing of the Christian idea of individual salvation: "The source of the Jewish belief in immortality . . . is family love."<sup>57</sup> Judaism is communal or familial and therefore inherently anticapitalistic.

Indeed, in *Rome and Jerusalem*, Hess—like Chajim Bloch—frequently refers to the family as the basic unit of the nation and extols in hyperbolic terms the Jewish family and maternal love: "Such love which, like maternal love, flows out of the very life-blood and yet is as pure as the divine spirit; such infinite love for family can have its seat only in a Jewish heart. And this love is the natural source whence springs the higher, intellectual love of God, which, according to Spinoza, is the highest point to which the spirit can rise. Out of this inexhaustible fountain of family love have the redeemers of the human race drawn their inspiration." Spinoza might have been surprised to learn that his *amor dei intellectualis* derived directly from the Jewish family, but for Hess this association allowed him to marry his love for Spinoza with Jewish nationalism. And this celebration of the family, reminiscent, as already noted, of the trope typical of German Jewish preachers of the

time, leads Hess to equally celebratory remarks about Jewish women, the guardians of the family: "Oh, how stupid are those who minimize the value of woman's influence upon the development of Judaism! Was it not said of the Jews that they were redeemed from Egypt because of the merit of the pious women and that the future redemption will be brought about through them?"<sup>58</sup> He quotes approvingly the words of the French author Pierre Mercier in his *Essai sur la littérature juive*: "The Jews alone had the healthy sense to subordinate love of women to maternal love."<sup>59</sup> Rarely has the Jewish mother come in for such praise, yet it is praise that has an ironic ring: Hess himself had no children.

The Jewish religious genius owed its existence "to the fertility and resilience of the Jewish tribe [*Stammes*]." National redemption will clearly be based on this fact: "Every Jew has within him the potentiality of a Messiah and every Jewess that of a *Mater Dolorosa*." But Hess believed that the Jews, far from jealously hoarding their family gene, would spread their family love universally "until all mankind has become a single family."<sup>60</sup> In general, this statement reflects the peculiar nature of Hess's nationalism that paradoxically combined a virtually racial chauvinism with expressions of humanitarian universalism.

By the 1860s it was becoming increasingly common to use the language of blood and race to define a nation, although racial anti-Semitism was still in its infancy. By the time he wrote *Rome and Jerusalem*, Hess, the erstwhile socialist, had become convinced that the struggle of races took precedence over the struggle of classes: "Social life is, first of all, a product of the life of definite human races [*Menschenrassen*], of originally different folk tribes [*Volksstämme*]." It is clear from several passages in the book that Hess was moving toward a biological definition of Jewish identity. For example: "The Jewish race is an original [*ursprüngliche*] [race], which, despite climatic influences, reproduces [itself] in its integrity. The Jewish type is that which remains always the same throughout the course of the centuries"<sup>61</sup> As Koltun-Fromm has shown, Hess believed in "polygeneticism," that is, that the human race originated from many races, rather than one.<sup>62</sup> Adam and Eve were the progenitors of the Jewish race—and no other—a theme that unwittingly echoes some of the more chauvinist expressions of medieval Jewish mysticism.

Since intermarriage, according to Hess, like climatic influences, does not erase racial types,<sup>63</sup> the Jews, as the most persistent of all races, do not lose their characteristics when they intermarry with "Indo-Germanic peoples."<sup>64</sup> On this score, Hess tells the story of a Russian nobleman of

his acquaintance whose ancestry was partly Mongolian. But his children, born of a union with a Polish Jewess, had characteristically Jewish features. In intermarriage, which Hess had advocated in his earlier writings, the Jew remains Jewish.<sup>65</sup> The Jews were thus a unique community of descent, what later nationalists would call a “blood community,” a community from which one could not easily sue for divorce. In contrast, typical of Hess’s desire to balance this racial nationalism with universalism, he argues that his studies of racial science in the 1850s had convinced him of the inevitable disappearance of “any particular race dominance and the necessary regeneration of all oppressed peoples.”<sup>66</sup>

In *Rome and Jerusalem*, Hess revisits his earlier treatment of the biblical blood sacrifices. Although he does not allude explicitly to his 1845 essay on money, he must have had it in mind in this later context. He was also almost certainly aware of the orthodox rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer’s call for the renewal of the sacrifices, since he quotes the conclusion of Kalischer’s work at some length.<sup>67</sup> If so, the question was hardly theoretical. Hess says to his imaginary interlocutor: “You contrast the exalted historic religion of my regenerated Judaism with the ‘bloody sacrificial cult’ [*blutigen Opfercultus*] of the ancient Israelite.”<sup>68</sup> In answer to this challenge to the status of the sacrifices in contemporary Judaism, he first states that he does not consider the ancient sacrifices essential to a new Jewish nation in Palestine since both biblical prophets and later rabbis had no problem substituting prayer for sacrifice. In addition, the sacrifices themselves were never anything but a concession to paganism, which now becomes the materialistic religion that Judaism had represented in Hess’s earlier writings.<sup>69</sup> Biblical Judaism utterly rejected human sacrifice, thus dissolving the implied conflation of animal and human sacrifice in the 1845 essay. Since the Jews had a greater aversion to spilling blood and consuming meat than did other modern people, who killed meat “without sacrifice and without ceremony,” Judaism was arguably *more* humanitarian in its carnivorous customs than either paganism or Christianity. Here we discern an echo of Levinsohn’s argument against the blood libel based on the ostensible pacifism of the Jews.

In the moves that Hess makes in *Rome and Jerusalem*, we see the transition between the language of blood sacrifices and blood libel, on the one hand, and the nationalistic language of blood community, on the other. For the enemies of the Jews, the biblical sacrifices demonstrated the bloodthirstiness of the Jews that found its alleged later expression in the blood practices of ritual murder. In response, at least in

part, to the most notorious blood libel of modern times, Hess rejected this reading of the Jewish religion and substituted a different sort of blood language. Instead of bloody sacrifices, the essence of Judaism was the love of family, passed down through the blood, which united all generations of Jews into one nation or, in the vocabulary he preferred, one race. The biblical covenant of blood, a covenant based on sacrifice, now became a community of blood, based on the blood that one generation transmitted to the next.

### A JEWISH RACE?

In the decades after the turn of the twentieth century, Jewish thinkers followed in Hess's footsteps and came to increasingly define the Jews in racial terms. As John Efron has shown, Jewish racial science was a response to the development of anthropological ideas of race on the one hand and to the emergence of Jewish nationalism on the other.<sup>70</sup> In the German context, Efron discusses the contribution of the Zionist physician Elias Auerbach.<sup>71</sup> Auerbach tried to show how the Jews had maintained racial purity by resisting the impact of intermarriage and miscegenation. Those born to such unions were excluded from the Jewish nation, and the genetic stock was thereby preserved. Like the European nobility, which shunned inferior blood, the Jews demonstrated their adherence to principles of eugenics in their marital practices.<sup>72</sup> Even in antiquity these principles were at work. Either the ancient Israelites shunned relations with groups like the Hittites, or, if they did have such relations, as with the Amorites, the latter had similar racial characteristics: the Jews were part of a larger Semitic "race."

Auerbach rejected the argument made by some that the Amorites were blond Aryans and that this was the source of blondness among Jews. In doing so, he was implicitly staking out a position against those who advocated the theory of the "Aryan Jesus," that is, that an Aryan people had invaded Galilee and that Jesus was a descendant of these non-Semitic invaders. Auerbach could find no trace of such a non-Semitic people mixing with the Israelites. By implication, Jesus had to have been a racial Jew.

Auerbach offers instead a novel, Darwinist explanation for why some Jews had non-Semitic characteristics such as blondness. Having ruled out race mixing, he argued that the Jews adopted Gentile standards of beauty wherever they lived and therefore exhibited an unconscious

preference for blonds (this judgment corresponds to the text from the thirteenth century about Jewish “ugliness” discussed in chapter 3). Since blonds were highly valued, they were more likely to find well-to-do mates and therefore to produce more surviving offspring.

Auerbach’s thesis ought to be read against the backdrop of Houston Stewart Chamberlain’s *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, published only eight years earlier. We recall from chapter 4 that Chamberlain had also argued that the Jews were the masters of racial purity. The Sephardim, for Chamberlain, were the group that preserved their blood, whereas the Ashkenazim served as the agents of miscegenation, spawning a mestizo people. By bifurcating the Jews in this fashion, Chamberlain was able to maintain the Jewish race while explaining how they could sexually defile the Aryans.

Jewish racial scientists were also interested in the Sephardim as ostensible carriers of the original Jewish genome, the genetic version of the cultural bias that led to the Zionist adoption of Sephardic rather than Ashkenazic pronunciation of Hebrew. But not all Jewish theorists reached this conclusion. Redcliffe N. Salaman (1874–1955), a British Jewish doctor who served in the British Army in Palestine in World War I, argued that “the Ashkenazim can show a far cleaner bill than the Sephardim who are known to have absorbed in no small quantity both Moorish and Iberian blood.”<sup>73</sup> The Ashkenazim had segregated themselves much more than other Jewish communities and therefore possessed the biological superiority that Salaman wanted to have Zionism breed in the Jews generally. This racial science therefore had decidedly eugenic motives.

These scientific discussions constituted the academic dimension of a much broader discourse of blood in modern Jewish culture. The Russian Zionist writer and activist Vladimir Jabotinsky wrote in an essay in 1913, “On Race,” that racial appearances distinguished ethnic communities from one another, even if pure races as such did not exist. While at times Jabotinsky seemed to say that there was no hierarchy among races, at others he clearly assumed that white Europeans—among whom he counted the Jews—were innately superior to those of non-European lands. For Jabotinsky, race inhered in physical characteristics, but intellectual qualities, which determined cultural superiority, were somehow linked to the physical: “It is impossible to describe the racial psyche, yet nonetheless there is no doubt that a racial community is endowed with a special racial psychology which appears . . . in every member of the community.”<sup>74</sup>



One did not have to be a militant Zionist to partake in such language. Sigmund Freud, who was, to be sure, sympathetic to Zionism, believed strongly that there was an “essence” to Judaism that lay beyond mere religion.<sup>75</sup> In his last work, *Moses and Monotheism*, he argued that the guilt that the Israelites felt over their putative murder of Moses led to a “renunciation of the instincts,” which in turn produced “heightened” Jewish intellectuality (*Geistigkeit*), an ability to think abstractly beyond the evidence of the senses (*Sinnlichkeit*). This superior intellect (and it is no exaggeration to state that Freud believed the Jews to be superior in this regard) was then passed on from one generation to the next.<sup>76</sup> Freud thought that the archaic memory of the murder of Moses was somehow transmitted so that each generation experienced anew the guilt and repression that created intellectuality. The mechanism for this transmission is not clear: some have argued that Freud subscribed to the early nineteenth-century geneticist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck’s view that acquired characteristics can be transmitted genetically; others claim that Freud believed only in the *cultural* transmission of these characteristics, including unconscious memories.<sup>77</sup>

Either way, Freud’s belief in a quasi-racial inherited “essence” of Jewishness was not based on explicit blood language. In the last part of *Moses and Monotheism*, written after the Nazis had already occupied Austria and expelled Freud to England, he insisted that the Jews were inoculated against dilution of their essence through intermarriage: “Admixture of blood made little difference since what kept them together was something ideal—the possession they had in common of certain intellectual and emotional values.”<sup>78</sup> This statement shows how Freud wanted to preserve the idea of a Jewish race in intellectual or spiritual terms but to divorce it from the blood language now corrupted by the Nazis. It was Jewish *minds* and not Jewish bodies that constituted this essence.

Before the Nazis came to power, though, many Jews fell under the influence of the German *völkisch* thought of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, ideas that ultimately played a role in the rise of Nazism but in their earlier manifestations did not always have such sinister connotations.<sup>79</sup> Despite the anti-Semitic overtones of some of these ideas, the language of “blood and soil” (*Blut und Boden*) held wide appeal for Jews searching for new ways of defining themselves. For Zionists like Martin Buber, both of these concepts were the mystical motor of Jewish renaissance. In a speech to the Prague Jewish student group in 1909 entitled “Judaism and the Jews,” Buber asserted that “the forces that carve man’s life are his inwardness and his environment.”<sup>80</sup>

“Inwardness” he defines very specifically as “blood, the deepest, most potent stratum of our being.” What Buber meant by blood is the “chain of fathers and mothers, their character and their fate, their deeds and their suffering.”

He [i.e., the Jew] perceives then what commingling of individuals, what confluence of blood, has produced him, what round of begettings and births has called him forth. He senses in this immortality of the generations a community of blood. . . . To this is added the discovery, promoted by this awareness, that blood is a deep-rooted, nurturing force within the individual; that the deepest layers of our being are determined by blood; that our innermost thinking and our will are colored by it. . . . And he therefore senses that he belongs no longer to the community of those whose constant elements of experience he shares, but to the deeper-reaching community of those whose substance he shares.<sup>81</sup>

The community of blood may thus contradict the society in which one lives (“the community of experience”). As Paul Mendes-Flohr has pointed out, Buber distinguished between two types of experience: the prosaic experience of external reality (*Erfahrung*) and the inner, mystical experience (*Erlebnis*).<sup>82</sup> The felt experience of the blood community is just such an *Erlebnis*, a subjective, ecstatic act of will.

For those nations at home in their own land, blood and soil converge, or, as Buber puts it, the “natural objective situation” corresponds to the “natural subjective one.”<sup>83</sup> Although in this essay Buber does not specify that the Jews need to return to their own soil in order to create this convergence, his audience must have understood that this is what the philosopher of cultural Zionism had in mind. For Buber, the bifurcated Jews of the West would overcome alienation from their identity when they embraced the creative force of their blood. This is the first and most essential step in creating a living Judaism, which, in turn, will lead to Zion. Blood comes before soil.

Although Buber shared the language of blood community with the racial thinkers of his time, his view was very far from either racism or integral nationalism. His political philosophy was much closer to that of his friend Gustav Landauer (1870–1919), the German Jewish anarchist, who laid the groundwork for Buber in his essay on Fritz Mauthner’s philosophy of language, first published in 1903. For Landauer, our ancestors—human and animal—continue to live through us, just as we will live through our children and our work. Drawing on Ferdinand Tönnies’s famous distinction between *Gesellschaft* (society) and *Gemeinschaft* (community),<sup>84</sup> Landauer writes: “What is fundamental to

man, his innermost and most hidden essence, his sacrosanct character, is the great community of the living [*grosse Gemeinschaft der Lebendigen*] within him, which is his lineage and his blood community [*Blutgemeinde*]. Blood is thicker than water; the community, as that in which the individual finds himself, is more powerful and noble and ancient than the flimsy influences of state and society [*Staat und Gesellschaft*].”<sup>85</sup> For Landauer, and for Buber after him, the community of blood, of lineage, is the precise opposite of the state. Here, then, is no nationalistic slogan, but rather a countercultural one. And although Landauer did not apply his idea of blood community to the Jews, it is apparent from his deep appreciation of Buber’s *Reden über das Judentum* that he fully subscribed to the definition of the Jews as such a community.<sup>86</sup>

Buber was intent on combating the individualism of liberal German Jews. As the German Jews increasingly abandoned religion, it became imperative for liberal thinkers as well to find other forms of self-definition. The Jews, defined as a “community of descent” (or, in some cases, as a “community of fate”—*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*), might take the place of the earlier “community of faith.” In 1913, not long after Buber addressed the Prague students, Eugen Fuchs, who later became the president of the liberal Centralverein, suggested that German Jews should identify themselves not as *deutsche Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens* (German citizens of the Jewish faith), but as “Jewish Germans.” This new definition was based on what Fuchs called *Stammesbewusstsein*, literally translated as “tribal consciousness” but figuratively as “consciousness of common descent.”<sup>87</sup> This language of *Stamm* was a by-product of the *völkisch* nationalism of the late nineteenth century, but it spread to more moderate thinkers like Fuchs. In 1930, on the eve of the Nazi seizure of power, the historian Erich von Kahler also adopted the language of *Stamm* and argued that German Jews should proudly proclaim their distinctiveness in German society.<sup>88</sup> This difference was the result of the cultural inheritance that distinguished the Jewish tribe. Finally, at the extreme end of the spectrum, the Prussian nationalist Hans Joachim Schoeps also defined the Jews as a *Stamm* or tribe of Germany, like the Bavarians or the Saxonians.<sup>89</sup> Schoeps did not necessarily see all Jews as part of the same race; he distinguished the alien *Ostjuden* from the German Jews. Only the latter might be considered indigenously German. Such a position assumed that biology was mediated by geography.

These views were not, of course, universally accepted. Hans Goslar, a religious Zionist, said against Buber: “What we know is not solely the dark urgings of the blood.”<sup>90</sup> However, much of the resistance to the

idea of a Jewish race came out of opposition to Zionism. Perhaps the most scientific argument against a Jewish race appeared in 1911, when the American physician and anthropologist Maurice Fishberg published a massive study entitled *The Jews: A Study of Race and Environment*.<sup>91</sup> Fishberg argues that there is no one Jewish racial type and that the Jews of different lands resemble their neighbors much more than they do Jews elsewhere.<sup>92</sup> Environment, in the form of urban life and restricted occupations, produces the ostensible physical and psychological characteristics of the Jews, and these characteristics (such as short stature and weak muscles) in turn influence Jewish occupations in a kind of feedback loop.<sup>93</sup> What is most striking, though, is Fishberg's last chapter, entitled "Assimilation versus Zionism," in which he embarks on an extended polemic against the Zionists, who believe, he says, in the existence of a unitary Jewish race or nation (the two, he notes, are not, of course, identical). Since Fishberg rejects this assumption, he ends with a ringing endorsement of assimilation as the only realistic future for the Jews. His argument is that once the occupational, educational, and residential restrictions on the Jews are lifted, they will necessarily come to resemble their non-Jewish neighbors and will abandon the religious laws that segregate them.

An antiracist position could also serve a cosmopolitan socialist ideology. Thus, Karl Kautsky, the great German socialist, adamantly rejected any racial definition of Judaism in his *Are the Jews a Race*.<sup>94</sup> Kautsky based much of his anthropological argument on Fishberg, but his polemic against Zionism was, if anything, fiercer: he accuses the Zionists of wanting to replace the medieval ghetto with a "world ghetto" as the only way of preserving the alleged purity of the Jewish race.<sup>95</sup> Focusing his critique on the Zionist anthropologist Ignatz Zollschan, he argues that Jewish race science shares with anti-Semitic racists like Houston Stewart Chamberlain the same erroneous belief in the purity of races.<sup>96</sup> For Kautsky, "every cultural race is a mixed race," and therefore the goal should not be the artificial segregation of imagined races, but rather their intermixing. The Jews, he says, must be liberated from the ghetto and thus from the Judaism that it sustained.

A similar view could be found in Soviet Russia. There, Anatoli Lunacharsky, the first commissar of education and the non-Jewish husband of a Jewish woman, wrote stirringly: "It is with great joy that we view the immense increase in the number of Russo-Jewish marriages. . . . Our Slavic blood still has a lot of peasant malt; it is thick and plentiful, but it flows a little slowly. . . . On the other hand, the blood of our

Jewish comrades is very fast flowing. So let us mix our blood and, in this fruitful mixture, find the human type that will include the blood of the Jewish people like delicious, thousand-year-old human wine.”<sup>97</sup> If Lunacharsky celebrated intermarriage, he did so on the same grounds of blood as those who rejected it. Thus, whether one wished the Jews to remain true to their tribe or to mix with others, the discourse still revolved around communities of blood.

One might reject the idea of a pure Jewish race, however, without advocating assimilation. Louis Finkelstein, the chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, wrote in 1949 in the foreword to his edited work *The Jews: Their History, Culture, and Contribution to Civilization* that the Jews of today bear little genetic resemblance to the Israelites who came out of Egypt. The Jewish people have both absorbed proselytes and lost members to assimilation: “The Talmud maintains that the descendants of Sisera, Haman, and Titus included the foremost Jewish scholars of their time; Queen Victoria proudly regarded herself as a descendant of King David.”<sup>98</sup> Since he rather implausibly calculates that the number of Jews who descended from Abraham and Sarah would be 1,125,899,906,842,624—more than the number of people who have ever lived—the Jews, like everyone else, must have intermarried. In short: “probably the whole world is kin.” Jews differ from others because of what they believe, not who their parents were.

The tension within this discourse could be found even within one thinker. The writer and Jewish nationalist Israel Zangwill often spoke in entirely contradictory ways about Jews and race. In his celebrated—if hackneyed—play *The Melting Pot*, which popularized that phrase, he appears to champion intermarriage and assimilation. He himself had excited great hostility among some of his fellow Zionists when he married a Gentile. But his actual position was much more complicated. Despite his prophecy of the “melting” of all prior ethnicities in the American crucible, it turns out that race is not so easily effaced. In a debate about whether the Russian pianist Rubinstein was a Jew since he was baptized shortly after birth, one character asks: “And did the water outside change the blood within?”<sup>99</sup> Blood remains thicker than water, at least the water of baptism, which raises the question of whether blood is also stronger than the fire under the melting pot.

In the afterword to the 1914 edition of the play, Zangwill expresses his ideas on race with puzzling ambiguity. He argues, on the one hand, that Jewish traits are racially “recessive,” so that Jews should ultimately disappear as recognizable types in America. On the other hand, he claims

that the Jew is “the toughest of all the white elements that have been poured into the American crucible, the race having, by its unique experience of several thousand years of exposure to alien majorities, developed a salamandrine power of survival. And this asbestoid fibre is made even more fireproof by the anti-Semitism of American uncivilisation.”<sup>100</sup> And then as if conscious of the contradictions in his argument, he backs off from the miscegenetic message of the play by concluding that the “Jew may be Americanised and the American Judaised without any gamic interaction.”<sup>101</sup>

Since Zangwill’s own politics oscillated between assimilation, Zionism, and Jewish territorialism, it is perhaps not surprising to find contradictory ideas about race in his writings. But although he was perhaps more mercurial than most, he was not that odd in a time when, in the felicitous phrase of Michael Stanislawski, a whole variety of thinkers inhabited a world at once cosmopolitan and nationalist. Many of these thinkers would have welcomed Jewish assimilation, but they recognized its impossibility, a view that often led them to racialized ways of defining the Jews. As the passionate debates chronicled here attest, this was a discourse that left its unmistakable stamp in a host of different ways on the Zionist movement.

#### BLOOD AND ZION

Martin Buber’s invocation of blood in his addresses to the Zionist youth clubs found an echo in some of the ideology of the early communes in Palestine. His influence was especially strong on *Hashomer Ha-Tzair* (Young Guard), the youth movement that originated in the Galician area of Austro-Hungary in 1913. In 1920 a small group of these romantic Zionists established a commune called Bitanya on the bluff above the Sea of Galilee. Although it lasted only a half year, the *myth* of Bitanya played an important role in the later Hashomer kibbutz movement, especially since a collection of documents and testimonies was published only a short time after the breakup of the settlement.<sup>102</sup> The members of Bitanya, which was part secular encounter group and part religious sect, stayed up late after long days of labor, confessing their sins, exhorting each other to greater sacrifices, and fervently declaring their ideological commitments. The commune struggled with its own erotic longings, although it is hard to imagine that they had much energy left to fulfill them. With only four women in a group of twenty-seven, these longings often became abstract flights of fancy.

In one rumination, Eliahu Rapoport, who, at thirty-one, was much older than the teenagers in the group and was a long-time disciple of Buber, declares: "This is what today's generation demands of me: liberate me from the burden of morality; redeem me from the curse of barrenness, redeem me towards the distant image of a blood community [*edat ha-dam*]." <sup>103</sup> Rapoport, already married and the father of children, was expressing a collective rather than a personal problem: perhaps because there were so few women in the commune (as well as in Palestine generally), the fear of infertility was an issue that plagued many of these utopian settlers. <sup>104</sup> For Rapoport, and others as well, bourgeois sexual morality prevented the development of an authentic blood community. Instead, he invokes those biblical figures, like Tamar from the book of Genesis (chapter 38), who were prepared to transgress the law in order to ensure the continuation of the nation. To reach back to the Bible was a common move in this longing for a blood community, since these Zionists tended to reject the Jewish communities of the Diaspora as alienated from the true sources of national life.

Unable to extend their radical ideas to gender equality, they celebrated the maternal role of women as the key to recovering the blood community. In a novel by Nathan Bistritsky, based on Bitanya, the main protagonist declares in one speech that in messianic times, matriarchy will return. In a bizarre, incestuous image, Abraham will alternate with his son Isaac in suckling from the breasts of Sarah. He continues: "She—the mother—stands outside of our circle, the circle of history, and a strip of blood stands red behind her like a holy, terrifying shadow. She wallows in the blood, her holy blood, the blood of virginity, the blood of her first sacrifice, the blood of childbirth. Humanity washes in the blood of its heroes, but the dove of the holy spirit descends only on the fountain of blood that flows from the woman." <sup>105</sup> Bistritsky's language clearly conjures up the biblical passage in Ezekiel 16 in which God finds the young woman Israel "wallowing in her blood." There, the blood of childbirth and virginity are the blood in which the nation lives. Here, too, the emphasis is not on the impurity imputed to this blood by the legal tradition, but rather on its vital force. In this striking reversal of the menstrual taboo, Bistritsky holds that a woman's flow of blood contains the Holy Spirit. This is the most holy blood, presumably because only this blood guarantees the fertility of the blood community. Women—and their bleeding—are the vital fount of the nation. Bistritsky's interpretation of female blood, albeit without any scholarly apparatus, is partially

reminiscent of the one I advanced in the first chapter of this book, although he does not recognize that this view of women is a strictly male—and priestly—construct.

Bistritsky notes that while “humanity washes in the blood of its heroes,” the procreative blood of women is implicitly a higher form. Yet, like most nationalisms, Zionism quickly came to celebrate blood spilled in battle as the liquid glue that bound the nation to its land. This development had already started in eastern Europe, where the wave of pogroms, starting in 1881, renewed the medieval language of martyrdom. Even Hayim Nahman Bialik’s “City of Slaughter,” a poem critical of the alleged passivity of the Jews of Kishinev, evoked the old vocabulary, if only to reject it. Angry young writers, such as Micha Yosef Berdichevsky, celebrated the sword over the book and searched for examples of muscular violence in the margins of Jewish history.

It was in this atmosphere that a young Hebrew poet, Yaakov Cahan (1881–1960), wrote some lines at the turn of the twentieth century that echoed for decades in Zionist culture. The poem is called “Ha-Biryonim,” a Talmudic term meaning “terrorists” or “hooligans” that refers historically to some of the first-century Jewish rebels against the Romans. In the most famous stanza of the poem, Cahan calls for the resurrection of the *biryonim*:

We arose, returned, we the *biryonim*  
 We came to redeem our oppressed land  
 With a strong hand, we demand our right!  
 In blood and fire, Judah fell  
 In blood and fire, Judah shall rise again . . .

He concludes with a series of alliterations on blood (*dam*) and soil (*adamah*):

The sun will stand still [*ki-dom*]  
 As in the days of Joshua—like red blood [*ka-dam aduma*]  
 In a sea of blood,  
 Drowning heaven and soil,  
 The soil of Zion is washed  
 In the redness [*be-odem*] of dawn redemption sparkles.<sup>106</sup>

Using the etymological associations between blood, redness, and soil, Cahan thus constructs a Hebrew version of *Blut und Boden*, one that is thoroughly drenched in the blood of battle. This Jewish *völkisch* ideology found the same bellicose expression that was commonly its fate in European nationalism as well.



The slogan of “blood and fire” proved to be Cahan’s most enduring legacy. The first armed group of Jewish watchmen (*shomrim*) in Palestine adopted it a few years later, and it subsequently became the battle cry for militant Zionism. When, in 1920, the settler-soldier Joseph Trumpeldor was killed with some of his companions by Arabs in northern Galilee, the statue of a lion erected in their memory at Tel Hai bore Cahan’s verse.<sup>107</sup> The new Hebrew martyr was not to be a passive victim of his Gentile oppressors, as these writers assumed, sometimes wrongly, was the case for their medieval predecessors. No, this martyr would take up arms, and his heroic death would redeem the land and the nation.

This glorification of blood spilled in battle found expression in a remarkable booklet published in 1911 to commemorate the watchmen who had died the previous year in skirmishes with Arab marauders. Although these Arabs were probably less nationalist opponents than armed bandits, the contributors to the pamphlet, entitled *Yizkor* (Remember—an allusion to the *piyyutim* in memory of the medieval martyrs), treated these conflicts as if they had been full-fledged battles over Jewish national rights. At the same time, though, the editors note that the Jews who died did so “at the hands of brothers, at the hands of members of a nation racially close to us [*kirvat geza*].”<sup>108</sup> They call upon the Arabs to join with the Jews in reclaiming the land and making it fertile. But they also characterize the blood of the fallen as “the blood of the covenant between us and our beloved land.”<sup>109</sup> What for the Bible in Exodus 24:8 was the blood of animal sacrifices and for the rabbis the blood of circumcision, for the editors of *Yizkor* became the blood of the armed defenders of the land.

Two contributions to *Yizkor* are particularly relevant to our topic. The first is by Yehoshua Thon and takes up the question of self-sacrifice (*mesirat ha-nefesh*).<sup>110</sup> Thon distinguishes between positive and negative forms of self-sacrifice. Both are types of martyrdom (*kiddush ha-shem*), but the first involves voluntary actions in service of a higher principle, while the second is a passive acceptance of a coerced fate. In Thon’s typology, the positive form of martyrdom, undertaken freely, stems from a belief in the continuity of the community for whom the martyr sacrifices his life. The negative, passive form is based on a belief in the permanence of the individual soul and the idea of the next world (*olam ha-ba*). It is a defense of religious principles. Although Thon does not denigrate the traditional type of martyrdom, his dichotomies of “positive versus negative” and “active versus passive” make it clear that

the secular martyrs are superior to the religious. With this secularization of *kiddush ha-shem*, Thon co-opts a religious vocabulary in the service of a new nationalist ideal.

The second—and more important—essay that takes up these themes is by the poet and educator Kadish Leib Silman (1880–1937). In ecstatic, mystical prose, he connects the blood spilled in violence with the *völkisch* idea of a blood community: “We spill our blood and live here. Our life is the continuation of the past and the spilling of our blood is also a continuation with the past. There is no nation that does not build its life on the foundations of the past and blood joins blood.”<sup>111</sup> Then, in an even more feverish passage, he links blood (*dam*) with soil (*adamah*), again forging a Hebrew version of *Blut und Boden*:

Blood, blood. Its color is beautiful and the earth into which it soaks becomes valuable and dear to us through it. Because just as blood is necessary for the body as well as for the nation as a whole, so it is necessary for the earth [*adamah*]. A stone on which blood has boiled becomes through it a memory in a book, but even more so is the earth. Its memory remains with us from generation to generation. And if the blood was not spilled on it, life itself would not fructify thought. If you take away the memory of our blood, you take away much of the glorious past of the world and even of our past. And if we did not irrigate the land with our blood, we would not stand on it today.<sup>112</sup>

The life of the nation and the fruitfulness of its land requires irrigation with blood. The collective memory necessary for national life also rests on blood. In a final flourish, Silman appropriates the biblical phrase “the blood is the life” (Lev. 17:11) and turns the death of the national martyrs into a source of life: “The blood is the life. And he who spills his blood for *kiddush ha-shem* and for the conquest of life, the life of his soul remains within him, eternal life and memory. *Selah*.”<sup>113</sup> The last word—*Selah*—is the traditional ending of a prayer (like *Amen*); in this way, Silman turns religious *dicta* into secular, nationalist ideals.

As Jonathan Frankel has shown, *Yizkor* did not represent a monolithic point of view in the small Zionist settlement of Ottoman Palestine.<sup>114</sup> There were a number of vehement dissents, including some to the editorial foreword that seemed to call for reconciliation between the Semitic brothers of the land. Of greater relevance, though, were those who argued against the seeming continuity between martyrdom in the Exile and death at the hands of the Arabs in the land of Israel. Zionism must break with the passivity of the past. In the Jewish homeland, martyrdom as a passive act had given way to active heroism

and should not adopt the same language. For the writer Joseph Hayim Brenner, the mystical language of blood, with its historical associations, struck the wrong note for a secular movement intent on rooting a people in the present reality of the soil. And for Ahad Haam, the philosopher of “cultural Zionism,” the language of blood was abhorrent because it expressed a Levantine ethos of blood vengeance rather than an ethical nationalism. In a letter from 1922 responding to a revenge killing of an Arab boy in the wake of attacks on Jews, he wrote: “Jews and blood—are there two greater opposites than these? . . . Is this the dream of the return to Zion which our people dreamt for thousands of years: that we should come to Zion and pollute its soil with the spilling of innocent blood?”<sup>115</sup> These debates anticipate later controversies in Zionism between realistic politics and mystical messianism. As a symbol, blood might stand on either side of this barricade, either for continuity between past, present, and redemptive future, or for a revolutionary break with exilic history.

These ruminations from the early years of the Zionist settlement in Palestine found their most extreme expression in the poetry of Uri Zvi Greenberg (1896–1981).<sup>116</sup> A veteran of World War I, his early poetry—in Yiddish and Hebrew—shared the same expressionist style with many other World War I poets. The horror of war in the trenches and the mass death the soldiers encountered there gave birth to a poetic assault on the sensibilities of the reader. In this literary shock attack, blood took pride of place. Indeed, the word *blood* remained one of the most pervasive in all of Greenberg’s long oeuvre. His first collection of Hebrew poetry, published in 1924, includes a poem called “In this Blood” (“Be-Ze ha-Dam”). Rejecting the culture of the nations who have imprisoned “Hebrew blood,” the poet turns instead to the “teaching [*torah*] of my flesh and my God and the twenty-two letters [of the Hebrew alphabet]. The laws of the race [*huvei geza*] are there.” Like Friedrich Nietzsche, Greenberg wants to “write in blood,” since the blood of the nation is found in the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. His task is to forge a poetry that will liberate what has been imprisoned by Gentile culture. To do so, it is necessary “to dip this quill in the blood of Ezekiel, in the blood of every Israelite seer.”<sup>117</sup> If the prophet Ezekiel envisioned the nation of Israel as a girl “wallowing in your blood,” Greenberg turns this blood into that of the prophet himself, with whom he, as a poet, identifies. The anger and passion of the prophets of the land of Israel are to be found in their blood, which now flows in the veins of their poetic heir. By connecting

back to this prophetic blood, Greenberg imagined turning his poetry into contemporary prophecy.

It is characteristic of Greenberg's poetics to translate traditional or conventional formulations into the language of blood. Thus, he speaks of seeing the trampled Jerusalem through "the blood between the parts" (*dam ben ha-betarim*).<sup>118</sup> The biblical phrase "covenant between the parts" (*berit ben ha-betarim*: Gen. 15:9–21) refers to the mysterious covenant that God makes with Abraham by causing a flame to pass between the halves of sacrificed animals. Although the biblical text makes no mention of blood, Greenberg quite correctly intuitively, as we have seen in chapter 1, that the Bible's idea of covenant requires blood. So he substitutes "blood" for "covenant."

With the 1929 Wailing Wall riots and the subsequent Arab massacre of Jews in Hebron, Greenberg came to see blood as more than just a historical metaphor. Jewish blood spilled in the land of Israel unites the poet with his people: "I am the blood of all the blood shed in Zion."<sup>119</sup> In the book of Ezekiel, God refers to the prophet repeatedly as "son of man" (*ben adam*). In 1929 Greenberg wrote a poem entitled "The Speech of a Son of the Blood [*ben ha-dam*]: Accusation." *Adam* (human) is now transmuted into *ha-dam* (the blood), that is, the blood of the nation, which *is* the nation. Here, the blood is no longer the blood of the prophet but now the blood of the murdered Jews: the wall around Jerusalem is made of red blood.<sup>120</sup>

In 1937 Greenberg escalated his use of blood language in response to the crises in Palestine and in Europe. The previous year, the Arabs began a revolt against both the British and the Zionists. In response to terror attacks on Jewish civilians, the Labor Zionists declared a policy of "self-restraint" (*havlagah*), while the Revisionists, the party to which Greenberg belonged, embraced revenge attacks. In a collection of poems entitled *Sefer Ha-Kitrug ve-ha-Emunah* (*The Book of Accusation and Faith*), he writes:

I awoke this morning and everything was red  
The sky was blood, the sun blood  
Shoes—blood, clothing—blood.<sup>121</sup>

He denounces the socialist Zionists: their red flag is the flag of a Hebrew blood libel.<sup>122</sup> By turning over three Revisionist activists whom the British subsequently hanged, the socialists were like the Jews who betrayed Jesus to Pilate.<sup>123</sup> Here—and in many other places—Greenberg expresses his surprising identification with Jesus as a bleeding Jew.<sup>124</sup>

Throughout the book, Greenberg repeatedly emphasizes that only blood can avenge blood. The secret of heroism is “blood for blood” (*dam tahat dam*).<sup>125</sup> God writes not in ink but in “blood for blood,” an allusion to the biblical “eye for an eye.”<sup>126</sup> The savior of the Jews is the “Messiah of blood,” and the ideal should not be *kiddush ha-shem*, but *haganat ha-shem* (“defense of God” rather than “sanctification of God”), by which Greenberg means renouncing the passive form of martyrdom in favor of active retaliation.<sup>127</sup> He takes the biblical Simon and Levi, who slaughtered the Shechemites in revenge for raping their sister, Dinah (Gen. 34), as his models. To adopt the side of Simon and Levi means, significantly, to reject the patriarch Jacob, who counseled reconciliation with the people of the land. Perhaps the most striking passage is the following manifesto:<sup>128</sup>

And I say a land is conquered by blood  
And only conquered by blood, consecrated to the people  
With the sanctity of blood.

The very fertility of the land depends on the blood shed for it. Denouncing the idea of a special Jewish ethic not based on vengeance, Greenberg announces that there is only one universal ethic: “and it is blood that will decide who will be the sole sovereign here.”

Turning to the increasing menace of Nazism in Europe, Greenberg denounces those European Jews who think that the Nazis are a passing phenomenon: “I will not betray my lips if I say in my poem: the devil himself has urinated in their blood.”<sup>129</sup> The curse is evidently on those Jews who are complacent in the face of the apocalypse: their blood has turned from red to yellow (yellow, though, does not have the same connotation of cowardliness in Hebrew as it does in English).

Yet Greenberg scarcely belongs to those Zionists who would turn their backs on the Diaspora. He even ponders returning to the Exile to reunite with his people, since in the land of the prophets, he is treated like an enemy. His identity comes, as the title of one poem calls it, “From the Blood of My Ancestors in Spain . . .”<sup>130</sup> Had his mother borne him in the “vineyards of King David,” he might have been the lyre (*kinor*) for the restored kingdom of the House of David, but instead, he is condemned to tear his hair and gnash his lips, bound to a bed of nails, his feet burned with hot coals. Here he envisions himself as a martyr of the Inquisition. There is, then, a scarcely concealed measure of masochism in Greenberg’s verse, an almost perverse desire for blood and destruction, as if to fulfill his own prophecy.

If Greenberg's visions must have seemed impossibly outlandish in the 1930s, they became all too real in the 1940s as word arrived of the destruction of the European Jews. It was in response to the Holocaust that Greenberg composed what was probably his most powerful book-length poem, *Rehovot ha-Nahar* (*Streets of the River*). It is framed as an apocalypse, an ancient manuscript written in "black blood" after "the flood [*mabul*] of Jewish blood,"<sup>131</sup> and the text prophesies the destruction of the end of time. In the second prologue, the daughters of Israel are dressed in the wedding dresses and jewelry of "the martyred brides of blood" (*kalot damei ha-kedoshot*).<sup>132</sup> While the last phrase is deliberately obscure, Greenberg is almost certainly alluding to the "bridegroom of blood" (*hatan damim*) of Exodus 4. But here it is the female martyrs who take the place of the male figures (Moses and his son) of the biblical story, and the blood is not the blood of circumcision, but of the murdered Jews of Europe.

In collapsing the Bible with the present, Greenberg applies to history the Talmudic dictum that "there is no early or late in the Torah": the contemporary persecutors of the Jews are the biblical Amalek ("the Kingdom of Amalek on the Dniester").<sup>133</sup> This attitude also informed his view of Arab enmity to Zionism. As he puts it in the line that contains the title of the poem: "There is one river of blood [and] of tear [*ha-dami ha-dimi*] in which we cross streets."<sup>134</sup> If one can unpack the phrase "streets of the river" (*rehovot ha-nahar*), it would seem to mean that the many "streets" of the river of history are all the same.

In this antihistorical vein, the slaughter of the Jews of Europe recapitulates the sacrifices in the ancient temple: the floor of the poet's childhood house is covered with "the blood of the floor of the sanctuary."<sup>135</sup> It is the blood of the Jews that takes the place of sacrificed animals. Greenberg explains that ever since the Jews taught the world monotheism, the fire, water, and trees that the pagans worshipped have become enraged and persecuted them. Jesus was a Jewish prophet, but his message went unheard, for the goyim have not been weaned away from paganism. Their blood calls them to return to their old gods, to whom they bring the blood of Jews as an offering.<sup>136</sup> There is, then, a sense in Greenberg that the Jews remain trapped in the struggles of ancient Israel: there is no escape from history.

This belief in the eternal nature of the enemies of Israel leads Greenberg to a disturbingly racial theory. Against Darwin, but like the medieval Kabbalists, he writes that only the Jews are descendants of Adam and not of a monkey:

We are from the blood of Adam whom God created in His image  
 and they [the nations] are from the blood of an animal;  
 they come from the forest and the field . . .  
 All of them have drunk from our blood with the thirst of an animal.”<sup>137</sup>

As with the anti-Christian polemics of the Middle Ages, it is these essentially different types of blood that separate the Jews from the Gentiles. The consequence is that the Gentiles thirst for the blood of the Jews. Their culture, which Greenberg holds to be far inferior to the much older culture of the Jews, is founded on the blood of their Jewish victims.<sup>138</sup>

In this fashion, Greenberg turns the ancient blood accusation against the Jews' accusers: it is the Christians, not the Jews, who need the blood of their age-old enemies. The only redemption for the polluted blood of the goyim is to become Jews. They must therefore choose between drinking blood and eating the limbs from a living body, on one hand, and becoming Israel, on the other.<sup>139</sup> That there is such an escape suggests that perhaps the racial divide between the Jewish and Gentile blood may not be absolute, but Greenberg clearly holds out little hope that such a transformation will in fact take place.

Thus does Greenberg's poetry offer an awful, apocalyptic vision redolent with the blood of violence and race. While the Zionist mainstream recoiled from this vision, Greenberg had a powerful influence on the culture of the right, especially the poet and activist Avraham Stern (1907–42) and the ideologue Israel Eldad (1910–96).<sup>140</sup> Stern, who led the underground guerilla group *Lehi* and was killed in a shootout with the British Mandatory police, referred repeatedly to blood in his poetry. He was also adept at using and transforming traditional religious symbols and expressions. For example, in an unpublished fragment evidently from 1933, entitled “Messiah,” Stern writes that the Messiah will be born in a rank prison cell, surrounded by murderers and rapists:

In the morning, the light of dawn dropped into the cellar and  
 the floor is filled with a puddle of red blood  
 and the Messiah will know that there are two paths to redemption:  
 the blood and the sword.<sup>141</sup>

In another, a romantic ode to the land of Israel, Stern appropriates the formula of the traditional Jewish wedding but also alludes to a famous love poem by the national poet Hayim Nahman Bialik:

Behold you are betrothed to me, homeland  
According to the law of Moses and Israel

. . . . .  
I—I will put my head in the lap of your mountains  
You—in my blood you will live forever.<sup>142</sup>

The last line of the poem is yet another allusion to the passage in Ezekiel 16, in which God says to the female child, Israel, “live in your blood, live in your blood.” Here it is the blood of the male poet, the blood spilled in battle, through which the land, figured as female, will live.

Unlike Greenberg, others who were attracted to a racial definition of the Jews often tried to balance it with at least a gesture toward universalism. For, example, the chief rabbi of Palestine from 1921 to 1935, Abraham Isaac Kook, saw the Jews as the heart of the human organism and not as a separate entity. The centrality of the Jews in the divine economy could be manifested only in a universal mission: nationalism, for Kook, was integrally bound up with universalism.<sup>143</sup> Nevertheless, even Kook, drawing from the medieval philosopher Judah Halevi, argued that the Jews had spiritual characteristics that each generation inherited from its predecessor. Man had so degenerated during the ancient Israelites’ exile in Egypt that God had to purge the Jews of their profane humanity and create a new creature, “Israelite from head to toe.”<sup>144</sup> Israel’s divine nature comes from “its racial character, physical and spiritual, which it did not take from chosenness nor can any corruption of chosenness eradicate it.”<sup>145</sup> Still, for Kook, Israel’s special qualities existed to serve the world and not only itself, a view quite remote from Greenberg’s.

#### BLOOD WITHOUT SOIL

The natural tendency of some strands of Zionism, following European models, to partake in the language of blood, in terms of both militarism and racial thinking, provoked considerable dissent, by both Zionists and the movement’s opponents.<sup>146</sup> For example, a most remarkable Orthodox rabbi from Russia, Aharon Shmuel Tamares (1869–1931), in the wake of World War I criticized militarism and preached pacifism. Poetry, art, psychology, and morality must all be purified of “ruddy stains,” namely the cult of blood.<sup>147</sup> For Tamares, Judaism, with its centuries of experience in exile, had developed the right ethos to educate the nations of the world against violence.



But it was the German Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig who staked out perhaps the most profound alternative position in *Star of Redemption* (*Stern der Erlösung*), first published in 1921. Far from eschewing the language of blood, as Tamares did, Rosenzweig embraced it, but he gave it his own peculiar meaning: blood was the essence of Judaism, but it was an essence devoid of specific racial content; moreover, it was blood detached from soil. Since the *Star* is an enormously complicated book, it would take us far afield to try to explicate fully the place of blood within its argument. I will try, nevertheless, to sketch out a tentative road map.

The problem of the book is death and the challenge death poses to all systematic philosophies. On the very first page of the *Star*, Rosenzweig makes it clear that it was the experience of the trenches, from which he wrote the postcards that were the initial draft of the book, that threw up this challenge: "Let man creep like a worm into the folds of the naked earth before the fast-approaching volleys of a blind death from which there is no appeal. . . . But philosophy denies these fears of the earth."<sup>148</sup> The search for eternity does not lead to ideas, but to lived experience.

Rosenzweig finds the kernel of religious truth not in theology, but in sociology, which reveals how the faithful live their faith. Christianity is not to be found in the *theologumena* of Christ, just as Judaism is not to be found in the content of Torah. Instead, Christianity, by definition, is the religion that proselytizes, while Judaism is the religion that procreates:

Christianity must proselytize. This is just as essential to it as self-preservation through shutting the pure spring of blood [*des reinen Quells des Bluts*] off from foreign admixture is to the eternal people. Indeed proselytizing is the veritable form of its self-preservation for Christianity. . . . In the eternal people, procreation bears witness to eternity. . . . In place of the corporeal flow of the one blood [*fleischlichen Fortströmens des einen Bluts*] that bears witness to the ancestor in the engendered grandson [in Judaism], here [in Christianity] the outpouring of the spirit must establish the communion of testimony in the uninterrupted stream of baptismal water.<sup>149</sup>

Much as we saw in the medieval polemics on blood versus water, here two types of fluid—blood and water—stand for the essence of Judaism and Christianity. "Procreation" and "proselytism" are the essential teachings of the two religions, but they are teachings found less in books than in the way Christians and Jews actually live.

Since procreation is the essence of Judaism, it follows that it is women who are the primary propagators of Jewish life.<sup>150</sup> Men may

be knowledgeable in Torah, but since Torah is not the essence, women, who are excluded from study, actually occupy center stage: they are rooted in nature, by which Rosenzweig means that their essential task is procreation. Judaism is, almost by definition, female. To be sure, a full gender analysis of the *Star* would reveal a much more ambiguous role for women, especially in Rosenzweig's passages on the dynamics of love.<sup>151</sup> Here what is interesting is the way Rosenzweig anticipates Chajim Bloch in replicating the well-known nineteenth-century homily that it was Jewish women who preserved Judaism through the family. But Rosenzweig's argument is also strikingly reminiscent of the wild paeans to women that we encountered in the Bitanya community in Palestine; these appeared at virtually the same time that Rosenzweig was completing the *Star of Redemption*. It is this Dionysian spirit that demonstrates how Rosenzweig was much closer to romantic Zionism than to liberal German Judaism.

Christianity, then, overcomes death by proselytizing, while Judaism does so by procreating. These actions connect the faithful to eternity. For Judaism, love is "stronger than death." This verse from the Song of Songs demonstrates for Rosenzweig that the Song is the "core book [*Kernbuch*] of Revelation,"<sup>152</sup> an astonishing claim since it is one of the biblical books in which God plays no role. But because the Song teaches Eros, it connects more centrally to the essence of Judaism than any other book of the Bible. In this paean to marital love, Rosenzweig may have been speaking very personally, because he composed the *Star* at the time of his own marriage. As he writes grandiloquently: "Matrimony is infinitely more than love. Matrimony is the external fulfillment which love reaches out after from her internal blissfulness in a swoon of unquenchable longing."<sup>153</sup> In making love central to Judaism (albeit with purple prose), Rosenzweig boldly robbed Christianity of one of its main claims against its older rival.

Love conquers death in two ways. First, the lover lives only in the present, and therefore his consciousness of his future death disappears. But love also conquers death because it is the source of procreation, without which there can be no true future. The "great simile of marriage" is the source of redemption: "From the summit of love, the soul yearns for the created blood community; only in the fated, nay the God-given unification of this one and that one, in marriage, does she [i.e., the soul] find her redemption."<sup>154</sup> Marriage is not only a union between two people but is also the act that establishes community. And it is the Jews who are the quintessential practitioners of this art: "There is only

one community in which such a linked sequence of everlasting life goes from grandfather to grandson, only one which cannot utter the 'we' of its unity without hearing in its interior a voice that adds: 'are eternal.' It must be a blood community, because only blood gives the present warrant to the hope for the future. . . . Only a community based on common blood feels the warrant of eternity warm in its veins even now."<sup>155</sup> This community of blood is, of course, the Jews.

Some commentators, disturbed by the possible racial overtones of Rosenzweig's text, try to save him by arguing that his Judaism could not have been truly racial because he recognized the possibility of conversion.<sup>156</sup> But even though he could not deny this aspect of Jewish law, he nevertheless insisted on the purity of Jewish blood. As we have already noted, basing Judaism on procreation means "shutting the pure spring of blood off from foreign admixture." As opposed to all the other nations, the "Jew finds in his people the perfect fusion with a world of his own."<sup>157</sup> That is, he recognizes all other Jews instinctively since they are of the same blood—a polemical claim, given the strong sense of ethnic difference that many German Jews felt about the *Ostjuden*, the Jews of eastern Europe.<sup>158</sup> But, like others of the Jewish renaissance in Weimar Germany, Rosenzweig rejected the prevailing view of the *Ostjuden* and embraced the eastern Jews as his brethren. The inclusiveness of his Jewish blood community reflected a certain kind of Jewish Orientalism with respect to eastern Europe.

Since Christianity is a universal, proselytizing religion, it is guaranteed to feel alienated from the blood of its founder: "Ever since then and everywhere, a Siegfried is at strife with that stranger, the man of the cross, in his very appearance so suspect a character. A Siegfried who, whether blond and blue-eyed, or dark and small-boned or brown and dark-eyed, wrestles again and again with this stranger who contradicts the continued attempts to assimilate him to his [nation's] ideal image."<sup>159</sup> This is a remarkable refutation of the anti-Semitic doctrine of the Aryan Jesus. The very attempt to assimilate Jesus to the Aryan nation demonstrates that this nation lacks a true blood community with its own faith.

Of course, Rosenzweig recognized that there are other communities of blood. But what distinguishes the Jews is that theirs is the only community that trusts *solely* in the blood and does not ground itself in the earth:

The peoples of the world are not content with the bonds of blood. They sink their roots into the night of the earth, lifeless in itself but the spender of life, and they believe that the durability of the earth guarantees them

permanence. . . . The earth of their homeland is watered by the blood of their sons, for they do not trust in the living community of blood that is not anchored in the strong foundation of the earth. . . . Whenever a people loves the soil of its native land more than its own life, it is in danger—as all the peoples of the world are . . . in the end the soil will remain as that which was loved more strongly, and the people's own life will expire upon it.<sup>160</sup>

Here we hear echoes of the opening paragraph of Rosenzweig's book: the nations dig into "the night of the earth," much as the soldiers of World War I dug themselves deep into trenches, which, nevertheless, could not prevent their deaths. The *Boden* into which the nations pour their *Blut* yields only war and death, not eternity. But the Jews renounce this kind of territorial nationalism: "We alone trusted in blood and abandoned the land; and so we preserved the priceless sap of life which guaranteed us its eternity. . . ."<sup>161</sup> We have struck root in ourselves, rootless in the earth, eternal wanderers on it, but deeply rooted in ourselves, in our own body and blood. And it is this rooting in ourselves and in nothing but ourselves that vouchsafes us our eternity."<sup>162</sup> The nations of the world "dilute" their blood by mixing it with the earth. Only the Jews maintain the purity of their blood by avoiding territorial nationalism.

Those commentators troubled by Rosenzweig's use of the language of blood, even though it is divorced from nationalism, make strenuous efforts to inoculate him from association with Nazi discourse, about which, they claim, he had to be ignorant. These interpretations typically sanitize his language, arguing that it should be understood as metaphorical.<sup>163</sup> A somewhat different interpretation, by Peter Gordon, holds that what Rosenzweig means by blood is the opposite of racialism, since the latter is based on nature and Rosenzweig's blood community is divorced from nature: it creates its own "acosmic temporality."<sup>164</sup> For Gordon, Rosenzweig used blood language in the opposite way of the exponents of *Blut und Boden*: it is blood without soil. In this way he could distinguish Judaism from all forms of temporal nationalism, whether Teutonic or Zionist.

Gordon's philosophical interpretation seems on the mark. While it is true that Rosenzweig's blood community is not the same as the *Volksgemeinschaft*, it still remains a *physical* community. It is the *bodies* of the Jews that pass on Judaism.<sup>165</sup> Whether one wants to use the word *racial* or the word *ethnic*, Rosenzweig clearly held, like Moses Hess, that the blood passed on from one generation to the next is what defines Judaism. This blood has no specific content, however: it does not contain

some mystical characteristics of the nation, such as German racists tried to ascribe to the so-called Aryans. In this sense, Rosenzweig's racial concept of Judaism, if that is what it is, departs quite dramatically from other racial ideologies of the time.

One characteristic of racial thinking, though, is to create hierarchies between higher and lower races; on this score, Rosenzweig must be judged guilty. Although he gives an honored role to Christianity in his scheme of redemption, he reserves the central role (the star itself as opposed to its rays) for the Jews. It is they alone who preserve the purity of their blood, while the nations of the world promiscuously change their ethnic identities as their religion proselytizes. In a sense, only the Jews are a true race. In this, Rosenzweig, either unwittingly or intentionally, confirmed Houston Stewart Chamberlain's claim that the Jews are the most racially pure of all peoples and that it is they who taught the world the meaning of race. If Rosenzweig was aware of this kind of argument—and it seems hard to believe that he was not—then he was deliberately adopting it for his own purposes as a form of polemic.

A reading of the *Star* in its historical context sheds a rather different light on it than the purely philosophical approaches of most commentators. In his magnum opus, Rosenzweig was reacting not only to a whole philosophical tradition but also to pressing political and communal concerns. In adopting the language of blood community, he was deliberately identifying himself with a discourse that we have already charted and, perhaps most specifically, with Martin Buber, who became Rosenzweig's close collaborator. In addition, as we saw in chapter 4, blood had already become a central word in the anti-Semitic vocabulary when Rosenzweig wrote the *Star*: only three years before the book appeared, but while Rosenzweig was already writing it, Artur Dinter's *Sin against the Blood* became a best-seller. It is possible that Rosenzweig was as much concerned to counter such *völkisch* ideas as he was to refute Zionism. But his tactic was a cunning one: he adopted the very accusation that such anti-Semites made against the Jews—that the Jews were a quintessentially racial community—and drew the opposite conclusion. Whereas Dinter—and Chamberlain before him—thought that the Jews wanted to pollute the Aryan blood line, Rosenzweig celebrated the insularity of Jewish blood. The Jewish blood community had no need for miscegenation or intermarriage, for it remained splendidly autochthonous.

This last point suggests another—and perhaps equally important—context in which to situate Rosenzweig's book: the raging debate over Jewish demographics in late Imperial and Weimar Germany. German

Jews ironically began to describe themselves as a *Stamm* (tribe) at the same time that they became increasingly anxious about their demographic future. In 1911 Felix Theilhaber published a book that warned darkly that high rates of intermarriage and low fertility were combining to destroy the German Jewish community. Theilhaber projected the demise of the community if contemporary trends continued.<sup>166</sup> In Weimar, the rate of intermarriage further skyrocketed, while the rate of fertility sank. In 1920 the sexologist Max Marcuse delivered a lecture entitled “Über die Fruchtbarkeit der christlich-jüdischen Mischehe” (“On the fertility of Christian-Jewish mixed marriage”), in which he showed that mixed marriages between Jews and non-Jews had a low rate of fertility. But Marcuse used the opportunity to argue that such low fertility was the result of cultural forces rather than, as anti-Semitic writers claimed, a physiological product of mixing two incompatible races. Mitchell Hart and Sharon Gillerman have separately shown how widespread this discussion was among German Jews, ranging from social scientists to social workers.<sup>167</sup> The demographic decline of the German Jews was seen as a pathological condition that required radical cures, whether in the form of Zionism or in that of cultural renewal.

In this context, Rosenzweig’s ideology of procreation and blood community was less a description than it was a utopian prescription. This is the way his book needs to be understood: as a program for Jewish renewal in the precise situation in which the German Jews found themselves at the beginning of the Weimar Republic, but a program of renewal whose vocabulary came directly from the author’s Jewish and German milieus.<sup>168</sup> His personal preoccupation with love and marriage at the time he wrote the book became the prism through which he addressed the larger crisis that had seized the imagination of the Weimar Jews. In this, he was speaking the same language as the Zionists, who also preached the need for renewed fertility. Only their blood community required soil, while his did not.

With Rosenzweig, we come to the end of this survey of blood in modern Jewish culture. From defense against the blood libel to the idea of a Jewish blood community, the language of blood ran like a red thread through this culture as it searched to find new moorings in the modern world. Moses Hess served as the historical pivot between these two ideas. Turning, by his own account, away from cosmopolitanism and to Jewish nationalism as a result of the Damascus Blood Libel, Hess identified the Jews as a race, a blood community. Sixty years separated Hess’s *Rome and Jerusalem* from Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption*, the

two standing as bookends for a central European discourse that came to an end with the Nazis. To be sure, Zionist writers like Uri Zvi Greenberg continued using the language of blood even later, but for that very reason, their ideas seemed increasingly extreme and marginal.

Between the violence of the blood libel and the utopianism of the blood community runs a much darker current: the blood of the Jews spilled in the greatest genocide in human history. It was this, and not the accusations against the Jews, that constituted the real ritual murder of the twentieth century. And if the Nazis irretrievably polluted the concept of a blood community, perhaps their bloody deeds created a very different kind of blood identity: solidarity with the victims. Let the final words here be those of the Polish Jewish poet Julian Tuwim, who in his 1944 Holocaust manifesto *We Polish Jews*, redolent with ironic Christian imagery, rejected the racial community of Jewish blood for another kind of identification with his people:

There are two kinds of blood: the blood that flows inside the veins and the blood that spurts out of them. The first is the sap of the body, and as such comes [only] under the realm of physiologists. . . . Never since the dawn of mankind has there been such a flood of martyr blood, and the blood of Jews (not "Jewish blood") flows in widest and deepest streams. Already its blackening rivulets are flowing together into a tempestuous river AND IT IS IN THIS NEW JORDAN THAT I BEG TO RECEIVE THE BAPTISM OF BAPTISMS: THE BLOOD, BURNING, MARTYRED BROTHERHOOD OF JEWS. Take me, my brethren, into that glorious bond of Innocently Shed Blood. To that community, to that church I want to belong.<sup>169</sup>

# Epilogue

## *Blood and Belief*

By a historical coincidence, just as the Nazis were using blood to perpetrate the greatest genocide in history, Oswald T. Avery and his coworkers showed in 1944 that it was DNA—and not blood—that transmitted genetic information. Those who continued to speak of blood as the agent of genetics could do so only metaphorically: the correct language now had to be that of genes. With the elucidation of the structure of DNA by James Watson and Francis Crick in 1953, modern genetics was born. These fundamental discoveries, and all those that built upon them, promised to track the mixing and migration of populations and thus to answer, once and for all, the question of race.<sup>1</sup>

Such answers, though, have been hard in coming. While the latest genetics, arguing for the fundamental similarity of all *Homo sapiens*, seem to contradict the idea of race as a biological category,<sup>2</sup> other research has brought race in through the back door.<sup>3</sup> So, for example, race-based medicine (the design of drugs for specific ancestral groups, such as those of African descent) assumes that genetic differences between groups may have meaningful biological consequences. And the increasing demand for DNA testing to determine the origin of one's ancestors demonstrates that such differences continue to have a strong hold on the popular imagination.<sup>4</sup>

To judge by articles in the popular press reporting on genetic research, the origin of the Jews also continues to be of enormous and compelling interest.<sup>5</sup> Since the Y chromosome is inherited only through



the paternal line and mitochondrial DNA only through the maternal, analysis of mutations in these two sex-linked genes offers the possibility of tracing populations backed to their founding fathers and mothers. For example, investigations in mitochondrial DNA have shown that all human beings descend from a common mother (the “African Eve”) some 150,000 years ago.

Applying the same kind of research to the Jews has, however, yielded contradictory results.<sup>6</sup> Some suggest that the Jews have conserved their genetic makeup since antiquity. For instance, a recent study of Ashkenazic women has shown that there were just four founders, who probably came from the Middle East.<sup>7</sup> This study seems to contradict a theory that the male founders of the Ashkenazim took local wives when they migrated to northern Europe and converted them. Instead, it would appear that these founders established their new communities in small family groups whose origins go back to the Roman Empire, if not earlier.

Studies of the Y chromosome of those from the priestly lineage (*kohanim*) also seem to show a high degree of genetic purity, that is, that very few nonpriests have entered this line.<sup>8</sup> Some of these studies yielded the surprising result that a tribe from southern Africa, the Lemba, may have descended in part from the *kohanim*.<sup>9</sup> Since similar haplotypes have been found in Yemen, some have speculated that groups of priests, whom we know were in Yemen, migrated to Africa, ending up eventually in southern Africa, where they became part of the Lemba. This people exhibits some behaviors, such as circumcision and not eating pork, that may come from Jewish origins.

However, a study of Ashkenazic Jews who carry the family tradition that they are Levites shows the opposite of a homogeneous ethnic group that migrated from the Middle East.<sup>10</sup> The tentative—and surprising—conclusion is that the Ashkenazic Levites show little resemblance to Sephardic Levites or other Jews, for that matter, regardless of their status. Instead, they appear to resemble most closely several non-Jewish eastern European populations. The authors postulate that despite the fact that the identity of Levites—like *kohanim*—derives from the father, a non-Jewish man converted to Judaism, probably to marry a daughter of a Levite, and took on the status of his in-laws. Through the luck of the genetic draw, he became the founder of all subsequent Ashkenazic Levites. Yet most Ashkenazic Jews who are not Levites appear to descend from Roman Jews, a community whose origins go back to the Roman Empire.

As with the larger question of race in human genetics, the genetic purity of the Jews remains elusive. Their far-flung communities have genetic ties to each other, with their origins clearly in the Middle East.<sup>11</sup> Sephardic Jews are virtually indistinguishable from Iraqi Jews and share a lesser, but still great, degree of genetic similarity with Ashkenazic Jews. But the Jews also resemble to a greater or lesser degree the non-Jewish populations among whom they have lived, and especially the Palestinian Arabs who inhabit the region from which they originally came.<sup>12</sup> In short, genetics points in two opposite, but not surprising, directions: Jews have maintained a high degree of genetic uniformity but have also incorporated other populations into their gene pool.

As Raphael Falk has argued, the question of Jewish genetics is not solely a scientific one, since the way one interprets the science, the uses one puts it to, and the very way in which one poses the questions are cultural and political, rather than only scientific.<sup>13</sup> Those who, like the author Arthur Koestler, have an ideological interest in disproving the genetic purity of the Jews could certainly find ample evidence in the science to do so.<sup>14</sup> On the other side of the coin, those who want to reinforce popular belief about the genetic unity of the Jewish people can also invoke scientific studies that seem to support their case. As we see with the Lemba, Jewish genetics has also been pressed into service in the search for “lost tribes,” a romantic quest that owes more to modern nationalism than to actual history.<sup>15</sup> One could even imagine that those who favor a binational—as opposed to a Jewish—state in what is now Israel might point to the genetic similarity between Jews and Palestinians, an argument for common kinship that some early Zionists already made a hundred years ago, before the Jewish-Arab conflict began in earnest.

The Bible itself provides a complex picture of the origins of the Jews, one that hardly supports a monolithic position like one of the two above. On the one hand, all Israelites are said to descend from the patriarch Jacob and his twelve sons. But, as in most tribal, patriarchal societies, these sons could—and did—bring foreign women into their clans, thus mixing their own “blood” (or genes) with those of their neighbors. When the Israelites left Egypt, we are told that they did so as a “mixed multitude” (*erev rau*, Ex. 12:38), suggesting that whatever tribal unity might have existed in patriarchal times was now irretrievably lost. The attempt by Ezra the Scribe in the fifth century B.C.E. to impose genetic uniformity on the “holy seed” never took hold, despite occasional attempts by later Jewish thinkers, such as the twelfth-century philosopher Judah Halevi, to revive it. In modern times Jewish diversity has all but

stymied those, both Jews and their enemies, who have attempted to define the Jews as a racial or blood community.

Perhaps no Jewish community has challenged the idea of a Jewish race as much as the Ethiopian Jews, or Beta Israel, who immigrated to Israel in 1977, 1984, and again in 1991. The folklorist Hagar Salamon has described the extraordinary revolution in identity that occurred when these Jews came to Israel.<sup>16</sup> While the Beta Israel saw themselves as lighter-skinned than their Christian neighbors in Ethiopia, a racialized phenotype was not central to their identity. When they arrived in Israel, they were suddenly subjected to racial typing according to skin color: they “became” black. Moreover, this new black identity was one that distinguished them not from non-Jews, but from other Jews. The explicit language of blood was rarely invoked in Israeli discourse, but racial—and at times even racist—language sometimes was.

The challenge that the Beta Israel posed to Israeli society was nothing short of the question Who is a Jew? And What does a Jew look like? What does an Ethiopian, who observes religious laws based mainly on the Bible, but not on the Talmud, have in common with a Russian Jew who follows neither? Absent a common religion, is there an ethnic or biological marker that links them? In what sense, if any, can one speak of a community of Jewish blood? Such questions, seemingly laid to rest by the Holocaust, have recurred with new intensity in the wake of the creation of Israel and the ingathering of the “exiles” from far-flung lands.

The identity of the Beta Israel in Ethiopia was not based on racial characteristics, but, as Salamon has shown, it was most definitely based on blood: not the blood inside their veins, but rather their blood manipulations and rituals.<sup>17</sup> Blood in this sense played a central role in differentiating this minority group from the majority Christians in Ethiopia. The Jews believed that their Christian neighbors were polluted for three reasons: because they did not observe the laws of menstrual purity, because they failed to slaughter meat with a sharp knife, and because they ate blood with their meat. Pollution with menstrual blood was considered so severe that the Jews made it a practice not to have any physical contact with their Christian neighbors, even in celebrations to which the latter might be invited. The use of what seemed to the Jews dull knives bespoke Christian cruelty toward animals, symbolic of Christians’ cruelty generally. Finally, the Christian custom of eating meat with the blood still in it merged in Jewish eyes with what the Jews knew of the Christian belief in the consumption of the blood of Christ.

The Christians, for their part, thought that the Jews practiced strange and magical blood rites. When the Jews slaughtered a lamb for Passover and, according to local practice, hung the carcass on a tree to drain it of its blood, the Christians believed that they were reenacting the crucifixion of Christ, a crime of which they believed the Jews still to be guilty. They also believed that this Jewish bloodthirstiness continued to the present day. The Christians labeled the Jews a “hyena people” who looked human during the day but turned into bloodsucking hyenas (*buda*) at night. Here the vampire myth from northern Europe found its African equivalent and also a parallel to the African vampire stories mentioned in the introduction to this book. Even though Jews and Christians had very different blood practices and beliefs, Salamon argues that each group was deeply bound up in what the other practiced—and even more in what they *believed* the other practiced. The identity of each found definition through the other.

This fascinating evidence from an exotic Jewish community, whose identity remains the subject of both myth and controversy, captures many of the themes that we have encountered in these pages. Already in the biblical period, blood served as a fundamental marker of difference between the Jews and their neighbors. Yet some of these differences lay more in Israelite imagination than in the actual practices of Canaanite culture. Menstrual blood in particular came to be symbolic of pollution of the land by foreigners, as well as those who betrayed the strictures of orthodox Yahwists. Crossing between ritual and moral pollution, menstrual blood symbolized the system as a whole.

The complex dialectic Salamon has described between the Beta Israel and Christian Ethiopians also finds confirmation in the ideas about the blood of the covenant debated by rabbis and church fathers in the early centuries of the Common Era. Against the backdrop of the question of which religion was the chosen of God, the strange ritual of Exodus 24, in which Moses throws blood on the people, continued to resonate. What might substitute for animal sacrifice after the ultimate sacrifice of Christ for Christians and the destruction of the temple for Jews? In what ways could blood still serve as a medium for initiation or conversion? Here the blood of circumcision became increasingly important for Jews, quite possibly as a carnal response to the Christians’ own symbolic blood rituals. And for both Christians and Jews, a new form of covenantal blood might be found in the blood spilled by their respective martyrs.

In the Middle Ages, we have seen how ideas about God’s anatomy, and specifically God’s blood, came to be a common language over which

Jews and Christians debated their differences. Believing that human beings shared blood with God, Jews countered the Christian worship of God's blood and body with their own divine hematology. The blood of menstruation now came to symbolize the radical difference between Jews and Christians: while the latter, in their failure to observe menstrual purity, caused the supernal Mother to menstruate, the former, in strictly following the menstrual laws, purified her of this pollution. Women thus had their own blood of the covenant to match men's blood of circumcision. And if Christians "feminized" Jewish men by claiming that they menstruated, the Jews responded that *they* represented true masculinity, while male and female Christians, in failing to observe the menstrual laws, were all polluted by female blood.

In addition, the medieval ritual-murder accusation, though no doubt owing its power to folkloric beliefs about witches and vampires, gained force and focus from medieval theology: the new dogma of the real presence gave symbolic literalism to the sacrament of wine and wafer. The Jews were pressed into service to give such literalism additional physicality by ostensibly consuming Christian blood and causing the Host to bleed. In the modern period, though, the renewed blood libel largely lost these theological overtones and came to stand for the Jews' rapacious greed: just as they sucked the blood out of Christian children, so they sucked the financial blood out of Christian society. The blood libel stood as well for the Jews' bloodthirstiness: the alleged cruelty with which they slaughtered animals was the same cruelty with which they were believed to kill Christians.

But side-by-side with this renewed and secularized medieval accusation was a new one: rather than sucking the blood *out* of Christians, the Jews sought to inject it *into* their bodies through miscegenation. The new European racial anti-Semitism may well have had its roots in the Spanish *limpieza de sangre*, since its social context was like that of Spain: large numbers of Jews who sought to enter Christian society either as converts or, in the modern case, as acculturated Europeans. As European nationalisms defined their nations as blood communities, those seen as not belonging to the racial stock had to be drummed out of the *Volk*. These ideas, widespread though they were in Europe, found their most virulent expression in German-speaking lands and, ultimately, with the Nazis.

As we observed in chapter 5, the Jews were not immune to these ideas. While combating the modern resurgence of the blood libel, some also turned to ideas of blood community. As religion lost its sway, biology

stepped in as the primary marker of identity. That Zionism, itself a product of European nationalism, sometimes embraced these ideas cannot be a surprise, but it was not only Zionists who did so. In Franz Rosenzweig's reaction against a Jewish form of "blood and soil," he adopted his own version of a *Blutgemeinschaft*.

The shifting meanings of blood throughout Jewish history demonstrate that race or blood community is only one of these meanings. The very historicity of the concept undermines the arguments of those who would insist that it is essential. Race, as many students of culture have rightly insisted, is a contingent, social invention more than a biological fact. In the final analysis, identity is a question of belief rather than of blood. Jewish history supports such a conclusion as much, if not more, than it supports biological ethnicity. Instead of race, the Bible offers a different definition of blood community. The strange text in Exodus 24 that has preoccupied us in this book speaks of a "covenant of blood" between God and Israel. This covenant takes effect when Moses throws half the blood of a bull sacrifice on the altar and half on the people. Blood rituals, those that are real, those that are symbolic, and those that are *both* real and symbolic, enact and reenact this covenant. And even when most of these rituals are shrouded in the distant past, like the sacrifices that have not been performed for two thousand years, their memory can be conjured up in the written tradition that beats in the heart of this community of blood.



# Notes

## INTRODUCTION

1. Luis White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley, CA, 2000).
2. Ibid., 14.
3. See Stephen D. Arata, "The Occidental Tourist: Dracula and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization," *Victorian Studies* 33, no. 4 (1990): 621–45.
4. For a second-century example, see Tertullian, *Apology*, chs. 7–8, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, MI, 1997), 3:23–24.
5. Alan Dundes, "The Ritual Murder or Blood Libel Legend: A Study of Anti-Semitic Victimization through Projective Inversion," in *The Blood Libel Legend: A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (Madison, WI, 1991), 336–78.
6. Roy Wagner, *Symbols That Stand for Themselves* (Chicago, 1986).
7. It must be added that menstruation need not necessarily engender the sense that the body is in danger, although male constructions of menstruation typically seem motivated by this fear.
8. For an interesting treatment of this theme, see Jean-Paul Roux, *Le sang: Mythes, symboles et réalités* (Paris, 1988), 11–14. See more generally the classic article of Victor Turner, "Symbols in African Ritual," in *Symbolic Anthropology*, ed. Janet L. Dolgin, David S. Kemnitzer, and David M. Schneider (New York, 1987), 183–94.
9. For an example of the former, see Lev. 17:11, and of the latter, see Gen. 7:15 and 7:22; Ezek. 37.
10. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, rev. ed., trans. James Harle Bell, John Richard von Sturmer, and Rodney Needham (London, 1969), esp. 478–97.



11. Richard Titmuss, *The Gift Relationship: From Human Blood to Social Policy* (New York, 1997).

12. *Merchant of Venice* 3.1.54.

13. Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton, NJ, 2004).

14. See Christian Holtor, “My Blood for Thee,” in *Blood: Art, Power, Politics, and Pathology*, ed. James M. Bradburne (Munich, 2001), 27.

15. For a theoretical exposition of my position, see David Biale, “Towards a Cultural History of the Jews,” in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, ed. David Biale (New York, 2002). I owe the use of the term *circulation* to the new historicism pioneered by Stephen Greenblatt in his *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley, CA, 1988).

16. See Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. Barbara Harshav and Jonathan Chipman (Berkeley, CA, 2006).

17. David Warren Sabean, *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, U.K., 1984).

18. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra* (Stuttgart, Germany, 1956), 41, my translation. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

# I. POLLUTION AND POWER

I base my translation on Jacob Milgrom, *The Anchor Bible: Leviticus 17–22* (New York, 2000), 1448, but revise Milgrom based on Baruch Levine, *Leviticus: The JPS Commentary* (Philadelphia, 1989), 116, where Levine argues that the *bet* may be understood as “the *bet* of price,” as in *nefesh be-nefesh* (Deut. 19:21—Levine incorrectly states Deut. 19:33, which does not exist): “life in exchange for life.” Naturally, the correct translation is the source of much scholarly debate. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1472–79 for a discussion and a bibliography.

All biblical translations are based on the New JPS Translation of *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia, 1988) unless otherwise noted. I have on occasion modified the JPS translation based on the Masoretic text.

1. Stephen Geller, “Blood Cult: Toward a Literary Theology of the Priestly Work of the Pentateuch,” *Prooftexts* 12, no. 2 (May 1992): 97–124.

2. I am also not persuaded by Geller’s claim that Deuteronomy represented a verbal religion: sacrifice plays a central role in it, albeit in the service of its ideology of centralization of the cult. For all its well-known differences from the priestly writings, Deuteronomy itself is hardly a book hostile to blood sacrifices; but more to the point, the priestly writings themselves, like Deuteronomy, are also writings.

3. Dennis J. McCarthy, “The Symbolism of Blood and Sacrifice,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 166–76, and “Further Notes on the Symbolism of Blood and Sacrifice,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92 (1973): 205–11. See also M. Vervenne, “The Blood Is the Life and the Life Is the Blood,” in *Ritual and Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. Quaegebeur (Louvain, Belgium, 1993), 451–70.

4. *Dictionnaire de la Bible supplément* (Paris, 1991), s.v. “Sang,” by H. Cazelles.

5. “They smear with blood the golden god, the wall, the utensils of the entirely new god. The new god and the temple become clean.” Quoted in David Pearson Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity* (Atlanta, 1987), 36 n. 67.

6. Cazelles, “Sang.”

7. See Ezek. 44:7: “when you offer up my food [*lahmi*], the fat and blood.” It is not clear, however, whether this means that God actually eats. In any case, although Ezekiel was a priest, there is no parallel to this statement anywhere else in the priestly corpus. See William K. Gilders, *Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible* (Baltimore, 2004), 150. Another passage that suggests the possibility that God actually “eats” the sacrifices is Lev. 9:24: “Fire came forth from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat parts on the altar.” But it is the fire that “goes before” (*mi-li-fnei*) God and appears to do the consuming.

8. Jacob Milgrom, *The Anchor Bible: Leviticus 1–16* (New York, 1991), and *Leviticus 17–22*. See Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, for qualifications to Milgrom’s arguments.

9. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 1002.

10. *Ibid.*, 1003.

11. *Ibid.*; Israel Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis, 1994). On the differences between Leviticus 17 and the P documents, see Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 12–32.

12. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 253–61: involuntary individual sins defile the sacrificial altar; involuntary communal or priestly sins defile the inner altar; and finally, “brazen and unrepented offenses” defile the ark itself, the innermost part of the temple.

13. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1571–80. Milgrom wavers between regarding “moral impurity” as literal or metaphorical defilement. Jonathan Klawans argues strongly for a literal understanding of the effect of these sins. The priestly documents thus contain two types of defilement: ritual and moral. See his *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Israel* (New York, 2000), esp. 3–42. (Klawans offers an excellent overview of the literature on this subject preceding the publication of Milgrom’s second volume of his Leviticus commentary.) See further Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel,” in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth*, ed. Carol L. Meyers and M. O’Connor (Winona Lake, IN, 1983), 399–414. Frymer-Kensky prefers the term *danger pollutions*, since these kinds of impurities can bring on catastrophic consequences, particularly ejection of the Israelites from their land. More recently, Christine Hayes has built upon Klawans’s argument in order to investigate the impurity associated with Gentiles. See her book *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Inter marriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (Oxford, 2002), esp. ch. 2.

14. Frymer-Kensky already pointed this out, albeit without adequately explaining why this particular transgression occupies both categories. See “Pollution in Biblical Israel,” 405.

15. This is perhaps the overarching conclusion of Gilders’s *Blood Ritual*, which goes far in questioning many of the assumptions that earlier scholars have imposed on the texts. For Gilders, the Bible describes rituals that have instrumental meaning or that establish practice; these meanings do not tell us much about the reasons behind them. In his conclusion, Gilders attempts to

infer some “latent” meanings in the text, but he does not pretend that these are provable from the texts themselves.

16. Gilders argues that the Holiness Code is the only textual stratum to give an explicit meaning to blood as embodying life and that one cannot infer from this what it meant to the earlier Priestly Code. (Gilders accepts Knohl’s and Milgrom’s arguments that P precedes H.)

17. Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 8 and 189. See also Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity* (Chicago, 1992), 6–7.

18. The term *Holy Land* is postbiblical, although the ideas that God dwells in the land of the Israelites and not in other lands, and that the land can be defiled, suggest that some notion of a Holy Land is already at work in biblical religion.

19. The word for *pollution* here is different from that of the Levitical passages, which use *tm* or *tvh* (*hnf* is attested in various prophets, such as Isaiah, Micah, and especially Jeremiah, as well as in Psalms and Job). The passage in Numbers is usually assigned to H since it involves pollution of the land, which is one of H’s signatures; however, the language of pollution is not that of H.

20. See Raphael Patai, “The ‘Egla arufa’ or the Expiation of the Polluted Land,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 20 (1939–40): 63–64.

21. See Moshe Greenberg, “Some Postulates of Biblical Law,” in *The Jewish Expression*, ed. Judah Goldin (New Haven, CT, 1976), 18–37.

22. My translation here is admittedly idiosyncratic. All others I have consulted conflate the words *dam* and *nefesh* and render “life-blood.” But this violates the grammar of the verse, which has a direct object (“your [pl.] blood”) and an indirect object (“for [or in payment for] your souls”). What makes this passage in Genesis additionally perplexing is that God demands the same compensation from animals as from humans. Does this mean that animals that kill other animals must pay with their lives? The law in Ex. 21:35–36 about an ox that kills a neighboring ox does not support this conclusion. Or does it refer to animals that kill humans?

23. William Propp, *Anchor Bible Exodus* 1–18 (New York, 1998), 437. I thank Ronald Hendel for drawing my attention to Propp’s original argument.

24. Bernard Levinson argues that the blood on the doorposts and the lintel marks a ritual boundary between the zone of safety (inside the house) and the demonic realm outside. This marking is much the same as the way blood marks the temple as a holy or protected zone. See Bernard M. Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation* (New York, 1997), 58–59.

25. Propp, *Anchor Bible Exodus*, 233–38. Propp argues that the plural, *damim*, refers specifically to bloodguilt and that this is the explanation of the mysterious phrase *hatan damim* (usually translated “bridegroom of blood”). He also claims that Moses was not technically guilty of homicide, but rather of manslaughter: his flight to Midian was like flight to a city of refuge. The ritual of atonement implicit in the circumcision was equivalent to the atoning value of the death of the high priest in the law of the cities of refuge (Num. 35:25–28). This is the only place in the Bible where the *blood* of circumcision plays a role. In rabbinic literature, it became much more important, as I discuss in chapter 2.

26. Aeschylus, *The Choephoroi*, 401–3, in *The Oresteian Trilogy*, trans. Philip Vellacott (London, 1956).

27. Aeschylus, *The Eumenides*, 265–68, in *Oresteian Trilogy*.

28. As Milgrom notes, H did not consider idolatry defiling. This was an innovation of the seventh-century prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Milgrom believes that Baal worship had been effectively eradicated in the eighth century, the period in which he locates H, and that it did not recur until the time of Manasseh (*Leviticus* 17–22, 1575).

29. The interpolated “my” is in the New JPS translation of the Tanakh. It seems like the correct reading.

30. See Milgrom, *Leviticus* 1–16, 704–13, and *Leviticus* 17–22, 1472–79.

31. Baruch Schwartz, *Torat ha-Kedushah: Iyyunim ba-Hukah ha-Kohanit she-ba-Torah* (Jerusalem, 1999), 77.

32. See *ibid.*, 108–20, for a concise summary and refutation of the various alternatives. See, further, Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 158–80.

33. See Levine, *Leviticus*, on Lev. 1:4 and 17:11.

34. Schwartz, *Torat ha-Kedushah*, 117–20.

35. Moses Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago, 1963), 2.46 (pp. 585–86).

36. On Maimonides and the Kabbalists as prefiguring historical versus symbolic anthropological understandings, see Abraham Socher, “Of Divine Cunning and Prolonged Madness: Amos Funkenstein on Maimonides’ Historical Reasoning,” *Jewish Social Studies* 6, no. 1 (Fall 1999): 6–29.

37. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 2:46 (p. 587).

38. 1 Sam. 14:34 has *el ha-dam* (“toward the blood”), an equally puzzling phrase.

39. Joshua Grintz, “Do Not Eat on the Blood,” *Zion* 31, nos. 1–2 (1966): 1–17 (in Hebrew). Grintz has taken his description of these rites directly from W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods* (Boston, 1956), 221–22. The main sources for the practice are Herodotus, *History* 2.44, and Homer, *The Odyssey*, book 11 (for nourishing the dead).

40. Milgrom, *Leviticus* 17–22, 1490–93.

41. Although Milgrom has accepted Grintz, he does bring some possible objections. See *ibid.*, 1493.

42. See Levine, *Leviticus*, 132–33.

43. On this incident, see Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 54–58. The incident takes place immediately *before* Saul orders a night battle (1 Sam. 14:36), so it is not self-evident that the slaughter and the eating took place at night (one of the characteristics of chthonic worship). Grintz cannot hold at one and the same time that Saul’s troops were engaged in secular slaughter of animals for food *and* that they were sacrificing to the *chthonioi*. There is no evidence in 1 Sam. 14 that the troops are engaged in a ritual action, Greek or otherwise, including divination. It is also not convincing to argue that the Hebrew *artza* can only mean with the throat pointed downward, toward the earth, as one would expect from chthonic rites; it could just as well mean, given the context, *on* the earth. The text seems to suggest that Saul was the first to erect altars for slaughter of meat (1 Sam. 14:35). Since this is the point of Lev. 17, Grintz may

be correct in holding that that law, or some variant of it, must have been known to Saul, assuming that the story in Samuel is historical. But it is equally possible that the strange pericope of this incident (vv. 31–35) is a later interpolation, since it interrupts the logic of the story, which is about Jonathan's eating of honey while the rest of the troops fast.

44. Although the goats mentioned in these two texts have traditionally been understood as demons (see Rashi, Ibn Ezra, etc. ad loc.), the context would equally allow for translating "wild goats," since the only other demon mentioned is Lilith.

45. Following the suggestion in Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1966), 972.

46. Geller, "Blood Cult," 103–7; Milgrom, *Leviticus* 17–22, 1462.

47. Michael C. Astour, *Hellenosemitica: An Ethnic and Cultural Study in West Semitic Impact on Mycenaean Greece* (Leiden, 1967), 174–85. Astour argues that the Dionysian cult migrated to Mycenaean Greece from the Near East.

48. On the cult of Dionysos, see Guthrie, *Greeks and Their Gods*, 145–82; and Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. John Raffan (Cambridge, MA, 1985), 161–67.

49. The translation is Guthrie's in *Greeks and Their Gods*, 152. Gilbert Murray's translation in *The Complete Greek Drama*, ed. Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill Jr. (New York, 1938), 2:238, is different and less comprehensible.

50. *The Bacchae*, in Oates and O'Neill, *Complete Greek Drama*, 2:236.

51. See Astour, *Hellenosemitica*, 190, for this argument and the further claim that *satyr* is derived from Semitic roots meaning "to dismember" or "to destroy," which corresponds to one element in the Dionysian ritual. But for a demurral, see M. L. West, *The East Face of Helicon* (Oxford, 1997), 111 n. 29.

52. On women and *omophagia*, see Barbara Goff, *Citizen Bacchae: Women's Ritual Practice in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley, CA, 2004), 272.

53. A. Heinrichs, "Great Maenadism Reconsidered," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 82 (1978): 14–65. I thank Erich Gruen for referring me to Heinrichs's work.

54. See West, *East Face of Helicon*; and Astour, *Hellenosemitica*.

55. Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans: An Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, trans. Peter Bing (Berkeley, CA, 1983), 5. See Burkert's note 20 for sources. The technical term for sprinkling blood on the altars was *haimassein tous bamous*.

56. P. Stengel, *Die Opferbrauche der Griechen* (Leipzig, 1910), 117. See further F. T. van Straten, *Hiera kalá: Images of Sacrifice in Archaic and Classical Greece* (Leiden, 1995). The *aganot* in the Bible are mentioned only in the Exodus passage in which Moses throws blood on the people, which is discussed later in this chapter. They do not appear in the Levitical descriptions of sacrifices, where the way in which the blood is collected is not specified.

57. G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge, U.K., 1957), 211, no. 244.

58. See the summary of these views in Valentina Conticelli, "Sanguis Suavis: Blood between Microcosm and Macrocosm," in Bradburne, *Blood*, 55–63. On

the comparison between Greek and Israelite religion on the topic of blood, see Stanley K. Stowers, “On the Comparison of Blood in Greek and Israelite Ritual,” in *Hesed ve-Emet: Studies in Honor of Ernest S. Frerichs*, ed. Jodi Magness and Seymour Gitin (Atlanta, 1998), 179–96. Stowers is correct in contradicting Dennis McCarthy’s arguments that the Greeks associated blood with death and that the biblical religion was the only one that associated it with life. But he exaggerates when he says a consensus exists that blood played a very minor role in Greek religion. The work of Walter Burkert certainly proves the opposite. Stowers is, however, on the right track in challenging those who see in the biblical attitude a sort of exceptionalism.

59. Schwartz, *Torat ha-Kedushah*, 70–73. Schwartz argues that since God was held by the priests to dwell in the tabernacle, everything outside of it was the realm of the demons. This seems improbable: the secular space is never really called “demonic” in the priestly literature. Milgrom has argued convincingly against this view.

60. See Marcel Detienne, “Culinary Practices and the Spirit of Sacrifice” in *The Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Greeks*, ed. Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, trans. Paula Wissing (Chicago, 1989), 1–20.

61. See Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry* (Cambridge, MA, 1992).

62. See David Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel: Text and Psychology* (University Park, PA, 1993).

63. There is no evidence in Canaanite materials for ritual “prostitution” or other types of cultic sex. The Egyptians, the Hittites, and the ancient Arabs all forbade sex to those engaging in cultic activity. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 932–33. See further Mayer Gruber, “The Hebrew *qedesa* and Her Canaanite and Akkadian Cognates,” in his *The Motherhood of God and Other Studies* (Atlanta, 1992), 17–48. So, it is likely that the prophetic denunciation of such practices was simply unfounded polemic.

64. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Savage in Judaism* (Bloomington, IN, 1990), 183. See also Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1567.

65. On child sacrifice in the Bible, see Jon Levinson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven, CT, 1993).

66. On the evidence that this prohibition was directed not only at men but also at women, and on the implications for understanding the purity laws, see Mayer I. Gruber, “Purity and Impurity in Halakic Sources and Qumran Law,” in *Wholly Woman, Holy Blood: A Feminist Critique of Purity and Impurity*, ed. Kristin De Troyer, Judith A. Herbert, Judith Ann Johnson, and Anne-Marie Korte (Harrisburg, PA, 2003), 65–76.

67. See Hayes, *Gentile Impurities*, ch. 2. Hayes argues that Ezra instituted a new category of impurity: genealogical. It was this impurity that marriage to Gentiles incurred.

68. See Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution in Biblical Israel,” 401.

69. Hyam Maccoby has pointed out this problem with Milgrom’s argument, as well as some others that I shall be following here. See his *Ritual and Morality: The Ritual Purity System and Its Place in Judaism* (Cambridge, U.K.,

1999), 31. More recently, Deborah Ellens has shown convincingly that Lev. 15 contains two strata: the first treats women as inferior to men (the language of infirmity—*dawwah*—is used in v. 33 to describe menstruation); the second, later stratum reshapes the first into an egalitarian discourse in which menstrual blood and semen are similar since they are both genital discharges. Women, like men, are responsible for guarding the purity of sanctuaries. See her “Menstrual Impurity and Innovation in Leviticus 15,” in De Troyer, *Wholly Woman*, 29–44.

70. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London, 1966), 35–36. It should be noted in Douglas’s favor that she has tried to construct an argument beyond the sort of ethical—and therefore rather triumphalist—one that Milgrom has reverted to.

71. Leslie A. Cook, “Body Language: Women’s Rituals of Purification in the Bible and Mishna,” in *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*, ed. Rahel R. Wasserfall (Hanover, NH, 1999), 40–59.

72. *Ibid.*, 50 (emphasis in original).

73. See Leonie Archer, “Bound By Blood: Circumcision and Menstrual Taboo in Post-exilic Judaism,” in *After Eve: Women, Theology, and the Christian Tradition*, ed. Janet Martin Soskice (London, 1990), 38–61; Eilberg-Schwartz, *Savage in Judaism*, esp. 186–92; and Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Covenant of Blood: Circumcision and Gender in Rabbinic Judaism* (Chicago, 1996). The idea can be found in interpretations of Greek religion, as well as in history of religions in general (see the work of Arnold van Gennep in particular). See Robert Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford, 1983), for a bibliography. Nancy Jay has made the opposition between the blood of childbirth and the blood of sacrifice the cornerstone of her theory of patriarchal religion. See her *Throughout Your Generations Forever*. I have argued against this school of interpretation in my essay “Does Blood Have Gender in Jewish Culture?” in *Gendering the Jewish Past*, ed. Marc Raphael (Williamsburg, VA, 2002), 7–24.

74. The Bible does not contain this kind of physiological speculation, and we must remain agnostic about whether its authors considered menstrual blood to be female seed. Such was the much later view of Galen, who became the source for the idea as it appeared in rabbinic literature.

75. Nachmanides on Lev. 15:11, as quoted by Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 934.

76. b. *Yevamot* 107a; b. *Gittin* 81b; and b. *Ketubbot* 73a.

77. It needs to be pointed out that the various biblical texts seem to have a hierarchy in which pathological discharges are more polluting than menstrual blood, which, in turn, is more polluting than semen.

78. Quoted in Helen King, *Hippocrates’ Woman: Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece* (London, 1998), 89–90.

79. Quoted *ibid.*

80. King, *Hippocrates’ Woman*, 93. Nancy Jay turns the distinction between men who shed “controlled” blood in sacrifices and women who bleed uncontrollably into an argument for gender hierarchy. But, as Mayer Gruber has argued, women also performed sacrifices in ancient Israel. See his “Women in the Cult according to the Priestly Code,” in his book *Motherhood of God*, 49–68.

81. King, *Hippocrates' Woman*, 76. See also Hermann von Stade, "Women and Dirt," *Helios* 19, nos. 1–2 (1992): 15.

82. See Goff, *Citizen Bacchae*, 29.

83. Herodotus, *History*, trans. George Rawlinson (New York, 1928), 103.

84. Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution in Biblical Israel," 401. In the same sentence, Frymer-Kensky equates the parturient woman with a person who has touched death (a corpse), but the life/nonlife liminality of childbirth is essentially different from death, which is final.

85. Maccoby has suggested aspects of this argument. See *Ritual and Morality*, 49–50, 60. He goes too far, however, in claiming that "the female, more than the male, is involved in the birth-death cycle, and is therefore a greater focus of impurity, just because she represents a potentiality for a different religious orientation" (49–50). He believes that the double period of impurity imposed on a woman who gives birth to a girl instead of a boy (Lev. 12) has to do with a form of female spirituality that predates Israelite religion and has to do with worship of an Earth-Goddess (112, 208). Whatever the merits of this theory of alternative female spirituality, it seems a thin reed on which to rest the double impurity of the parturient. A better theory might be that a female child creates greater impurity because she herself will later, as a childbearing woman, enter the female cycle of menstrual impurity.

86. On this possible meaning of *karet*, see Levine, *Leviticus*, excursus 1.

87. See Anna S. Meigs, *Food, Sex, and Pollution: A New Guinea Religion* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1984), 128. See also A. S. Meigs, "A Papuan Perspective on Pollution," *Man* 13 (1978): 304–18.

88. See Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity* (Stanford, CA, 1999).

89. Meigs, *Food*, 111. Similar notions can be found among other New Guinean groups, such as the Siane and the Huli. See 132. Milgrom quotes Meigs but fails to understand the dual meaning of menstrual blood in the Hua's belief system.

90. Kathleen O'Grady, "The Semantics of Taboo: Menstrual Prohibitions in the Hebrew Bible," in De Troyer, *Wholly Woman*, 1–28.

91. See *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 10th ed., s.v. "Taboo," by James Frazer, and *The Golden Bough* (New York, 1959), 587.

92. O'Grady, "Semantics of Taboo," 28. One might argue speculatively that the nazir's vow to refrain from wine is the precise analogue of avoidance of blood, since, in the biblical lexicon, wine is the "blood of the grape" (Gen. 49:11).

93. Translating the first phrase with Milgrom, *Leviticus* 1–16, 945.

94. The grounds for arguing for an interpolation are the first-person possessive ("my Tabernacle") and the root *nzr*, which also appears in Lev. 22:4. See *ibid.*, 945–47.

95. Chris Knight, *Blood Relations: Menstruation and the Origins of Culture* (New Haven, CT, 1991).

96. My translation from the Masoretic text. For an analysis of textual variants on the passage and a bibliography, see Francesco Vattioni, "Il Sangue dell'Alleanza (Es. 24.8)," in *Atti della Settimana Sangue e Antropologia Biblica* (Rome, 1980), 2:497–513; and H. M. Kamsler, "The Blood Covenant in the Bible," *Dor le Dor* 6, no. 2 (1977–78): 94–98.



97. See the very useful analysis of Ronald S. Hendel, “Sacrifice as a Cultural System: The Ritual Symbolism of Exodus 24, 3–8,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 101, no. 3 (1989): 366–90. See his notes on 370–71 for a bibliography (up to 1989) on the possible meanings of “throwing the blood on the people.” For a more recent treatment, see Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 37–43.

98. Surprisingly little recent literature exists on this subject. For some cursory summaries of the textual evidence, see *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. “Anointing”; and *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1998), s.v. “Masah.”

99. See Jacob Milgrom, *Studies in Levitical Terminology*, vol. 1, *The Encroacher and the Levite—The Term Aboda* (Berkeley, CA, 1970).

100. See Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), 98.

101. Herodotus, *History*, trans. George Rawlinson (New York, 1932), 148.

102. Tertullian, *Apology*, ch. 9, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:25.

103. See H. Clay Trumbull, *The Blood Covenant: A Primitive Rite and Its Bearings on Scripture* (New York, 1885).

104. *Ibid.*, 64.

105. Jaroslav Cerny, “Reference to Blood Brotherhood among Semites in an Egyptian Text of the Ramesside Period,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 14 (1955): 162.

106. Quoted *ibid.* from H. Tegnaeus, *Blood-Brothers* (New York, 1952), 43.

107. Hendel argues against Robertson Smith that the throwing of the blood ought not to be understood as part of some genealogy in which the “primitive” drinking of the blood and eating the raw flesh of the sacrificed animal was replaced by eating it cooked and finally pouring it on an altar to be presumably eaten by a god. The throwing of the blood has no place in this chronology and ought to be understood instead as part of the cultural system of Israelite sacrifice.

108. Hendel, “Sacrifice as a Cultural System,” 388.

109. Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, trans. J. S. Bowden (Philadelphia, 1962), 198. See further Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 38.

## 2. BLOOD AND THE COVENANT

1. Guy G. Stroumsa, *La fin du sacrifice: Les mutations religieuses de l'Antiquité tardive* (Paris, 2005), 137, and, more generally, all of ch. 3. I thank Alison Frazier for bringing Stroumsa's important book to my attention.

2. See *ibid.*, 108–19.

3. On this interpretation, see in particular Alan Segal, *Rebecca's Children* (Cambridge, MA, 1986); Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*; Marc Hirschman, *A Rivalry of Genius: Jewish and Christian Biblical Interpretation in Late Antiquity*, trans. Batya Stein (Albany, NY, 1996); and Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, 2004).

4. Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton, NJ, 2001). Schwartz claims that during the period following the two revolts, Palestine was essentially “dejudaized” in the sense that most Jews lived fully Hellenized lives and identified as Jews only ethnically. The rabbis were a tiny

sect that preserved certain traditions. After the Christianization of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, synagogue-centered communities emerged in many places, although the rabbis themselves remained largely marginal to this development. For Schwartz, rabbinic Judaism as a hegemonic culture did not really take hold until the early Islamic period.

5. Exactly to whom this prophecy is addressed is perplexing, as is the phrase “blood of your covenant.”

6. For a discussion of the verb *zaraq* in the Bible, see Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 25–27.

7. See Francesco Vattioni, “Il Sangue dell’Alleanza (Es. 24.8),” in Vattioni, *Atti della Settimana Sangue*, 2:497–513; and B. Couroyer, *L’Exodie* (Paris, 1958), 115.

8. See the excellent discussion with literature (up to 1985) by O. S. Wintermute in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York, 1985), 2:35–51. See further, for more recent work, James C. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees* (Sheffield, U.K., 2001).

9. For a recent study of blood in *Jubilees*, see William K. Gilders, “Blood and Covenant: Interpretive Elaboration of Genesis 9:4–6 in the Book of *Jubilees*,” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 15, no. 2 (2006): 83–118.

10. See J. T. A. G. M. Van Ruiten, *Primaeval History Interpreted: The Rewriting of Genesis 1–11 in the Book of Jubilees* (Leiden, 2000), 240–45. See also James Kugel, *The Bible as It Was* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), 413; and, more generally, John C. Endres, *Biblical Interpretation in the Book of Jubilees* (Washington, DC, 1987).

11. Gilders, “Blood and Covenant,” 96.

12. One might infer indirectly from Ex. 19:1 that the giving of the Torah had to have happened, according to the Bible’s own chronology, eight weeks after the Exodus, rather than the rabbinic seven. Note that the Beta Israel from Ethiopia count seven weeks from the end of the week of Passover, which conforms more to the Bible than does any other Jewish tradition. The counting of fifty days comes from Lev. 23:15, where the context is purely agricultural and has nothing to do with the giving of the Torah. However, see Moshe Weinfield, “Pentecost as the Festival for the Giving of the Law,” *Immanuel* 8 (1978): 7–18, who believes that there are already biblical sources for the association between the holiday and the revelation at Sinai.

13. On this interpretation, see Levine, *Leviticus*, excursus 1.

14. *Covenant of Damascus* 3:5–7, in *The Dead Sea Scriptures*, ed. Theodor H. Gaster (Garden City, NY, 1964), 73. See Gilders, “Blood and Covenant,” 103.

15. See E. Isaac, “The Ethiopic Apocalypse of Enoch,” in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:5–90. This text is usually dated from the second century B.C.E. to the first century C.E.

16. *Life of Adam and Eve* 23:2, trans. M. D. Johnson, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:266. This text is thought to date in its lost Hebrew original from the first century B.C.E. to the second century C.E.

17. See further Hayes, *Gentile Impurities*, 73–81; and Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness* (Berkeley, CA, 1999), 241–62.

18. Philo, *Questions on Exodus*, book 2.35, trans. Ralph Marcus (Cambridge, MA, 1953), 77.
19. See especially Philo, *De specialibus legibus*, trans. Suzanne Daniel (Paris, 1975).
20. See Erwin Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus* (Oxford, 1962), 14, 134–60.
21. Philo, *Questions on Exodus*, 2.14.
22. Philo, *De specialibus legibus*, 1.277.
23. *Ibid.*, 1.275.
24. Philo, *On the Migration of Abraham*, in Philo, trans. F. H. Colson, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA, 1932), 4:126.
25. Philo, *Questions on Exodus*, 2.36, 78.
26. On the Eucharist in the New Testament, see Bruce Chilton, *A Feast of Meanings: Eucharistic Theologies from Jesus through Johannine Circles* (Leiden, 1994); E. Mazza, *The Celebration of the Eucharist: The Origin of the Rite and the Development of Its Interpretation* (Collegeville, MN, 1999).
27. Jonathan Klawans, “Interpreting the Last Supper: Sacrifice, Spiritualization, and Anti-Sacrifice,” *New Testament Studies* 48 (2002): 1–17.
28. See J. C. Basset, “L’anamnèse: Aux sources de la tradition chrétienne,” in *La mémoire des religions*, ed. P. Borgeaud (Geneva, Switzerland, 1988), 91–104; and Stroumsa, *La fin du sacrifice*, 129–32.
29. The Vulgate has “new covenant,” evidently harmonizing Matthew with Luke, but the Marcan formula seems more likely.
30. See Richard D. Nelson, “He Offered Himself: Sacrifice in Hebrews,” *Interpretation* 57, no. 3 (July 2003): 251–66. Nelson points out that the author of Hebrews does not necessarily reject temple sacrifices, but he considers the Christian alternative much more effective.
31. On hyssop, see R. K. Harrison, “The Biblical Problem of Hyssop,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 26 (1954): 218–24; and H. HaReuveni, “The Hyssop,” *Tarbiz* 21 (1949): 40–46 (in Hebrew).
32. *Nafshoteikhem*—the biblical word *nefesh* may not mean soul—as it is usually translated, in the sense of a force separate from the body.
33. See Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI, 1964–76), 1:176–77.
34. This is not the view of Nelson, who translates the Greek word as “sprinkling of blood,” which would then harmonize it with Exodus 24. Since the Greek word is a neologism, it is difficult to know exactly how to translate it, but the context seems to suggest that it is the shedding of blood in the case of Christ, rather than what is done with his blood, that effects atonement. The purification rituals apply only to the old sacrifices.
35. The Vulgate of Hebrews translates *diatheke* as *testamentum*, which Eusebius was the first to use in reference to the set of books we call the New Testament.
36. John Chrysostom, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. James Swetham (Rome, 1964), 22–23.
37. *Ibid.*

38. On this theme, see Stroumsa, *La fin du sacrifice*, ch. 2.
39. On the Eucharist in patristic literature, see Daniel J. Sheerin, *The Eucharist* (Wilmington, DE, 1986); and Edward J. Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West: History and Theology* (Collegeville, MN, 1998).
40. Derek Krueger, *Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East* (Philadelphia, 2004).
41. Romanos, *Hymns*, 18.7, translated in Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 160. See further 160–62.
42. Saint Ambrose, *Letters*, trans. Mary Melchior Beyenka (New York, 1954), 308. The translation lists this as letter no. 56, but in the *Patrologia Latina* (Paris, 1845), 16:1222–24, it is listed as no. 55 (so also in the 1881 Oxford translation of the letters). *Haurio* can mean to drain as well as to consume, so Ambrose's meaning is unclear.
43. For the most extensive discussion of this theme through Clement of Alexandria, see Robert J. Daly, *Christian Sacrifice* (Washington, DC, 1978).
44. Justin, *Apology*, 1.13.1, in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation: Writings of Justin Martyr*, trans. Thomas B. Falls (New York, 1948), 45.
45. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 7.35, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge, U.K., 1953), 422–23.
46. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, 100–600 (Chicago, 1971), 166–71; W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1984), 108; and Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800–1200* (New York, 2002), 10–11.
47. Melito of Sardis, *On Pascha*, trans. Alistair Stewart-Sykes (Crestwood, NY, 2001), sec. 32, p. 45.
48. Origen, “Dialogue with Heraclides,” in *Treatise on the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides*, trans. Robert J. Daly (New York, 1992), 66.
49. Origen, *Homily on Numbers*, 16.9 (commenting on Num. 23:24), trans. in Sheerin, *Eucharist*, 180–81.
50. Ibid.
51. Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, 3.16.24.
52. Clement of Alexandria *Paedagogus* 1.42.1–2. The passage follows an elaborate account of lactation that Clement allegorized. See also Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ*, ch. 6, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:538–39, where he gives a physiological account for why Mary could not have lactated. For a wonderful account of the medieval tradition of Jesus and male monastic abbots as nursing mothers, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, CA, 1982).
53. *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, Bahodesh, ch. 3, ed. and trans. Lauterbach, 2:211.
54. *Exodus Rabba* 1.26.
55. David Hoffman, *Midrash Tannaim Le-sepher Debarim* (Jerusalem, 1977), 57. See also Kugel, *The Bible as It Was*, 414.
56. On this passage, see Vattioni, “Il Sangue,” 502. Pseudo-Jonathan has the same reading with regard to the use of the blood for atonement, while the Targum Neofiti follows the Masoretic text more literally.
57. b. *Zevahim* 6a; b. *Yoma* 5a; b. *Menahot* 93b.

58. Robert Daly makes a methodological mistake when he says he believes that the “well-known rabbinic saying ‘without blood there is no forgiveness’ . . . was taken up by the Christian tradition” (*Christian Sacrifice*, 96). That later rabbinic texts use the phrase hardly proves that the author of Hebrews got it from rabbis.

59. b. *Megilla* 3b; b. *Makkot* 10a; b. *Menahot* 110b; b. *Sota* 5b; b. *Sukkot* 49a; *Lev. Rabba* 7.2; *Avot de Rabbi Natan*, ver. A, ch. 4.

60. For the idea of “memorials of the Temple” (*zekher la-mikdash*), see b. *Rosh Hashanah* 30a; *Yoma* 19b; and *Sukkah* 41a.

61. y. *Pesahim* 10:3.

62. *Mekhilta Bahodesh* ch. 10. See further David Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering in Rabbinic Literature* (New York, 1995); and Ra’anan Boostan, *From Martyr to Mystic: Rabbinic Martyrology and the Making of Merkavah Mysticism* (Tübingen, Germany, 2005), esp. 157. I thank Ra’anan Boostan for sharing with me the page proofs of his important study.

63. *Leviticus Rabba* 20:12.

64. *Tanhuma*, Ahare, 10, ed. S. Buber (Jerusalem, 1990), 35a. See Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Cambridge, MA, 1979), 611.

65. b. *Taanit* 27b. See also b. *Megilla* 31b; b. *Menahot* 110a; and *Lev. Rabba* 7.3.

66. b. *Pesahim* 65b.

67. b. *Berakhot* 17a.

68. Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 1.17.2–3, trans. in Daly, *Christian Sacrifice*, 332, with partial Greek text.

69. See Robert Wilkin, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late Fourth Century* (Berkeley, CA, 1983).

70. b. *Yevamot* 46b.

71. b. *Keritot* 9a.

72. See Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 198–238; and Gary G. Porton, *The Stranger within Your Gates: Converts and Conversion in Rabbinic Literature* (Chicago, 1994).

73. Hoffman, *Covenant of Blood*. Shaye J. D. Cohen takes issue with Hoffman and argues that before the *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, the blood of circumcision played little role in rabbinic texts. See his *Why Aren’t Jewish Women Circumcised? Gender and Covenant in Judaism* (Berkeley, CA, 2005), 28–29. I am not persuaded by Cohen’s position, and even if Hoffman has exaggerated his argument, he still brings significant textual proof for the importance of the blood of circumcision in texts of the tannaitic and amoraic periods. Nevertheless, both Hoffman and Cohen agree that the *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* gives the most definitive statement along these lines.

74. b. *Shabbat* 137b.

75. *Mekhilta* Bo ch. 5.

76. *Exodus Rabba* 15:13.

77. Hoffman, *Covenant of Blood*, 108–9.

78. *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, ch. 28. Hoffman, in *Covenant of Blood*, 103, has misread the passage and believes wrongly that the text uses the formulation “the covenant of circumcision blood” (*zekhut brit dam milah*). I thank Shaye

Cohen for pointing out Hoffman's error (Hoffman also incorrectly labels the relevant passage as coming from ch. 29). Even without this unprecedented locution, though, the text still treats the blood of circumcision as central. On the meaning of circumcision blood in the rabbinic texts, see further Cohen, *Why Aren't Jewish Women Circumcised?* 28–32.

79. *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* ch. 28. Oddly enough, though, the sacrifice that the author compares to circumcision more commonly has the meaning, at least in the Levitical sources, of a *meal*, rather than an animal, offering, although it can have the general meaning of any type of offering as well. One would have expected the more common *korban* or *zevah*, which the *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* uses in another place, where it equates the blood of circumcision with the blood of a sacrifice (*ke-dam zevah*). See ch. 9.

80. Geza Vermes, "Circumcision and Exodus IV 24–26," in his *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies*, 2nd, rev. ed. (Leiden, 1973), 182.

81. Hoffman, *Covenant of Blood*, 91, 112–15.

82. *y. Nedarim* ch. 3, p. 37.3. See also the Ein Yaakov on b. *Nedarim* 31b.

83. In the Middle Ages, the Talmudic commentator Rabbenu Nissim (Ran) noted this discrepancy but resolved it by explaining that because circumcision is called covenant, it can signify all the commandments.

84. Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Blood of Christ in the later Middle Ages," *Church History* 71, no. 4 (December 2002): 685–714.

85. Tertullian, *On Baptism*, ch. 16, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:677.

86. Chrysostom, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 22–23.

87. See a similar idea in Apollinarius, *Paschal Chronicle*, where he speaks of the water and blood that poured out of the wound in Christ's side as "word and spirit." Quoted in Milito of Sardis, *On Pascha*, trans. Alistair Stewart-Sykes (Crestwood, NY, 2001), 81–82.

88. For two different recent readings of martyrdom in late antiquity, see G. W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge, U.K., 1995); and Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, CA, 1999).

89. Origen, *Commentary on John* 6:54. See Robert Daly, "Sacrifice in Origen," *Studia Patristica* 11 (1972): 125–29.

90. Tertullian, *Apology*, ch. 50, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:55. Tertullian actually said, "The blood of the Christians is the seed" (*semen est sanguis Christianorum*), but both the context and later usage justify the more expanded version. For a modern interpretation of the phrase, see Matthew D. Lundberg, "The Blood of the Martyrs Is the Seed of Life: Liberation Theology, Martyrdom, and the Prophetic Dimension of Theology," *Koinonia* 14 (2004): 1–28.

91. John Chrysostom *Eulogy on Ignatius of Antioch* sec. 4.

92. *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, trans. Kirsopp Lake (London, 1913), 331.

93. Tertullian, *Scorpiace*, ch. 6, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:639.

94. Augustine, *In Answer to Petilian the Donatist*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Peabody, MA, 1994), 4:542–43. Augustine agrees with Petilian that martyrs are baptized in their own blood but says that it is the fault of the Donatists if they suffer martyrdom.

95. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton, NJ, 1993), 1:241–42.

96. See Yuval, *Shnei Amim*, 93.

97. There is a rabbinic parallel of sorts to this story, in which Pharaoh is afflicted with leprosy and is told by his magicians that he can be cured only by bathing twice a day in the blood of Israelite children. This drastic cure is averted when the Israelites beseech God, who cures Pharaoh through a miracle. The story appears in *Exodus Rabba* 1.34. For a comparison of the rabbinic and the Christian legends, see Israel Jacob Yuval, *Shnei Amim be-Vitnekh* (Jerusalem, 2000), 259.

98. For the way Jewish and Christian ideas of martyrdom interacted, see Boyarin, *Dying for God*.

99. Boostan, *From Martyr to Mystic*, 173–85.

100. *Midrash Eikha Rabba*, ed. S. Buber (Vilna, 1899), 84–86. Translation in Boostan, *From Martyr to Mystic*, 178. On the influence of the Maccabean martyrologies on later Jewish literature, see Gerson D. Cohen, “The Story of Hannah and Her Seven Sons in Hebrew Literature,” in *Mordechai M. Kaplan Jubilee Volume*, ed. Moshe Davis (New York, 1953), 109–22; and Boostan, *From Martyr to Mystic*, 178 n. 109.

101. *Story of the Ten Martyrs*, 1.50.6–8, translated in Boostan, *From Martyr to Mystic*, 181. See also the Midrash on Psalm 9:13.

102. See Joshua Schwartz, “Treading the Grapes of Wrath: The Wine Press in Ancient Jewish and Christian Tradition,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 49 (1993): 215–28, 311–24.

103. The imagery is taken from Isa. 63:1–4, where God’s day of vengeance is connected with Edom.

104. *Pesikta Rabbati* 37.7. See Boostan, *From Martyr to Mystic*, 183.

105. Midrash on Psalm 9:13, trans. based on *The Midrash on Psalms*, trans. William Braude (New Haven, CT, 1976), 1:144–46. See Boostan, *From Martyr to Mystic*, 184.

106. See Robert Duthoy, *The Taurobolium: Its Evolution and Terminology* (Leiden, 1969).

107. Neil McLynn, “The Fourth-Century Taurobolium,” *Phoenix* 50, nos. 3–4 (1996): 312–21.

### 3. GOD’S BLOOD

1. *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*, trans. Suzanne Noffke (Tempe, AZ, 2001), 2:26, letter T171/G217/60, late Feb. 1376. Some of the manuscript variants have “bathed,” others “baptized,” but it is clear from other writings by Catherine that she believed Christians were, indeed, baptized in Christ’s blood. For an excellent discussion of blood in medieval Christian Europe on both the elite and the folkloric level, see Uli Linke, *Blood and Nation: The European Aesthetics of Race* (Philadelphia, 1999), 65–156.

2. *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan*, in David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Polemic in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 1979), 229, no. 244. Another Jewish polemical response to the blood libel can be found in Joseph Official, *Sefer Yosef ha-Mekane*,

ed. J. Rosenthal (Jerusalem, 1970), 53–54, where the author claims that references to eating blood in the Bible must be understood metaphorically. For a survey of Jewish responses, see Andreas Angerstorfer, “Jüdische Reaction auf die mittelalterlichen Blutbeschuldigungen vom 13. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert,” in *Die Legende vom Ritualmord: Zur Geschichte der Blutbeschuldigung gegen Juden*, ed. Rainer Erb (Berlin, 1993), 133–56.

3. Israel Yuval, “Vengeance and Damnation, Blood and Defamation: From Jewish Martyrdom to Blood Libel Accusations,” *Zion* 55, no. 1 (1993): 33–90 (in Hebrew). Yuval has expanded this pathbreaking and controversial article in his *Shnei Goyim be-Vitnekh: Yehudim ve-Notzrim—Dimuyim Hadadiim* (Tel Aviv, 2000), translated by Harshav and Chipman as *Two Nations in Your Womb*.

4. Yuval’s article aroused considerable controversy. See the special double issue of *Zion* (59, nos. 2–3 [1994]), esp. the critiques by Ezra Fleischer, Mordecai Breuer, and Avraham Grossman, as well as Yuval’s reply.

5. Ivan G. Marcus, “A Jewish-Christian Symbiosis: The Culture of Early Ashkenaz,” in Biale, *Cultures of the Jews*, 449–518. See also Marcus’s *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe* (New Haven, CT, 1996). A similar approach can be found in Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*.

6. Jeremy Cohen, “The ‘Persecutions of 1096’—From Martyrdom to Martyrology: The Sociocultural Context of the Hebrew Crusade Chronicles,” *Zion* 59, nos. 2–3 (1994): 169–208. Cohen shows how the story of the massacre of the Jews of Xanten starts with a Sabbath meal that bears strong resemblances to the Christian mass and the Last Supper and how the story of Rachel and her four children uses the motifs of the “mother Church,” the Virgin Mary as *mater dolorosa*, and the female image of *Synagoga* in Christian iconography. See further his *Sanctifying the Name of God: Jewish Martyrs and Jewish Memories in the First Crusade* (Philadelphia, 2004).

7. Alger of Liège, *On the Sacraments*, 1.8, quoted in Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology, 600–1300* (Chicago, 1978), 206. For an extensive discussion of the rise of a literalist or physical interpretation of the Eucharist from the early Middle Ages through the twelfth century, see Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*.

8. Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, U.K., 1991).

9. See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, CA, 1987).

10. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*. On Moses and Aaron as nursemaids, see *Song of Songs Rabba* 4.13, in which the two breasts of the lover in the Song of Songs are interpreted as Moses and Aaron.

11. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 132–33.

12. Quoted *ibid.*, 123.

13. On blood, milk, and martyrdom, see Jean-Pierre Perrot, “Du sang au lait: L’imaginaire du sang et ses logiques dans les passions de martyrs,” in *Le sang au Moyen Age*, by Perrot (Montpellier, 1999), 459–70.

14. Bynum, “Blood of Christ.” See further Nicholas Vincent, *The Holy Blood: King Henry III and the Westminster Blood Relic* (Cambridge, U.K., 2001). For a more general treatment of blood in late medieval Christianity, see



Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia, 2006). Professor Bynum's book came out after this manuscript went to press.

15. See Oluf Schoenbeck, "Saint Bernard, Peter Damian, and the Wounds of Christ," *Cistercian Studies* 30 (1995): 282.

16. Rupert of Deutz *De Sancta Trinitate in Exodum* 3, lines 1813–14. The Ordinary Gloss understands the Latin *ablucio* to mean both sprinkling and baptism.

17. On the role of the blood of Christ and female mystics more generally, see Danielle Alexandre-Bidon, "La devotion au sang du Christ chez les femmes médiévales: Des mystiques aux laïques (XIIIe–XVIe siècle)," in Perrot, *Le sang au Moyen-Age*, 405–13.

18. *Letters of Catherine of Siena*, 2:48, T163/G347, Jan.–Apr. 1376.

19. *Ibid.*, 2:67–68, T101/G27/DT23 to Cardinal Iacopo Orsini, latter half of Mar. 1376.

20. *Ibid.*, 2:87–88, T208/G111/DT6, about Apr. 6–11, 1376.

21. See Gershom Scholem, "Tselem: The Concept of the Astral Body," in his *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah*, trans. Jonathan Chipman (New York, 1991), 251–73, and "Shiur Komah: The Mystical Shape of the Godhead," in Scholem, *Mystical Shape*, 15–55.

22. Arthur Green, "Shekhinah, the Virgin Mary, and the Song of Songs: Reflections on a Kabbalistic Symbol in Its Historical Context," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 26, no. 1 (Apr. 2002): 1–52. See also Yehuda Liebes, "Christian Influences on the Zohar," in his *Studies in the Zohar*, trans. Arnold Schwartz et al. (Albany, NY, 1993), 139–62.

23. See Gershom Scholem, "Farben und ihre Symbolik in der jüdischen überlieferung und Mystik," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 41 (1972): 1–49.

24. Zohar 2:20a–b.

25. *Ibid.*, 2:149b.

26. See especially Elliot R. Wolfson, "Circumcision, Vision of God, and Textual Interpretation: From Midrashic Trope to Mystical Symbol," *History of Religions* 27, no. 2 (1987): 189–215, and *Through the Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, NJ, 1994), and *Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism* (Albany, NY, 1995).

27. Zohar 3:91b.

28. See also Charles Mopsik, "The Masculine Woman," in his *Sex of the Soul: The Vicissitudes of Sexual Difference in Kabbalah* (Los Angeles, 2005), 5–52.

29. Zohar Hadash—Shir ha-Shirim 4:40, maamar dalet ve-mem sofit nif-tehu le-he ve-he.

30. On this theme in Jewish mystical literature, see Joel Hecker, *Mystical Bodies, Mystical Meals: Eating and Embodiment In Medieval Kabbalah* (Detroit, 2005). For Christian ideas about the connection between blood and food, see Vanessa Rousseau, *Le goût du sang: Croyances et polémiques dans la chrétienté occidentale* (Paris, 2005).

31. *Iggeret ha-Kodesh*, ch. 4, in *Kitve ha-Ramban*, ed. C. D. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1964). The *Iggeret ha-Kodesh* was traditionally attributed to Moses Nachmanides, but Gershom Scholem definitively showed that this attribution

was false. See his article “Did the Ramban write the *Iggeret Ha-Kodesh*?” in *Kiryat Sefer* 21 (1944–45): 179–86 (in Hebrew). Scholem suggested that the *Iggeret ha-Kodesh* was written by Joseph Gikatilla, another Spanish Kabbalist, although he later modified this judgment. Gikatilla’s authorship has received support from Charles Mopsik in his *Lettre sur la Sainteté: Le secret de la relation entre l’homme et la femme dans la cabale* (Lagrasse, 1986), 20–29. See further Chavel, *Kitve ha-Ramban*, 315–19. Chavel suggests that the author was either Azriel of Gerona or one of his students. Chavel’s edition of the text is the most scientific and is the one I have used here. See my discussion of this text and other Kabbalistic treatments of sexuality in *Eros and the Jews* (Berkeley, CA, 1997), ch. 5.

32. See Yehuda Liebes, “The Zohar and Eros,” *Alpayim* 9 (1994): 67–119 (in Hebrew).

33. Daniel Abrams, *Ha-Guf ha-Elohi ha-Nashi ba-Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 2005).

34. Isaac the Blind, *Commentary on Sefer Yitzira*, ch. 1, p. 43a (British Museum MS 11791). See Abrams, *Ha-Guf ha-Elohi*, 124–25.

35. Yom Tov Lipmann Mühlhausen, *Sefer ha-Nizzahon* (Jerusalem, 1984; photocopy of 1644 MS), 57.

36. For the Talmudic treatment of menstruation, see Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*.

37. See Sharon Koren, “The Woman from Whom God Wanders: The Menstruant in Medieval Jewish Mysticism” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1999), and “Mystical Rationales for the Laws of *Niddah*,” in Wasserfall, *Women and Water*, 101–21. For Jewish medical texts on menstruation, which have a far less pejorative tone, see Ron Barkai, *Les infortunes de Dinah ou la gynécologie juive au Moyen-Âge* (Paris, 1991); and Carmen Cabellero-Navas, *The Book of Women’s Love and Jewish Medieval Medical Literature on Women: Sefer Ahavat Nashim* (London, 2004). The broadest treatment of menstruation in rabbinic and medieval texts is by Evyatar Marienberg, *Niddah: Lorsque les juifs conceptualisent la menstruation* (Paris, 2003).

38. Zohar 3:79a, 1:190b. See Koren, “Woman,” 188–89.

39. See Zohar 1:126b. See also a virtually identical formulation in the work of the author of the Zohar’s contemporary Isaac of Acre, *Sefer Meirat Einayim*, 29. The midrash can be found in b. *Avodah Zara* 22b.

40. Zohar 3:249b.

41. *Etz Hayyim*, Shaar 35, ch. 3.

42. Isaiah Horowitz, *Toledot Adam*, Bet David I, translation in *The Generations of Adam*, trans. Miles Krassen (New York, 1996), 228.

43. Hananel, *Torat Hayyim*, Ex. 24:8, ad loc. Hananel lived in Egypt, so his commentary was not written within the realm of Jewish-Christian discourse. But it was known and used later in Christian Europe.

44. Isaac Magrisso, *Me-am Loez*, translated into Hebrew by Shmuel Yerushalmi (Jerusalem, 1969), 2:918, on Ex. 24:8. Magrisso took over the project from Jacob Hulli and completed the Exodus commentary in 1746. On *Me-am Loez*, see Aron Rodrigue, “The Ottoman Diaspora: The Rise and Fall of Ladino Literary Culture,” in Biale, *Cultures of the Jews*, 870–72.

45. Jerome Friedman, "Jewish Conversion, the Spanish Pure Blood Laws, and Reformation: A Revisionist View of Racial and Religious Antisemitism," *Sixteenth-Century Journal* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 3–30. See further Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition* (New York, 1968), and his more recent "Limpieza and the Ghost of Américo Castro: Racism as a Tool of Literary Analysis," *Hispanic Review* 64, no. 1 (1996): 19–29; see also Baltasar Cuart Moner, *Collegiales mayores y Limpieza de Sangre durante la Edad moderna*, (Salamanca, 1991); and Juan Hernández Franco, *Cultura y Limpieza de Sangre en la España moderna* (Murcia, 1997). I thank my colleague Katie Harris for suggesting some of this bibliography.

46. On Sephardic racial thinking, including the sense of superiority over Ashkenazic Jews, see Gordon M. Weiner, "Sephardic Philo- and Anti-Semitism in the Early Modern Era: The Jewish Adoption of Christian Attitudes," in *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. Richard Popkin and Gordon Weiner (Dordrecht, Netherlands, 1994), 189–214; Yosef Kaplan, "The Attitude of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews to the Ashkenazi Jews in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam" (in Hebrew), in *Transition and Change in Modern Jewish History: Essays Presented in Honor of Shmuel Ettinger* (Jerusalem, 1987), 389–412; and Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Assimilation and Racial Antisemitism: The Iberian and the German Models*, Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture no. 26 (New York, 1982). Kaplan demonstrates how the "Portuguese Nation" also discriminated against mulatto and black slaves who converted to Judaism.

47. See, for example, Philo, *Special Laws*, 1.8–9, trans. F. H. Colson (Cambridge, MA, 1937), 105; Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 3:49; and Judah Halevi *Sefer ha-Kuzari* 1:115.

48. Joseph Kimhi, *The Book of the Covenant*, trans. Frank Talmage (Toronto, 1972), 48.

49. Official, *Sefer Yosef ha-Mekane*, 91–92.

50. For a summary of some of the debates over the status of the conversos, see Friedman, "Jewish Conversion," 12–15. The question of how sincere the converts really were continues to plague historical scholarship. For an extreme view that argues that they were all sincere and that the Inquisition's accusations reflected a kind of proto-Nazi racism, see Ben Zion Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth-Century Spain* (New York, 1995). Other historians tend toward a more complex view in which some converts were sincere and others continued to preserve Jewish customs to one degree or another. But regardless of where one comes down on this question, it is clear that from a purely legal point of view, all converts, real or not, remained Jews. The only legal question if they returned to Judaism was what penance, if any, might be imposed. Netanyahu himself pointed this out in his *The Marranos of Spain from the Late XIV to the Early XVI Centuries according to Hebrew Sources* (New York, 1966).

51. See David Wachtel, "In Your Bloods Live: The Exegetical, Ritual, and Liturgical History of Ezekiel 16:6 in Medieval Ashkenaz," *Proceedings of the Twelfth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (1997).

52. Nizzahon Yashan, 92–93, no. 73, in Berger, *Jewish-Christian Polemic*.

53. Richard Schenk, "Covenant Initiation: Thomas Aquinas and Robert Kilwardby on the Sacrament of Circumcision," in *Hommage au Professeur*

Jean-Pierre Torrell OP, ed. Carlos-Josaphat Pinto de Oliveira (Fribourg, Switzerland, 1993), 555–93.

54. Yuval, “Vengeance and Damnation,” 85.

55. Petrus Alfonsi, *Dialogus Petri et Moysi Judaei*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne (London, 1996), 157, col. 659c. See further C. Merchavia, *Ha-Talmud be-Rei ha-Natzrut* (Jerusalem, 1979), 122.

56. Jacob ha-Gozer and Gershom ben Jacob ha-Gozer, *Zikbron Berit la-Rishonim*, ed. Y. Glasberg (Berlin, 1892), xiii. See the discussion in Simha Goldin, *Alebot Ahevukha, Al-Mot Ahevukha* (Tel Aviv, 2002), 178; and Abraham Gross, “The Blood Libel and the Blood of Circumcision: An Ashkenazic Custom That Disappeared in the Middle Ages,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 86, nos. 1–2 (July–Oct. 1995): 171–74.

57. See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Milah, 2:2.

58. Raymond Martini, *Pugio fidei adversus Mauros et Iudeos*, 3.3.11.18, p. 786, trans. in Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews* (Ithaca, NY, 1982), 150.

59. R. Po-chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven, CT, 1988), 20–21.

60. See R. Po-chia Hsia, *Trent 1475: Stories of a Ritual Murder Trial* (New Haven, CT, 1992). The famous woodcut is reproduced on 57.

61. Hsia, *Myth of Ritual Murder*, 121. The original source is Pfefferkorn *Speculum* sig. D 1–IV.

62. On various types of blood cures, see Andrew Gow, “‘Sanguis naturalis’ and ‘Sang de miracle’: Ancient Medicine, ‘Superstition,’ and the Metaphysics of Mediaeval Healing Miracles,” *Sudhoffs Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin und der Naturwissenschaften* 87, no. 2 (Dec. 2003): 129–58. Gow focuses primarily on the use of blood to cure diseases of the eye, based on the idea that the eye is the window into the soul, which, in turn, is conveyed by blood. But his discussion ranges widely and covers both medicinal uses of blood and other expressions of blood in medieval culture. For the connection between blood libel and medicinal uses of blood, see Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews* (New Haven, CT, 1943), 141–55; and also the classic work of Hermann Strack, *The Jew and Human Sacrifice: Human Blood and Jewish Ritual, an Historical and Sociological Inquiry* (London, 1909).

63. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton, NJ, 1993), 1:61 and 260–65.

64. Kathy Stuart, *Defiled Trades and Social Outcasts: Honor and Ritual Pollution in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, U.K., 1999).

65. *Letters of St. Catherine*, trans. Suzanne Noffke (Binghamton, NY, 1988), 1:110–11.

66. *Chroniques de France* (Paris, 1516), fol. 102, quoted in Reay Tannahill, *Flesh and Blood: A History of the Cannibal Complex*, rev. ed. (London, 1996), 87.

67. Arlette Farge and Jacques Revel, *The Vanishing Children of Paris: Rumor and Politics before the French Revolution*, trans. Claudia Miéville (Cambridge, MA, 1991).

68. On bloodsucking by witches, see Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 1972). Russell shows the close connections between

accusations against witches for ritual cannibalism performed on children and the blood libel against Jews. See esp. 251–52. For more on the associations and differences between witches and Jews, see Anna Foa, “The Witch and the Jew: Two Alikes that Were Not the Same,” in *From Witness to Witchcraft: Jews and Judaism in Medieval Christian Thought*, ed. Jeremy Cohen (Wiesbaden, Germany, 1996), 361–74; Ronald Po-chia Hsia, “Witchcraft, Magic, and the Jews in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany,” in Cohen, *From Witness to Witchcraft*, 419–34; and, classically, Trachtenberg, *Devil and the Jews*.

69. Marsilio Ficino, *Della Religione Christiane* (Florence, Italy, 1568), 59, trans. in Piero Camporesi, *The Juice of Life: The Symbolic and Magic Significance of Blood*, trans. Robert R. Barr (New York, 1995), 36–37.

70. On the history of blood transfusion, see Douglas Starr, *Blood: An Epic History of Medicine and Commerce* (New York, 1998); and Thomas Laqueur’s review of Starr, “Pint for Pint,” *London Review of Books*, Oct. 14, 1999.

71. Translated in Robert Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade* (Berkeley, CA, 1987), 237. On this trope, see further Marienberg, *Niddah*, 159–214.

72. *Nizzahon Yashan*, 68, no. 39, in Berger, *Jewish-Christian Polemic*.

73. *Ibid.*, 164–65, no. 152.

74. These arguments combine David Kimhi’s biblical exegesis and his polemical writings. See David Kimhi, *Radak al ha-Torah* (Jerusalem, 1974), on Gen. 2:7, and the polemical text attributed to him and published in translation by Frank Talmage, “A Hebrew Polemical Treatise,” *Harvard Theological Review* 60 (1967): 341–42. See further David Berger, “Christian Heresy and Jewish Polemic in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries,” *Harvard Theological Review* 68 (1975): 287–303.

75. See Charles T. Wood, “The Doctor’s Dilemma: Sin, Salvation, and the Menstrual Cycle in Medieval Thought,” *Speculum* 56, no. 4 (Oct. 1981): 710–27. I thank Adrienne Nock Ambrose for this reference and for her analysis of the question.

76. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 3a. 31, 5 (Cambridge, U.K., 1972), 52:25–29.

77. See Denise L. Despres, “Mary of the Eucharist: Cultic Anti-Judaism in Some Fourteenth-Century English Devotional Manuscripts,” in Cohen, *From Witness to Witchcraft*, 375–402.

78. Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 1999).

79. See James Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago, 1987), 53, 91–92, 156, 199, 242.

80. For an extended discussion of this trope, see Cohen, *Why Aren’t Jewish Women Circumcised?* 174–206.

81. *Nizzahon Yashan*, 224, no. 237, in Berger, *Jewish-Christian Polemic*.

82. *Ibid.*, 53, no. 16; see also 64, no. 33, where the menstrual blood is eliminated and the “binding of Isaac” substituted. This may mean that the author believed the midrash according to which Abraham actually spilled some of Isaac’s blood. Perhaps the author was uncomfortable with the inclusion of menstrual blood and sought an alternative.

83. Joseph Bekhor Shor, *Perushei Rabi Yosef Bekhor Shor al ha-Torah*, ed. Yehoshafat Nebo (Jerusalem, 1994), 29, on Gen. 17:11. I thank Shaye Cohen for bringing this important text—and probable source for the *Nizzahon Yashan*—to my attention. See further Cohen, *Why Aren't Jewish Women Circumcised?* 192–99.

84. Mühlhausen, *Sefer Nizzahon*, 19. See Cohen, *Why Aren't Jewish Women Circumcised?* 180–81.

85. *Nizzahon Yashan*, 224, no. 238, in Berger, *Jewish-Christian Polemic*. A similar text appears in *Sefer Yosef ha-Mekane*, by Joseph Official, ed. J. Rosenthal (Jerusalem, 1970), 95. For a discussion of this motif, see David Berger, “On the Image and Destiny of Gentiles in Ashkenazic Polemical Literature” (in Hebrew), in *Yehudim mul ha-Tzlav*, ed. Yom Tov Assis, Michael Toch, Jeremy Cohen, Ora Limor, and Aaron Kedar (Jerusalem, 2000), 74–91.

86. Lodovico Domenichi, *La nobilita delle donne* (Venice, 1549), fol. 26v, trans. in Camporesi, *Juice of Life*, 95.

87. See Willis Johnson, “The Myth of Jewish Male Menses,” *Journal of Medieval History* 24, no. 3 (1998): 273–95; and Peter Biller, “Views of Jews from Paris around 1300: Christian or ‘Scientific’?” in *Christianity and Judaism*, ed. Diana Wood, Studies in Church History, no. 29 (Cambridge, MA, 1992), 187–208.

88. Jacques de Vitry, *Histoire Orientale*, trans. Marie-Geneviève Grosselet (Geneva, Switzerland, 2005), 233. See also Irvén M. Resnick, “Medieval Roots of the Myth of Jewish Male Menses,” *Harvard Theological Review* 93, no. 3 (July 2000): 259. Resnick thus disproves Johnson’s claim that the belief that Jewish men bleed monthly is attested first in 1503.

89. Helen Rodnite Lemay, *Women’s Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus’ De Secretis Mulierum with Commentaries* (Albany, NY, 1992), 71 and 74.

90. Hsia, *Myth of Ritual Murder*, 130.

91. Resnick, “Medieval Roots,” 241–64.

92. Zohar 1:138a–139a (Midrash ha-Neelam).

93. Elliot R. Wolfson, “Re/membering the Covenant: Memory, Forgetfulness, and the Construction of History in the Zohar,” in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi*, ed. Elisheva Carlebach, John M. Efron, and David N. Myers (Hanover, NH, 1998), 216–17. I thank Elliot Wolfson for drawing the crucial passage in his article to my attention. See also Koren, “Woman,” 293. Some of the relevant passages are Zohar 1:131b and 2:3a–b.

94. Yom-Tov Assis, “Sexual Behavior in Medieval Hispano-Jewish Society,” in *Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky*, ed. Ada Rapoport-Albert and Steven J. Zipperstein (London, 1988), 25–60. The most typical direction for this miscegenation was between Jewish men and Muslim serving women.

95. See David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence* (Princeton, NJ, 1996). Nirenberg also provides evidence from the notarial archives in Aragon of sexual boundary-crossing between Jews and Christians (as well as Muslims) in the fourteenth century. For an extension of his argument to the fifteenth century, see his “Conversion, Sex, and Segregation: Jews and Christians in Medieval Spain,” *American Historical Review* 107, no. 4 (Oct. 2002): 1065–93.

96. For a recent discussion of the connection between sexual anxieties and the doctrine of *limpieza de sangre* in the fifteenth century, see Nirenberg, “Conversion, Sex, and Segregation.”

97. Barry Mark, “Kabbalistic Tocinofobia: Americo Castro, Limpieza de Sangre, and the Inner Meaning of Jewish Dietary Laws,” in *Fear and Its Representation in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Anne Scott and Cynthia Kosso, *Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, no. 6 (Turnhout, Belgium, 2002), 152–88.

98. b. *Nidda* 9a.

99. Nahman of Bratslav, *Likkutei Muharan*, first ed. (Jerusalem, 1969), 29:3.

100. Nahman understands the *gidim* as the veins, arteries, and nerves, an idea he took from Isaac Luria.

101. I use the term *circulatory system* because other Hasidic writers demonstrate knowledge of Harvey’s discovery, although I have not found direct evidence of this in Nahman.

102. Nahman, *Likkutei Muharan*, 23:2.

103. Nahman of Bratslav, *Shivhei ha-Ran* (Jerusalem, n.d.), no. 17, p. 13. See Arthur Green, *Tormented Master: A Life of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav* (New York, 1981), 39; and, more generally for how Nahman’s ideas about sexuality fit into eighteenth-century Hasidism, my *Eros and the Jews*, ch. 6.

104. Nahman of Bratslav, *Likkutei Etzot* (Jerusalem, 1977–78), Mamom ve-Parnasa, par. 16–17. On Nahman’s views on masturbation and its role in his *tikkun klali*, see Yehuda Liebes, “Ha-Tikkun Ha-Kelali of R. Nahman of Bratslav and Its Sabbatean Links,” in his *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism*, trans. Batya Stein (Albany, NY, 1993), 15–150.

105. See my “Between Melancholy and a Broken Heart: A Note on Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav’s Depression,” *Graven Images* 3 (1996): 107–11; and, more generally, Green, *Tormented Master*.

106. Nahman of Bratslav, *Sefer ha-Middot* (New York, 1966–67), Mamon, part 2.

107. Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl, *Sefer Meor Einayim* (Jerusalem, 1959–60), par. Yitro.

108. Moshe Hayyim Ephraim of Sudylkov, *Degel Mahane Ephraim* (Bnei Brak, 1969), par. Bo.

109. Bernard Weinryb, *The Jews of Poland* (Philadelphia, 1976); Moshe Rosman, *The Lord’s Jews: Magnate-Jewish Relations in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 1990); Gershon Hundert, *The Jews in a Polish Private Town: The Case of Opatów in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore, 1992); and Magda Teter, *Jews and Heretics in Catholic Poland* (New York, 2006).

110. Gavin Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley, CA, 1990), ch. 9. See further Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven, CT, 1999).

111. See Pelikan, *Growth of Medieval Theology*, 186–206; and Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*.

112. Alan Dundes, “The Ritual Murder or Blood Libel Legend: A Study in Anti-Semitic Victimization through Projective Inversion,” in *Blood Libel Legend*, 336–78.

113. See Christopher Ocker, “Ritual Murder and the Subjectivity of Christ: A Choice in Medieval Christianity,” *Harvard Theological Review* 91, no. 2 (1998): 153–92; and Rubin, *Gentile Tales*.

114. The illumination is from the “Stuttgarter Passionale.” See Stefan Rohrbacher and Michael Schmidt, *Judenbilder: Kulturgeschichte, antijüdischer Mythen und antisemitischer Vorurteile* (Hamburg, Germany, 1991), 272. Some of the figures in the picture are clearly marked as Jews by their hats.

115. See Langmuir, *Toward a Definition*; and Yuval, “Vengeance and Damnation.” Yuval has suggested the connection with the phrase “from tales of Jewish martyrs to tales of Christian martyrs.”

116. Thomas of Cantimpré, *Bonum Universale de Apibus*, 2.29.23, translated from *Les exemples du livre des Abeilles*, ed. Henri Platteau (Paris, 1997), 164–65. See also Cesareo Bander, “From Mythical Bees to Medieval Anti-Semitism,” in *Violence and Truth: On the Work of René Girard*, ed. Paul Dumouchel (Stanford, CA, 1988), 213. I thank Jeremy Cohen for this latter reference.

117. Martin Luther, *Works* (Philadelphia, 1955), 47:267.

118. Henry of Segusio, *Summa Aurea* (Venice, 1570), book 5, col. 1204, trans. in Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, 99. Rubin gives an excellent account of the Jewish response to the Eucharist on 93–103. An argument virtually identical to Henry’s was made by Pope Innocent III in a letter to the Archbishop of Sens and the Bishop of Paris, July 15, 1205, in Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews* (New York, 1989), 115. On “latrine blasphemy,” see Marcus, “Jewish-Christian Symbiosis,” 480–82; and Israel Jacob Yuval, “‘They tell lies: you ate the man’: Jewish Reactions to Ritual Murder Accusations,” in *Religious Violence between Christians and Jews: Medieval Roots, Modern Perspectives*, ed. Anna Sapir Abulafia (Houndmills, U.K., 2002), 96–97.

119. Isaac ben Moses, *Or Zarua* (Jerusalem, 1968), Piske Avoda Zara, no. 146. See Yuval, “They tell lies: you ate the man,” 96–97.

120. Letter of Jacob ben Elie, in Grayzel, *Church and the Jews*, 339.

121. Vicente de Costa Mattos, *Breva discurso contra a heretica perfidia da judaismo* (Tolosa, 1696), 13:1, 326, quoted and translated in Friedman, “Jewish Conversion,” 17.

122. Profiat Duran, *Kitve Pulmus le-Profiat Duran*, ed. Frank Talmage (Jerusalem, 1981), 39. See also Hasdai Crescas, *The Refutation of Christian Principles*, trans. Daniel J. Lasker (Albany, NY, 1992), 59–62.

123. Yuval has pointed to the importance of cursing as the alleged crime of the Jews. See *Shnei Goyim*, 131–35. Ridicule, while not the same as cursing, may be thought to function in a similar way.

124. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, part 3, Q. 76, art. 7–8. I thank Richard Schenk for bringing this text to my attention.

125. Magda Teter, “The Legend of Ger Zedek of Wilno as Polemic and Reassurance,” *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 29, no. 2 (Nov. 2005): 237–64.

126. *Ibid.*, 242.



127. David Malkiel, “Infanticide in Passover Iconography,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 56 (1993): 85–99.

128. Glossa Ordinaria 4.84 on Matt. 27:25. See Ocker, “Ritual Murder and the Subjectivity of Christ,” 165.

129. Ocker, “Ritual Murder and the Subjectivity of Christ,” 165.

130. This is Norman Cohn’s paraphrase of the teachings of the movement of Konrad Schmid in the fourteenth century. See his *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York, 1970), 143–44.

131. Daniel Goldschmidt, *Siddur Kinot le-Tisha be-Av* (Jerusalem, 2002), 37. See further Yuval, *Shnei Goyim*, 117. For the midrashic background, which holds that “all of the plagues that God brought upon Egypt are destined to be brought upon Edom,” see Solomon Buber, ed., *Tanhuma* (Jerusalem, 1964), 2:43–44, par. Bo, sec. 6; and Dov Mandelboim, ed., *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* (New York, 1962), 1:133, par. 7.11.

132. For connections between blood spilled in combat and sacred blood, see Danielle Buschinger, “Sang versé, sang guerisseur, sang aliment et sang du Christ dans la littérature médiévale allemande,” in Perrot, *Le sang*, 257–66.

133. Peggy McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia, 2003), 18.

134. The classic interpretive work on these Chronicles remains Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial* (New York, 1967). See also Chazan, *European Jewry*; Robert Chazan, *In the Year 1096* (Philadelphia, 1996); Assis et al., *Yehudim mul ha-Tzlav*; and Cohen, *Sanctifying the Name*. On the martyrological mentality of the Ashkenazi Jews and its connection to the Christian context more generally, see Susan Einbinder, *Beautiful Death: Jewish Poetry and Martyrdom in Medieval France* (Princeton, NJ, 2002); and Goldin, *Alemot*.

135. There is an unresolved scholarly controversy about the historicity of the Chronicles that need not detain us. Whether the events recorded there actually happened or were constructed by survivors out of their own guilt (perhaps because they had to convert to survive), the texts bear witness to a prevalent mentality that became even more canonical with their dissemination. For some of the controversy, see Jeremy Cohen, “Persecutions of 1096,” and his *Sanctifying the Name*.

136. See H. E. J. Cowdrey, “Martyrdom and the First Crusade,” in *Crusade and Settlement*, ed. Peter W. Edbury (Cardiff, Wales, 1985), 46–56; and C. Morris, “Martyrs on the Field of Battle before and during the First Crusade,” in *Martyrs and Martyrologies*, ed. D. Wood (Oxford, 1993), 93–104; and, more generally, Carl Erdmann, *The Origin of the Idea of Crusade* (Princeton, NJ, 1977); and J. Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (Philadelphia, 1986).

137. Adolf Neubauer and Moritz Stern, eds., *Hebräische Berichte über die Judenverfolgung während der Kreuzzüge* (reprint, Hildesheim, 1997), 3; Chazan, *European Jewry*, 247.

138. Neubauer and Stern, *Hebräische Berichte*, 17; Chazan, *European Jewry*, 272.

139. Neubauer and Stern, *Hebräische Berichte*, 3; Chazan, *European Jewry*, 247.

140. Neubauer and Stern, *Hebräische Berichte*, 8; Chazan, *European Jewry*, 256.
141. Neubauer and Stern, *Hebräische Berichte*, 17; Chazan, *European Jewry*, 273.
142. Neubauer and Stern, *Hebräische Berichte*, 64.
143. Ivan Marcus, "Jewish-Christian Symbiosis," 494.
144. Neubauer and Stern, *Hebräische Berichte*, 12; Chazan, *European Jewry*, 264.
145. Chazan, *European Jewry*, 255–56.
146. For a discussion of these midrashic sources, see Spiegel, *Last Trial*, 30–37.
147. See Avraham Grossman, *Hasidot u-Mordot: Nashim Yehudiot be-Europa be-Yemei ha-Benayim* (Jerusalem, 2001), 346–72.
148. Marcus, "Jewish-Christian Symbiosis," 469–72. The phrase "married Madonnas" appears on 472.
149. Israel Davidson, *Otsar ha-Shira ve-ha-Piyyut* (New York, 1970), 1:46; Abraham Haberman, *Sefer Gezerot Ashkenaz ve-Tsarfat* (Jerusalem, 1945), 111–12. For a discussion of this *piyyut* and especially the motif of blood, see Goldin, *Alemtot*, 337–40.
150. *Sefer Hasidim*, ed. Judah Wistinetzky, Parma ed. (Frankfurt, Germany, 1924), no. 1533; see also no. 1534.
151. This text flows directly from *Sefer Hasidim*'s punctiliousness about covering up blood from ritual slaughtering. See, for example, *ibid.*, p. 400, no. 1649, where the text cautions against urinating or spitting where a ritual slaughterer has covered over the blood of an animal.
152. S. Ansky, "Die Tseylem Frage," *Dos Neye Lebn* 1, no. 10 (Sept. 1909), 615. I thank my student Matthew Hoffman for this reference.

#### 4. POWER IN THE BLOOD

1. On Julius Streicher and *Der Stürmer*, see Dennis E. Showalter, *Little Man, What Now? Der Stürmer in the Weimar Republic* (Hamden, CT, 1982); and Randall L. Bytwerk, *Julius Streicher* (New York, 1983).
2. Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, MA, 2006).
3. For these two views, see Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York, 1996); and Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, rev. ed. (New York, 1998).
4. Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge, MA, 2003).
5. On the different discourses of anti-Semitism, see the excellent essay of Phillipe Burrin, "Nazi Antisemitism: Animalization and Demonization," in *Demonizing the Other: Antisemitism, Racism, and Xenophobia*, ed. Robert S. Wistrich (Amsterdam, 1999), 223–35.
6. For the best study of "sexual disgrace" in the Nazi period, as well as Weimar Germany, see Alexandra Przyrembel, "*Rassenschande*": *Reinheitsmythos und Vernichtungslegitimation im Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen, 2003). See

also Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton, NJ, 2005).

7. For a general discussion of the development of the ritual-murder accusation from the turn of the twentieth century and the role of *Der Stürmer*, see Rohrbacher and Schmidt, *Judenbilder*, 336–59.

8. On this crucial event, see Hsia, *Trent* 1475.

9. *Der Stürmer*, May 1939.

10. For two of Hillel Kieval's published works on the revival of the blood libel, see his "Representation and Knowledge in Medieval and Modern Accounts of Jewish Ritual Murder," *Jewish Social Studies*, n.s., 1 (1994–95): 52–72, and "Death and the Nation: Ritual Murder as Political Discourse in the Czech Lands," in his *Languages of Community: The Jewish Experience in the Czech Lands* (Berkeley, CA, 2000), 181–97. For a particularly interesting study of the Beilis trial in its Russian context, see Harriet Murav, "The Beilis Ritual Murder Trial and the Culture of Apocalypse," *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature* 12, no. 2 (Fall–Winter 2000): 243–63.

11. Michael Walser Smith, *The Butcher's Tale: Murder and Antisemitism in a German Town* (New York, 2002).

12. Robin Judd, "The Politics of Beef: Animal Advocacy and the Kosher Butchering Debates in Germany," *Jewish Social Studies* 10, no. 1 (Fall 2003): 117–50, and *Cutting Identities: Jewish Rituals and German Politics* (Ithaca, NY, 2007). See also Brian Klug, "Ritual Murmur: The Undercurrent of Protest against Ritual Slaughter of Animals in Britain in the 1980s," *Patterns of Prejudice* 23, no. 2 (1989): 16–28; Antony Kushner, "Stunning Intolerance: A Century of Opposition to Religious Slaughter," *Jewish Quarterly* 35 (1989): 16–20; and Sander Gilman, *Franz Kafka: The Jewish Patient* (New York, 1995). Gilman precedes Judd in drawing attention to the connection between ritual slaughter and ritual murder in German lands.

13. Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (Harmondsworth, England, 1960), 440–41.

14. *Ibid.*, 441.

15. See Manfred Dichts and Rupert Wimmer, *Thomas Mann und das Judentum* (Frankfurt, Germany, 2004); and Michael Brenner, "Beyond Naphta: Thomas Mann's Jews and German-Jewish Writing," in *A Companion to Thomas Mann's The Magic Mountain*, ed. Stephen Dowden (Columbia, SC, 1999), 141–57.

16. Carl Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of a Political Symbol*, trans. George Schwab and Erna Hilfstein (Westport, CT, 1996), 9.

17. See Jonathan Frankel, *The Damascus Affair: "Ritual Murder," Politics, and the Jews in 1840* (Cambridge, U.K., 1997); and Ronald Florence, *Blood Libel: The Damascus Affair of 1840* (Madison, 2004).

18. See Gabor Klaniczay, *The Uses of Supernatural Power: The Transformation of Popular Religion in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, trans. Susan Singerman, (Princeton, NJ, 1990), 168–88. On Jews and witches, see Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*, 251–52.

19. See the sources cited above in note 10. This particular argument, though, I owe to a personal communication from Kieval.

20. On this trial, see Andrew Handler, *Blood Libel at Tiszaeszlar* (Boulder, CO, 1980).

21. Charlotte Klein, “Damascus to Kiev: *Civiltà Cattolica* on Ritual Murder,” *Wiener Library Bulletin* 27 (1974): 18–25; and David Kertzer, *The Popes against the Jews* (New York, 2001).

22. The Nazi agitation was preceded by the Deutschvölkische Schutz- und Trutz-Bund, founded in 1919. One of the founders of the Bund was Artur Dinter, discussed at length later in this chapter. George Mosse argues that this organization was responsible for reviving the ritual-murder accusation as well as for reprinting Rohling’s *Talmudjude*. See George Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (New York, 1978), 182–83.

23. See Rohrbacher and Schmidt, *Judenbilder*, 356–57.

24. See Barry Glasser, *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things* (New York, 2000).

25. Erich Bischoff, *Jesus und die Rabbinen: Jesu Bergpredigt und “Himmelreich” in ihrer Unabhängigkeit vom Rabbinismus* (Leipzig, Germany, 1905).

26. Erich Bischoff, *Die Kabbalah: Einführung in die Jüdische Mystik und Geheimwissenschaft* (Leipzig, Germany, 1903), 40–43. Bischoff dismisses many of the arguments that Rohling had advanced, showing that some of his evidence came from translations of Kabbalistic texts, rather than from the originals, which contained no incriminating passages. In 1891 Bischoff wrote a book entitled *Die Juden und das Christenblut: Beiträge zur Erklärung der Hypothese eines jüdischen “Blutrituals.”* I have not been able to examine this work, but it seems fair to assume that the views Bischoff expressed in the 1903 work are based on the earlier text.

27. Erich Bischoff, *Das Blut in jüdischem Schrifttum und Brauch* (Leipzig, Germany, 1929).

28. Bischoff dedicated his 1905 book *Jesus und die Rabbinen* to Hermann Strack “als Dank für vieles,” and *Die Kabbalah* also quotes Strack favorably.

29. Bischoff, *Das Blut*, 15–16.

30. Bischoff already alludes to this possibility in the 1903 book on the Kabbalah, where he invokes Strack, who had “shown so unbelievably many strange and even religiously disguised blood superstitions.” But he goes on to say that “possibilities are not yet facts” and that, in any case, these putative superstitions had no basis in official Judaism (Bischoff, *Die Kabbalah*, 42–43).

31. Bischoff, *Das Blut*, 27–29. His sources for two of these are *Sefer Shaa-rei Zedek* (Wilmersdorf, 1799), 1.5.11 and *Sefer Toledot Adam* (Wilmersdorf, 1734). The latter he takes from Strack. Bischoff also relies on the Jewish author of the definitive biblical concordance, Solomon Mandelkern, who had served as the government rabbi in Odessa, for reports on marital customs from southern Russia from the 1870s and 1880s.

32. Bischoff, *Das Blut*, 48–49. See David ha-Levi Segal, *Turei Zahav* commentary on *Shulkhan Arukh*, Orach Hayyim 472.9. Bischoff mistakenly thinks that Segal was in Lublin, whereas he was, in fact, in Lvov. Ha-Levi Segal’s position was quoted in the late nineteenth century by the *Mishna Berura* and the *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh*, but I have found no evidence that the practice of using white wine was ever widespread in the period when the blood libel recurred

with some frequency in eastern Europe. Bischoff's arguments on *haroset* come close to those articulated more recently, but self-evidently without anti-Semitic intent, by Yuval, *Shnei Amim*, 258–64.

33. Bischoff, *Das Blut*, 53–68.

34. *Ibid.*, 40.

35. Paul Sommer and Erich Bischoff, *Erläuterungen zu Adolf Hitlers "Mein Kampf"* (Leipzig, Germany, 1934).

36. Theodor Fritsch, *Handbuch der Judenfrage*, 42nd ed. (Leipzig, Germany, 1938), 139. Fritsch himself died in 1933. The *Handbuch*, published originally in 1887 as *Antisemiten-Catechismus*, underwent many revisions, so Fritsch evidently incorporated Bischoff's research after the 1929 publication of the latter's work. The passage from *Tikkunei ha-Zohar* is on 59a (not, as Bischoff and Fritsch have it, 88b). An obscure passage, its meaning would seem to be the exact opposite of what the anti-Semites thought it meant. The phrase "kosher slaughter by foreigners" is mishnaic and refers to those who are allowed to practice kosher slaughter even if they are forbidden to bring sacrifices (the list includes women). In the *Tikkunei ha-Zohar*, the "foreigners" are those Jews who do not study Torah (*mishtadlei de-oreita*). However, their prayers, which (following Talmudic tradition) take the place of sacrifices, can ward off the angel of death. The text thus finds a way for these "foreigners" to achieve the same benefits as Torah scholars and mystics. In fact, it has nothing to do with non-Jews or with ritual sacrifices. Bischoff himself notes that the text cannot refer to foreigners, but he suggests that it is the ambiguity of the passage that excited the (erroneous) belief that the Zohar endorses ritual murder. See Bischoff, *Das Blut*, 39 n. 2. I thank Daniel Matt for helping me decipher this passage of the *Tikkunei ha-Zohar*.

37. Gerhard Utikal, *Der jüdische Ritualmord: Eine nichtjüdische Klarstellung* (Breslau, Germany, 1935), 102.

38. *Ibid.*, 106.

39. *Ibid.*, 106–7.

40. Johann von Leers, *Die Verbrechernatur der Juden* (Berlin, 1944). Von Leers, who had a law degree, also wrote *Blut und Rasse in der Gesetzgebung* (Munich, 1936), as well as *Adolf Hitler* (Leipzig, Germany, 1932), a hagiography of Hitler before the Nazi seizure of power, and *Reichskanzler Adolf Hitler* (Leipzig, Germany, 1933).

41. On the interesting question of the topography of the modern blood libel, see Utz Jeggle, "Tatorte: Zur imaginären Topographie von Ritualmordlegenden," in Erb, *Die Legende vom Ritualmord*, 239–52.

42. Rohrbacher and Schmidt, *Judenbilder*, 359.

43. See Herf, *Jewish Enemy*.

44. See Rohrbacher and Schmidt, *Judenbilder*, 357.

45. I take issue with Herf's claim (*Jewish Enemy*, 206) that sexual or bodily obsessions played only a minor role in Nazi wartime propaganda. He considers *Der Stürmer* a relatively unimportant player in this effort. While he may be right in statistical terms, there is little doubt that a synergy existed between the various blood and sexual accusations and the claim of Jewish power. Given the importance of these accusations for Hitler himself, the question remains open.

46. See Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Ippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933–1945* (Cambridge, U.K., 1991); and Eric Vieler, *The Ideological Roots of Germany National Socialism* (New York, 1999).

47. The literature on the history of racism and on Nazi science is voluminous. For general histories of racial science, see Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution*; and George Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ, 2002). For Nazi science, see R. N. Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis* (Cambridge, MA, 1988); Heather Anne Pringle, *The Master Plan: Himmler's Scholars and the Holocaust* (New York, 2006); and Gretchen Schafft, *From Racism to Genocide: Anthropology in the Third Reich* (Urbana, IL, 2004). On German eugenics, see James M. Glass, 'Life Unworthy of Life': *Racial Phobia and Mass Murder in Hitler's Germany* (New York, 1997); and Aly Götz, *Cleansing the Fatherland: Nazi Medicine and Racial Hygiene* (Baltimore, 1994). On eugenics in the United States, see most recently Henry Bruinius, *Better for All the World: The Secret History of Forced Sterilization and America's Quest for Racial Purity* (New York, 2006).

48. See Linke, *Blood and Nation*, 210.

49. *Die Weltkampf* (1935), referred to in Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution*, 118.

50. This case is discussed in Proctor, *Racial Hygiene*, 149; and Allyson D. Polsky, "Blood, Race, and National Identity: Scientific and Popular Discourses," *Journal of Medical Humanities* 23, nos. 3–4 (Winter 2002): 176.

51. Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 27–42.

52. Fritz Fink, *Die Judenfrage im Unterricht* (Nuremberg, Germany, 1937), 41–46, quoted in Bytwerk, *Julius Streicher*, 158.

53. For a psychoanalytic analysis of this gender division in modern anti-Semitic iconography, see Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the World Jewish Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (Chico, CA, 1981).

54. Karl Bergmann, "Völkisches Gedankengut im deutschen Sprichwort," *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Bildung* 12 (1936): 363–73. See also by Bergmann, "Lebendige Rassenhygiene im deutschen Sprichwort," *Volk und Rasse* 11 (1936): 296–97; and, further, Wolfgang Mieder, "Proverbs in Nazi Germany: The Promulgation of Anti-Semitism and Stereotypes through Folklore," *Journal of American Folklore* 95, no. 378 (1982): 435–64.

55. Bergmann, "Völkisches Gedankengut," 367.

56. Bergmann, "Lebendige Rassenhygiene," 296–97.

57. Karl Bergmann, "Das deutsche Sprichwort als Kündler völkischen Gedankengutes," *Volk und Scholle* 12: 325, quoted in Mieder, "Proverbs in Nazi Germany," 449. The word *Erb* also has the connotation in Nazi usage of "genetic" or "racial." Thus, *Erbsünde* has not only its more common meaning of "original sin" but also the sense "racial sin."

58. See Rohrbacher and Schmidt, *Judenbilder*, 376ff., for the book's influence as well as an analysis of its message. Other interpretations of Dinter's novel can be found in Przyrembel, "Rassenschande," 37–38; and Christina von Braun, "Die 'Blutschande.' Wandlungen eines Begriffs: Vom Inzesttabu zu den Rassengesetzen," in her *Die schamlose Schönheit des Vergangenen: Zum Verhältnis von Geschlecht und Geschichte* (Frankfurt, Germany, 1989), 81–111.

59. Hermann Strack, *Jüdische Geheimgesetze?* (Berlin, 1920), 24–30. Strack relates that he consented to look at Dinter's pulp fiction only when his wife seemed entranced by the novel.

60. The Denazification Court that sentenced Dinter to a fine of one thousand RM noted that his writings paved the way quite directly to the Nuremberg Laws, even if he played no role in either the Nazi Party or the regime. For an extensive biography of Dinter, see *Biographisch-bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon* (Herzberg, Germany, 2001), s.v. "Dinter, Artur," by Andreas Schulz and Matthias Wolfes.

61. Artur Dinter, *Die Sünde wider das Blut*, 16th ed. (Leipzig, Germany, 1921), 13.

62. *Ibid.*, 138–39.

63. On the SS attitude toward illegitimacy and extramarital sex, see the analysis of the SS newspaper *Das Schwarze Korps*, in William L. Combs, *The Voice of the SS: A History of the SS Journal 'Das Schwarze Korps'* (New York, 1986), 103–4. See also Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*.

64. Dinter, *Die Sünde*, 278.

65. *Ibid.*, ch. 15.

66. *Ibid.*, 120.

67. Richard Andree, *Zur Volkskunde der Juden* (Bielefeld, Germany, 1881), 133.

68. For a discussion of the Jewish body as seen in anti-Semitic literature, see Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York, 1991), and *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca, NY, 1985).

69. Jack Zipes, ed. and trans., *The Operated Jew*, 60. I thank Steven Aschheim for suggesting that I look at Panizza's story.

70. Melville's reference to Melchizedek, the king and priest of Salem (Jerusalem?) from Gen. 14 must have in mind the New Testament use of this biblical figure as a priestly prefiguration of Jesus. He is described in Heb. 7:15–16 as "a priest not by virtue of a law about physical descent."

71. Herman Melville, *Redburn: His First Voyage* (New York, 1850), 214.

72. Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. John Lees (New York, 1914), 330–31.

73. See Ismar Schorsch, "The Myth of Sephardic Supremacy," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 34 (1989): 47–66.

74. Saul Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death* (New York, 1984).

75. See, for example, Franklin Littell and Hubert G. Locke, *The German Church and the Holocaust* (Detroit, 1974); Klaus Scholder, *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich* (Frankfurt, Germany, 1977); and Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus* (Princeton, NJ, forthcoming).

76. Linke, *Blood and Nation*, 152–53.

77. Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1936), 114. On Rosenberg, see Fritz Nova, *Alfred Rosenberg: Nazi Theorist of the Holocaust* (New York, 1986); and Ernst Piper, "Alfred Rosenberg—der Prophet des Seelenkrieges: Der gläubige Nazi in der Führungselite des nationalsozialistischen Staates," in *Der Nationalsozialismus als politische Religion*, ed. Michael Ley and Julius H. Schoeps (Bodenheim, Germany, 1997), 107–25.

78. For the preparation of these ideas in Wilhelmine Germany, see Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Garden City, NY, 1965), 61–81; Uriel Tal, *Christians and Jews in Germany: Religion, Politics, and Ideology in the Second Reich, 1870–1914* (Ithaca, NY, 1975); and Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*.

79. See Stern, *Politics of Cultural Despair*, 25–128.

80. See Richard Wagner, *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (New York, 1897), 6:211–84. On Wagner and the Jews, see Robert Gutman, *Richard Wagner: The Man, His Mind, and His Music* (New York, 1968); Jacob Katz, *The Dark Side of Genius: Richard Wagner's Anti-Semitism* (Hanover, NH, 1986); and Paul Lawrence Rose, *Wagner: Race and Revolution* (London, 1992).

81. Wagner, "Against Vivisection," in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, 6:202.

82. Wagner, "Know Thyself," in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, 6:271.

83. Wagner, "Hero-dome and Christendom," in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, 6:283.

84. Gottfried Arnold, *Unparteiische Kirchen und Ketzerhistorie* (Frankfurt, Germany, 1700–1742). See further Erich Seeberg, *Gottfried Arnold* (Meerane, Germany, 1923).

85. For arguments that the operas are indeed anti-Semitic, see Rose, *Wagner*; Marc A. Weiner, *Richard Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination* (Lincoln, NE, 1995); and Michael Steinberg, "Music, Drama, and the End of History," *New German Critique* 69 (Autumn 1996): 163–80.

86. See Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*.

87. See Chamberlain, *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, 1:203ff.

88. See M. Bewer, *Gedanken* (Dresden, Germany, 1892), 31, and, further, *Der deutsche Christus* (Dresden, Germany, 1907). On Bewer, see Tal, *Christians and Jews*, 276–79.

89. Bewer, *Gedanken*, 32.

90. See Stern, *Politics of Cultural Despair*, 231–325.

91. Friedman, "Jewish Conversion," 18.

92. *Ibid.*

93. *Ibid.*, 23–26. See further Elisheva Carlebach, *Divided Souls: Converts from Judaism in Germany, 1500–1750* (New Haven, CT, 2001).

94. Portions of this text were published by Hermann Haupt, "Ein Oberrheinischer Revolutionär aus dem Zeitalter Kaiser Maximilians I," *Westdeutsche Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kunst*, Suppl. 8 (1893): 77–228. See further Norman Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium*, 119–26.

95. Haupt, "Ein Oberrheinischer Revolutionär," 141.

96. *Ibid.*, 187.

97. Wilhelm Kinkelin, "Europaisches Blutserwachen," *Odal* 10 (April 1937): 842–844, reprinted in *Das Dritte Reich und seine Denker*, ed. Leon Poliakov and Josef Wulf (Berlin, 1959), 180–82.

98. Karl Kraus, *Das dritte Walpurgisnacht*, quoted in Linke, *Blood and Nation*, 203–4.

99. Martin Heidegger, *Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität* (Breslau, Poland, 1933), 13.



100. This belief in the “defensive” character of Germany’s military actions had, of course, an afterlife in the Historikerstreit of the 1980s.

101. Dinter, *Die Sünde*, 278.

102. Rosenberg, *Mythus*, 2; and Alfred Rosenberg, *Gestaltung der Idee: Blut und Ehre*, part 2 (Munich, 1936), 1–2.

103. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, trans. Stephan Conway et al. (Minneapolis, 1987), 1:185.

104. *Ibid.*, 1:236.

105. Thor Goote, *Comrade Berthold*, quoted in *ibid.*, 1:235.

106. Bernhard Kellermann, *Der 9. November* (Berlin, 1921), 389. See further Klaus Vondung, *The Apocalypse in Germany*, trans. Stephen D. Ricks (Columbia, MO, 2000), 224.

107. For an excellent recent argument along these lines, see Omer Bartov, *Mirrors of Destruction* (Oxford, 2000), ch. 1.

108. Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews* (New York, 1997).

109. Victor Klemperer, *The Language of the Third Reich: LTI—Lingua Tertii Imperii*, trans. Martin Brady (London, 2000), 34. Klemperer’s observation is an expanded version of his diary entry of September 19, 1933. See his *Ich will Zeugnis ablegen bis zum Letzten* (Berlin, 1995), 57.

110. Klemperer, *Language of the Third Reich*, 249. I have modified the translation slightly.

111. Ernst Hiemer, *Der Jude im Sprichwort* (Nuremberg, Germany, 1942), 164–68. Translations of these proverbs appear in Mieder, “Proverbs in Nazi Germany,” 455–57. See also Linke, *Blood and Nation*, 203–5.

112. Kraus, *Die dritte Walpurgisnacht*, 121–24. I am indebted to both Linke and Mieder for drawing my attention to this important passage.

113. Joseph Goebbels, *Das Tagebuch von Joseph Goebbels* (Stuttgart, Germany, 1961), 85.

114. Vondung, *Apocalypse*, 227.

115. Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium*, 119.

116. Haupt, “Ein Oberrheinischer Revolutionär,” 212.

117. *Ibid.*, 201.

118. Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction: Antisemitism, 1700–1933* (Cambridge, MA, 1980).

119. Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* (Princeton, NJ, 1986).

120. On such beliefs in America, see Debbie Nathan, *Satan’s Silence: Ritual Abuse and the Making of a Modern American Witch Hunt* (New York, 1995). For England, see J. S. La Fontaine, *Speak of the Devil: Tales of Satanic Abuse in Contemporary England* (Cambridge, U.K., 1998).

121. This discussion is based on work in the still-uncataloged archive of white supremacist literature held at the Shields Library, University of California, Davis.

122. See Bytwerk, *Julius Streicher*, 63. On the white supremacist movement, see Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997).

123. Colin Holmes, “The Ritual Murder Accusation in Britain,” in Dundes, *Blood Libel Legend*, 110–12.

124. It is also not absent in Germany. See Rohrbacher and Schmidt's discussion of the Catholic publication *Loreto-Bote*, which circulated in the early 1990s in Bavaria and Austria, in *Judenbilder*, 360–68.

125. "Matzo—Myth or Reality?" *Orakuly (Oracles)*, Oct. 7–25, 1999. The source for the translated version of this article is the Web site of Union of Councils for Soviet Jews: [www.fsmonitor.com](http://www.fsmonitor.com) (translated from Georgian to Russian by Ariel Levine and from the Russian to English by Steve Swerdlow). On the ritual-murder tradition in Russian Orthodoxy, see John Klier, "The Blood Libel in the Russian Orthodox Tradition," unpublished. I thank Professor Klier for sharing his manuscript with me.

126. See Rivka Yadlin, "Anti-Jewish Imagery in the Contemporary Arab-Muslim World," in Wistrich, *Demonizing the Other*, 309–21.

127. Joel Kotek and Dan Kotek, *Au nom du antisionisme* (Brussels, 2003). On Sharon and Dracula, see 44.

128. Yadlin, "Anti-Jewish Imagery," 313.

129. Cecil Roth, "The Feast of Purim and the Origins of the Blood Accusation," *Speculum* 8 (1933): 520–26. This theme is now the subject of Elliott Horowitz's *Reckless Rites: Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence* (Princeton, NJ, 2006).

130. Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 144.

131. Arthur Koestler, who had lived for a short period in the 1920s in Palestine, took an idiosyncratic position that called for the total assimilation of Diaspora Jews, a position that informed his *The Thirteenth Tribe* (New York, 1976).

## 5. FROM BLOOD LIBEL TO BLOOD COMMUNITY

1. The title of the English translation (New York, 1948) of what was originally entitled *Réflexions sur la question juive* (Paris, 1947).

2. See Biale, *Cultures of the Jews*, preface.

3. For a review of the early modern and the nineteenth-century literature of response to the blood libel, see Frankel, *Damascus Affair*, 257–83.

4. See Hsia, *Myth of Ritual Murder*.

5. Hsia, *ibid.*, has argued that the decline in ritual-murder trials in central Europe had to do with the rise of Protestantism and its skepticism about magic. But since the age of Reformation also involved a dramatic rise in trials for witchcraft, it would seem that such an explanation can be only partially correct at best. On ritual murder in eastern Europe, see Jacek Wijaczka, "Ritual Murder Accusations in Poland throughout the 16th to 18th Centuries," in *Ritual Murder: Legend in European History*, ed. Susanna Buttaroni and Stanislaw Musial (Cracow, 2003), 195–210.

6. Frankel, *Damascus Affair*. See also Florence, *Blood Libel*.

7. I have not been able to find such a town or any record of a blood libel there.

8. See Frankel, *Damascus Affair*, 140. For an extensive description of this inconclusive case, see Simon Dubnow, *The History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, trans. I. Friedlaender (Philadelphia, 1916), 2:72–84.

9. Isaac Ber Levinsohn, *Efes Damim* (Vilna, 1837), 49. Levinsohn quotes Maimon on someone who urinates in a church.

10. *Ibid.*, 54–55.

11. *Ibid.*, 67.

12. For arguments that the Jews were familiar with weapons and not afraid to use violence, see my *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History* (New York, 1986); and Horowitz, *Reckless Rites*.

13. See Paul Nathan, *Der Prozess von Tisza-Eszlár* (Berlin, 1892); and Handler, *Blood Libel*.

14. Arnold Zweig, *Die Sendung Semaels: Jüdische Tragödie in Fünf Aufzügen* (Munich, 1920).

15. *Ibid.*, 54. For Zweig's fascination with the eastern European Jews, see his *The Face of East European Jewry*, trans. Noah Isenberg (Berkeley, CA, 2004). Zweig published this portrait of the *Ostjuden*, with pictures by Hermann Struck, in 1920, based on his experiences on the Polish front in 1917. Although it postdates the blood libel play by eight years, the play suggests that Zweig's Jewish Orientalism was not only a product of World War I.

16. See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. "Tizlaeszlar."

17. Zweig, *Die Sendung Semaels*, 46.

18. *Ibid.*, 89.

19. I thank Hillel Kieval for this observation. For Kieval's analysis of the modern blood libel, see his "Representation and Knowledge," and "Death and the Nation: Ritual Murder as Political Discourse in the Czech Lands" in his *Languages of Community*, 181–197.

20. For a collection of documents on the case, including the issues around expert witnesses, see *Acten und Gutachten in dem Prozesse Rohling contra Bloch* (Vienna, 1890).

21. Joseph S. Bloch, *My Reminiscences* (New York, 1923), 65.

22. *Ibid.*, 116–17.

23. In each of these, Strack added new material, so that he labels the English edition superior even to the eighth edition of the German on which it is based. See Strack, *Jew and Human Sacrifice*, preface to the English translation. Since Strack indicates that this edition is preferable to the German, I have used it instead of the original.

24. *Ibid.*, 123.

25. *Ibid.*, 36.

26. See Stuart, *Defiled Trades*.

27. Strack, *Jew and Human Sacrifice*, 70–71.

28. *Ibid.*, 40–41.

29. *Ibid.*, 37–40.

30. Klier, "Blood Libel in the Russian Orthodox Tradition," 13.

31. Strack, *Jew and Human Sacrifice*, 89–91.

32. See, for example, Lori B. Harrison, "Bloodsucking Bloom: Vampirism and a Representation of Jewishness in 'Ulysses,'" *James Joyce Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (Summer 1999): 781–98.

33. See Arata, "Occidental Tourist." The literature on Stoker's novel is enormous. See Arata for a bibliography.

34. Strack, *Jew and Human Sacrifice*, 95.
35. Augustine Calmet, *The Phantom World: The History and Philosophy of Spirits, Apparitions, etc., etc.* (Philadelphia, 1850), 279. Calmet lived from 1672 to 1757 and published his work in 1751 as *Dissertation sur les vampires*. See the new French edition (Paris, 1998). I thank my student Sonia Pflaster for bringing this text to my attention.
36. Strack, *Jew and Human Sacrifice*, 94.
37. *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* (Berlin, 1927), 1:1438.
38. This is the great strength of Uli Linke's *Blood and Nation*, which shares Strack's anthropological method.
39. *Blutlügen: Märchen und Tatsachen* (Berlin, 1929), 28.
40. Yudel Rosenberg, *Sefer Niflaot Maharal im ha-Golem* (Piotrkow, 1909); and Chajim Bloch, *Der Prager Golem, von seiner "Geburt" bis zu seinem "Tod"* (Berlin, 1920). On Rosenberg's forgery, see Prof. S. Z. Leiman, "The Adventure of the Maharal of Prague in London: R. Yudel Rosenberg and the Golem of Prague," *Tradition* 36, no. 1 (2002): 26–58. For a history of the Golem legend, culminating in a discussion of these two works, see Hillel Kieval, "Golem: The Invention of a Tradition," in his *Languages of Community*, 95–113.
41. Chajim Bloch, *Blut und Eros im jüdischen Schrifttum und Leben* (Vienna, 1935), 44.
42. See Marion Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family, and Identity in Imperial Germany* (New York, 1991); and Paula Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History* (Seattle, 1995).
43. Marienberg, *Niddah*, 40–41. In English, see Tirzah Meacham, "An Abbreviated History of the Development of the Jewish Menstrual Laws," in Wasserfall, *Women and Water*, 32–33; and Jonah Steinberg, "From a 'Pot of Filth' to a 'Hedge of Roses' (and Back): Changing Theorizations of Menstruation in Judaism," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 13, no. 2 (1997): 5–26.
44. Paul Lawrence Rose, *German Question/Jewish Question: Revolutionary Antisemitism from Kant to Wagner* (Princeton, 1990), 21. I thank Steven Aschheim for drawing my attention to Rose's argument.
45. *Ibid.*, 315.
46. M. Hess, *Rom und Jerusalem: Die letzte Nationalitätsfrage* (Leipzig, 1899), 33. Published in English as *Rome and Jerusalem*, trans. Meyer Waxman (Lincoln, NB, 1995), 56–66. English translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. See further Kenneth Koltun-Fromm, *Moses Hess and Modern Jewish Identity* (Bloomington, IN, 2001), ch. 3.
47. Hess, *Rom und Jerusalem*, 33. The unattested phrase "mamzer bilbul" is clearly a folk term, possibly of Yiddish provenance. The word *bilbul* can mean "libel" in Hebrew. The noun *mamzer* is here used as an adjective meaning something like "dastardly" (it is the Hebrew for "bastard") but may refer to the folk tradition, going back to the *Sefer Toledot Yeschu*, that Jesus was a bastard. If this is the case, then the expression means something like "Christian libel." I have consulted several Yiddish philologists, none of whom recognized the term.
48. Shlomo Avineri, *Moses Hess: Prophet of Communism and Zionism* (New York, 1985). For another reading of Hess's essay and his early work in

general, see Shulamit Volkov, “Moses Hess: Problems of Religion and Faith,” *Zionism* (1981): 1–15.

49. The difference between Marx and Hess is one of emphasis and nuance. Marx also holds that Christianity constitutes the theoretical expression of the Jewish religion of money, but his language about Judaism is much more vituperative than Hess’s. See Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” in his *Early Writings*, ed. T. B. Bottomore (New York, 1964).

50. Moses Hess, “Das Geldwesen,” in *Philosophische und sozialistische Schriften 1837–1850*, ed. Wolfgang Mönke (Vaduz, 1980), 335.

51. *Ibid.*, 345., emphasis in the original.

52. *Ibid.*, 337.

53. See Friedrich Kluge, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (Berlin, 2002). Kluge thinks that the shift from an *s* in *sakhern* to *sch* was the result of conflating this Yiddish word with the German *Schächer* (robber). If so, this would give the term an added pejorative connotation.

54. The reference to Jews and Christians as shopkeepers repeats the same equation expressed on p. 334 of “Das Geldwesen”: “For our Philistines, our Christian grocers and Jewish Christians, the individual is the *end*, the life of the species, as against the *means* of life.” What exactly he means here by “Jewish Christians” is obscure. Is it Christians who act like Jews or vice-versa?

55. “Das Geldwesen,” 345.

56. Moses Hess, *Die heilige Geschichte der Menschheit: Vom einem Jünger Spinoza’s in Philosophische und Sozialistische Schriften*, ed. Wolfgang Mönke (Vaduz, Liechtenstein, 1980), 71–72. For a commentary on this important early work, see Shlomo Avineri, introduction to Moses Hess, *The Holy History of Mankind and Other Writings* (Cambridge, U.K., 2004).

57. Hess, *Rom und Jerusalem*, 16; *Rome and Jerusalem*, 65.

58. Hess, *Rom und Jerusalem*, 2, 2 n. 1; *Rome and Jerusalem*, 44.

59. Hess, *Rom und Jerusalem*, 32; *Rome and Jerusalem*, 86.

60. Hess, *Rom und Jerusalem*, 12, 2, 57; *Rome and Jerusalem*, 60, 44, 120. As was common, Hess uses “tribe” (*Stamm*) interchangeably with “race” (*Race* or *Rasse*).

61. Hess, *Rom und Jerusalem*, 107, 12; *Rome and Jerusalem*, 180, 59.

62. Koltun-Fromm, *Moses Hess*, 76–84.

63. Hess, *Rom und Jerusalem*, 109; *Rome and Jerusalem*, 183.

64. Hess, *Rom und Jerusalem*, 12; see also 171–73; *Rome and Jerusalem*, 59.

65. For Hess’s views of intermarriage, see Avineri, *Moses Hess*, 73.

66. Hess, *Rom und Jerusalem*, 19–20; *Rome and Jerusalem*, 70.

67. Hess, *Rom und Jerusalem*, 98–100; *Rome and Jerusalem*, 173–75. On Kalischer, see Jody Meyers, *Seeking Zion: Modernity and Messianic Activism in the Writings of Zvi Hirsch Kalischer* (Oxford, 2003).

68. Hess, *Rom und Jerusalem*, 73; *Rome and Jerusalem*, 141.

69. Hess, *Rom und Jerusalem*, 75; *Rome and Jerusalem*, 144. See also note 8.

70. John Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (New Haven, CT, 1994). On Zionist ideas on a Jewish race, see Raphael Falk, “Zionism and the Biology of the Jews,” *Science in Context* 11, no. 3–4 (Autumn–Winter 1998): 587–608.

71. Efron, *Defenders of the Race*, 127–41.
72. Ibid., 137; and Elias Auerbach, “Die jüdische Rassenfrage,” *Archiv für Rassen- und Gesellschaftsbiologie* 4, no. 3 (1907): 338.
73. Redcliffe N. Salaman, “Heredity of the Jews,” *Journal of Genetics* 1, no. 3 (1911): 273–92, quoted in Falk, “Zionism,” 594–95.
74. Vladimir Jabotinsky, *Ketavim* (Jerusalem, 1947), 9:126–27. See further Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism* (New York, 1981), 166–69; Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism and the Fin-de-Siècle: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky* (Berkeley, CA, 2001); and Eran Kaplan, *The Jewish Radical Right: Revisionist Zionism and Its Ideological Legacy* (Madison, 2005).
75. See especially the preface to the Hebrew edition of *Totem and Taboo* (Jerusalem, 1939), published in English in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London, 1955), 13:xv.
76. For interpretations of Freud that emphasize this aspect of his Jewish identity, see Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven, 1991); and Sander L. Gilman, *Freud, Race, and Gender* (Princeton, 1993). I am also indebted to Eliza Slavet for sharing with me a portion of her doctoral dissertation, “Freud's *Moses*: Memory Material and Immaterial” (University of California, San Diego, 2006). Freud's sense of Jewish superiority can be found in many places. For example, in a letter to Sabina Spielrein, he wrote of Jesus: “The Lord . . . had him born from the superior Jewish race.” See Aldo Carotenuto, *A Secret Symmetry: Sabina Spielrein between Jung and Freud*, trans. Arno Pomerans et al. (New York, 1982), 116–17 (letter of August 20, 1912).
77. For the Lamarckian thesis, see Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses*, 30–31. For the opposite point of view, see Richard J. Bernstein, *Freud and the Legacy of Moses* (Cambridge, U.K., 1998), esp. 46–64. I thank Steven Aschheim for pointing out this debate in Freud scholarship.
78. Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Katherine Jones (New York, 1947), 158.
79. See George Mosse, “The Influence of the Volkish Idea on German Jewry,” in his *Germans and Jews: The Right, the Left, and the Search for a “Third Force” in Pre-Nazi Germany* (New York, 1970), 77–115. On the *völkisch* idea, see Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: The Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York, 1964).
80. Martin Buber, “Das Judentum und die Juden,” in *Reden über das Judentum* (Berlin, 1932), 11. English translation: Martin Buber, *On Judaism*, ed. and trans. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York, 1967), 17.
81. Buber, “Das Judentum und die Juden,” 8; *On Judaism*, 15.
82. Paul Mendes-Flohr, *From Mysticism to Dialogue: Martin Buber's Transformation of German Social Thought* (Detroit, 1989). It should be noted, though, that in the passage quoted previously, Buber uses the word *Erleben* to refer to the community of “experience.”
83. Buber, “Das Judentum und die Juden,” 9–10; English: *On Judaism*, 16.
84. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundbegriffe der reinen Soziologie* (Berlin, 1922; first published in 1887).

85. Gustav Landauer, *Skepsis und Mystik: Versuche im Anschluss an Mauthners Sprachkritik*, 2nd ed. (Cologne, 1923), 17. This edition was based on Landauer's handwritten notes from 1905.

86. Gustav Landauer, *Der werdende Mensch* (Potsdam, 1921), 244–58. For more on Landauer's thought, see Eugene Lunn, *Prophet of Community: The Romantic Socialism of Gustav Landauer* (Berkeley, CA, 1973).

87. See Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven, 1996), 39.

88. *Ibid.*, 41.

89. Mosse, "Influence of the Volkish Idea," 108.

90. Hans Goslar, *Judische Rundschau* 23, no. 41 (Oct. 11, 1918): 320.

91. Maurice Fishberg, *The Jews: A Study of Race and Environment* (London, 1911; reprint, New York, 1975).

92. More recent studies of Jewish genetics seem to confirm Fishberg's analysis. See A. E. Mourant, Ada C. Kopec, and Kazimiera Domanieska-Sobczak, *The Genetics of the Jews* (Oxford, 1978), 57: "Each major community as a whole bears some resemblance to the indigenous peoples of the regions where it first developed." But in examining factors like blood groups of Ashkenazim and Sephardim, the authors conclude that "neither of these populations resembles closely the peoples among whom they now or recently have lived . . . the two populations have a common origin" (51). It is hard to reconcile these two statements unless one argues that a people with common origins intermingled with others in the Middle Ages but afterward remained relatively endogamous. Whether genetics can prove this kind of history is unclear. See also Raphael Patai and Jennifer Patai, *The Myth of the Jewish Race*, rev. ed. (Detroit, 1989); and the discussion in the epilogue to the present volume.

93. For an analysis of the discourses around environment, race, and the Jewish body, see Gilman, *Jew's Body*.

94. Karl Kautsky, *Are the Jews a Race?* (New York, 1926).

95. *Ibid.*, 217 and 220.

96. *Ibid.*, 217–20. On Zollschan, see Efron, *Defenders of the Race*, 153–66.

97. Quoted in Slezkine, *Jewish Century*, 180.

98. Louis Finkelstein, ed., *The Jews: Their History, Culture, and Religion* (Philadelphia, 1949), 1:xxvii.

99. Israel Zangwill, *The Melting Pot*, rev. ed. (New York, 1926), 127. For a more extensive interpretation of the play, with bibliography, see my "The Melting Pot and Beyond: Jews and the Politics of American Identity," in *Insider/Outsider: American Jews and Multiculturalism*, ed. David Biale, Susannah Heschel, and Michael Galchinsky (Berkeley, CA, 1998), 17–33. For the most recent study of Zangwill and his plays, see Edna Nahshon, ed., *From the Ghetto to the Melting Pot: Israel Zangwill's Jewish Plays* (Detroit, 2006). For racial ideas among American Jews, see Eric L. Goldstein, "‘Different Blood Flows in Our Veins’: Race and Jewish Self-Definition in Late Nineteenth-Century America," *American Jewish History* 85, no. 1 (Mar. 1997): 29–55.

100. Zangwill, *Melting Pot*, 204.

101. *Ibid.*, 207.

102. Nathan Bistritsky, ed., *Kehilyatenu* (Jerusalem, 1988, based on the 1922 ed.). On this remarkable text, see Aviva Opaz, “The Symbolic World of the Collection ‘Kehilyateinu,’” *Kathedra* 59 (Mar. 1991): 126–41 (in Hebrew).

103. Bistritsky, *Kehilyatenu*, 40.

104. See my *Eros and the Jews*, ch. 7.

105. Nathan Bistritsky, *Yamim ve-Laylot* (Jerusalem, 1926), 197.

106. Yaakov Cahan’s poem was originally published as “Biryonim mi-ye-me ha-pulmusim shel Titus ve-Shimon Ben-Kokhav,” *Hashiloah* 12 (July–Dec. 1903): 565. It is reprinted in Cahan’s *Kitve Yaakov Cahan—Shirim* (Tel Aviv, 1960), 1:86–87.

107. See Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Identity* (Chicago, 1995).

108. A. Z. Rabinowitz, ed., *Yizkor: Matzevat Zikaron le-Halalei ha-Poalim ha-Ivrim be-EY* (Jaffa, 1912), 4. On this book, see Jonathan Frankel, “The Yizkor Book of 1911—a Note on the National Myths in the Second Aliya,” in *Religion, Ideology, and Nationalism in Europe and America*, ed. H. Ben-Israel (Jerusalem, 1986), 355–84; and Anita Shapira, *Land and Power* (Oxford, 1992), 73–74. Frankel shows that this introduction, signed by the Editorial Committee, was actually written by Yehoshua Radler-Feldman (also known by his pen name of Rabbi Binyamin).

109. Rabinowitz, *Yizkor*, 5.

110. Yehoshua Thon, “Mesirat Nefesh,” *ibid.*, 17–20.

111. K. L. Silman, “Me-Hirhurei Liba,” in Rabinowitz, *Yizkor*, 50.

112. *Ibid.*

113. *Ibid.*, 51.

114. Frankel, “Yizkor Book.”

115. Ahad Haam, *Kol Kitve Ahad Haam* (Jerusalem, 1947), 462.

116. On Greenberg, see, most recently, Dan Miron, *Akdamut le-AZG* [Uri Zvi Greenberg] (Jerusalem, 2002); Hannan Hever, *Moledet ha-Mavet ha-Yafa* (Tel Aviv, 2004). Two additional books by Hannan Hever set Greenberg in the larger contexts of political radicalism and political poetry: *Be-Shevi ha-Utopia* (Sdei Boker, 1995), and *Paytanim ve-Biryonim* (Jerusalem, 1994).

117. Uri Zvi Greenberg, *Emah Gedolah va-Yareah*, in *Kol Ketavav* (Jerusalem, 1990), 1:83.

118. Uri Zvi Greenberg, *Sefer Ha-Kitrug ve-ha-Emunah* (Jerusalem/Tel Aviv, 1937), 64.

119. Greenberg, *Kol Ketavav*, 2:148.

120. Uri Zvi Greenberg, *Neum Ben ha-Dam/Kategorya*, in *Kol Ketavav*, 2:145.

121. Greenberg, *Sefer Ha-Kitrug*, 101.

122. *Ibid.*, 99.

123. *Ibid.*, 104.

124. See Matthew Hoffman, *From Rebel to Rabbi: Reclaiming Jesus and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture* (Palo Alto, CA, 2007), chs. 3 and 4; and David Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse* (Cambridge, MA, 1984), 266–74.

125. Greenberg, *Sefer Ha-Kitrug*, 66.

126. *Ibid.*, 10.



127. Ibid., 166.
128. "Emet Ehat ve-lo' Shtayim," *ibid.*, 163–64.
129. "Lo El, Lo Melekh, Lo Gibbor," in Greenberg, *Sefer Ha-Kitrug*, 142.
130. Greenberg, *Sefer Ha-Kitrug*, 72–73.
131. Greenberg, *Rehovot ha-Nahar* (Jerusalem, 1978), 5.
132. Ibid., 6.
133. Ibid., 11.
134. Ibid., 169.
135. Ibid., 63.
136. Ibid., 32–33.
137. Ibid., 171.
138. Ibid., 169–73.
139. Ibid., 243.
140. See, in particular, Israel Eldad, *Dema ve-Nogah, Dam ve-Zahav: Iyunim be-Shirat Uri Tsevi Greenberg* (Jerusalem, 2003). For debates on the right on the use of violence, see Ehud Luz, *Wrestling with an Angel: Power, Morality, and Jewish Identity*, trans. Michael Swirsky (New Haven, CT, 2003). On the culture of the right, see Kaplan, *Jewish Radical Right*. It would be incorrect, though, to imply that those in the center and left of the political spectrum were immune to violence and blood language, especially in response to the Holocaust and Israel's War of Independence. As Hannan Hever has shown, the symbolism of death played a heavy role in the poetry of the Labor movement of the period. On nationalism and violence in Hebrew poetry of the 1940s, see Hannan Hever, *Pitom Mareh Milhamah* (Hakibbutz Ha-Meuchad, 2001).
141. Avraham Stern-Yair, *Be-Damai le-Ad Tehiye: Shirim* (Tel Aviv, 2002), 131.
142. Ibid., 53. The poem is from 1934.
143. See Yoel Bin Nun, "Nationalism, Humanity, and *Knesset Yisrael*," in *The World of Rav Kook's Thought* (n.p., 1991), 207–54. For a similar view of the Rav Kook, see Zvi Yaron, *Mishnato shel ha-Rav Kook* (Jerusalem, 1974).
144. Abraham Isaac Kook, *Perakim be-Mishnato ha-Iyunit shel ha-Rav Kook* (Jerusalem, 1965), 15–16.
145. Abraham Isaac Kook, *Shevet ha-Aretz* (Jerusalem, 1965), 7. For a revisionist argument of how Kook's racial ideals could be exploited by subsequent right-wing religious elements in the state of Israel, see my "Mysticism and Politics in Modern Israel: The Messianic Ideology of Abraham Isaac Ha-Cohen Kook," in *Religion and Politics in the Modern World*, ed. Peter Merkl and Ninian Smart (New York, 1983), 191–202.
146. See Luz, *Wrestling with an Angel*. Anita Shapira covers some of the same ground in *Land and Power*, focusing on internal debates with the Zionist movement.
147. Aharon Shmuel Tamares, "Hishtahrut ha-Mahshava ha-Ivrit," *Kolot* 6–8 (1922–23): 224, quoted in Luz, *Wrestling with an Angel*, 128. See further Aharon Shmuel Tamares, *Patizfism le-Or ha-Torah*, ed. Ehud Luz (Jerusalem 1992).
148. Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William Hallo (Boston, 1964), 3. All quotations from the *Star* are from Hallo's translation, which

I have checked against the German edition, *Der Stern der Erlösung* (Frankfurt, 1993); any modifications in the translation are noted. I have reversed the order of the two sentences quoted here to make the point that the experience of the trenches provokes the failure of philosophy.

149. Rosenzweig, *Star*, 341–42; *Stern*, 378–79.

150. Rosenzweig, *Star*, 326.

151. *Ibid.*, 175–79. Rosenzweig assumes a traditional gender dichotomy between the active and demanding male lover and the passive female “beloved.” A feminist reading of the *Star* is an important desideratum.

152. *Ibid.*, 202; *Stern*, 225.

153. Rosenzweig, *Star*, 204; *Stern*, 228; translation slightly modified.

154. Rosenzweig, *Star*, 241; *Stern*, 269; my translation.

155. Rosenzweig, *Star*, 298–99; *Stern*, 331–32.

156. See Rosenzweig’s letter to Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy in *Franz Rosenzweig: Briefe* (Berlin, 1935), 693. See further Leora Batnitsky, *Idolatry and Representation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig Reconsidered* (Princeton, NJ, 2000), 75. Rosenzweig elsewhere writes that the convert does not ever really belong to the congregation of Israel in a “integral way.” See his *Briefe und Tagebücher* (The Hague, 1979), 288. This letter is discussed by Haggai Dagan, “The Motif of Blood and Procreation in Franz Rosenzweig,” *AJS Review* 26, no. 2 (2002): 242–43. Dagan comes to the opposite conclusion to Batnitsky’s: Rosenzweig ultimately dismissed conversion as a real objection to the ethnic purity of the Jews.

157. Rosenzweig, *Star*, 329; *Stern*, 365.

158. See Steven Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The Eastern European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* (Madison, 1982).

159. Rosenzweig, *Star*, 329; translation slightly modified.

160. *Ibid.*, 299; *Stern*, 322; translation modified.

161. *Ibid.*

162. Rosenzweig, *Star*, 305; *Stern*, 339; translation modified.

163. Stéphane Mosès argues that Rosenzweig simply means an “ethnic people” (as opposed to a socially constructed nation) when he uses the term “blood community.” All peoples are blood communities in this sense; Rosenzweig chose an unfortunate term because of its racist associations, of which he was innocent. See Mosès’s *System and Revelation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, trans. Catherine Tihanyi (Detroit, 1982), 175. Leora Batnitsky, however, argues in *Idolatry and Representation*, 72–77, that the blood community “marks the limit of modern philosophy” because it is what distinguishes the Jews, as a carnal community, from philosophical abstraction (75). Batnitsky understands the blood community as purely symbolic, taking her lead from what Rosenzweig wrote to Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy: “The blood relationship is maintained only on account of its symbolic meaning” (quoted *ibid.*). Haggai Dagan also gives a metaphoric interpretation to blood, arguing that it is virtually identical to Heidegger’s *Dasein*. Just as Heidegger was able to see in the German people an “ultimate embodiment of existence,” so Rosenzweig gave the Jewish community of blood the same ontic meaning. The quoted phrase is from Dagan, “Motif of Blood and Procreation,” 243.

164. Peter Eli Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy* (Berkeley, CA, 2003), 210–14. Gordon has summarized and updated his arguments in “Franz Rosenzweig and the Philosophy of Jewish Existence,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Michael Morgan and Peter E. Gordon (Cambridge, U.K., 2007).

165. Batnitsky makes this point as well, pointing out that Rosenzweig believed in “carnal Israel.” But she retreats to a purely metaphoric argument that belies this insight.

166. Felix Theilhaber, *Der Untergang der deutschen Juden: Eine volkswirtschaftliche Studie* (Munich, 1911).

167. See Mitchell B. Hart, *Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity* (Palo Alto, 2000), esp. ch. 3; and Sharon Gillerman, *Germans into Jews: Remaking the Social Body in the Weimar Republic* (forthcoming), esp. chs. 1 and 2.

168. Gordon makes this argument very well in terms of both Rosenzweig’s rootedness in German philosophy and his idiosyncratic appropriation of Jewish liturgy. See Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger*, and “Franz Rosenzweig.”

169. Julian Tuwim, *My, Żydzi polscy—We, Polish Jews*, ed. C. Shmeruk (Jerusalem, 1984), sec. 3, capitalization in the original.

## EPILOGUE

1. For a review of the literature, see Luca L. Cavalli-Sforza, “The DNA Revolution in Population Genetics,” *Trends in Genetics* 14, no. 8 (1998): 303–5.

2. The earliest and most influential argument from genetics that race does not exist was by Richard Lewontin in his 1971 article “The Apportionment of Human Diversity,” *Evolutionary Biology* 4 (1971), and his book *Human Diversity* (New York, 1982). Craig Venter, who led one of the teams that decoded the human genome, announced at a press conference at the completion of the project (June 26, 2000) that it had disproved the existence of race. See further Ning Yu et al., “Larger Genetic Differences between Africans Than between Africans and Eurasians,” *Genetics* 161 (2002): 269–74.

3. For a popular article on the reintroduction of race into genomics, see Marantz Henig, “The Genome in Black and White (and Grey),” *New York Times Magazine*, Oct. 10, 2004. For the scientific arguments, see the *Nature Genetics Supplement* 36, no. 11 (Nov. 2004).

4. See Amy Harmon, “Seeking Ancestry in DNA Ties Uncovered by Tests,” *New York Times*, Apr. 12, 2006.

5. See, e.g., Nicholas Wade, “In DNA, New Clues to Jewish Roots,” *New York Times*, May 14, 2002, and “New Light on Origins of Ashkenazim in Europe,” *New York Times*, Jan. 14, 2006. An excellent summary of both popular and scientific articles can be found at [www.khazaria.com/genetics/abstracts-jews.html](http://www.khazaria.com/genetics/abstracts-jews.html).

6. Rebecca Cann et al., “Mitochondrial DNA and Human Evolution,” *Nature* 325 (1987): 31–36.

7. Doron M. Behar et al., “The Matrilineal Descent of Ashkenazi Jews: Portrait of a Recent Founder Event,” *American Journal of Human Genetics* 78, no. 3 (Mar. 2006): 487–97.

8. See Michael F. Hammer et al., “Y Chromosomes of Jewish Priests,” *Nature* 285, no. 6611 (1997): 32–33.

9. See Nicholas Wade, “DNA Backs a Tribe’s Tradition of Early Descent from the Jews,” *New York Times*, May 9, 1999. The study that made these claims about the Lemba was by Mark G. Thomas et al., “Y Chromosomes Traveling South: The Cohen Modal Haplotype and the Origins of the Lemba—the ‘Black Jews of Southern Africa,’” *American Journal of Human Genetics* 66, no. 2 (Feb. 2000): 674–86.

10. Doron M. Behar et al., “Multiple Origins of Ashkenazi Levites: Y Chromosome Evidence for Both Near Eastern and European Ancestry,” *American Journal of Human Genetics* 73, no. 4 (2003): 768–79.

11. See Michael F. Hammer et al., “Jewish and Middle Eastern non-Jewish Populations Share a Common Pool of Y-Chromosome Biallelic Haplotypes,” *Proceedings of the National Association of Science* 97, no. 12: 6769–74.

12. Ibid.; and Michael F. Hammer, Almut Nebel, et al., “High Resolution Y-Chromosome Haplotypes of Israeli and Palestinian Arabs Reveal Geographic Substructure and Substantial Overlap with Haplotypes of Jews,” *Human Genetics* 107, no. 6 (Dec. 2000): 630–41.

13. Falk, “Zionism.” See also Susan Martha Kahn, “Are Genes Jewish? Conceptual Ambiguities in the New Genetic Age,” David W. Belin Lecture in American Jewish Affairs, no. 12, Ann Arbor, MI, 2005, and *Reproducing Jews: A Cultural Account of Assisted Conception in Israel* (Durham, 2000).

14. Koestler, *Thirteenth Tribe*. As mentioned in chapter 4, Koestler argued that the Ashkenazi Jews were descendants of the Crimean Khazars rather than a Middle Eastern people. Koestler might have taken partial solace in the study of the eastern Europe origins of Ashkenazi Levites. See also Patai and Patai, *Myth of the Jewish Race*. Although that book predates the explosion in population genetics research noted here, its conclusions would probably remain largely the same if written now. Koestler relied on the first edition of Patai and Patai’s book (1975) for some of the scientific arguments to support his reading of the historical record.

15. For one view of these lost tribes, see Tudor Parfitt, *The Thirteenth Gate: Travels among the Lost Tribes of Israel* (Bethesda, MD, 1987). Parfitt was one of the nonscientist, ethnographic experts who participated in the Y-chromosome study of the Lemba. For a more skeptical view, see Hillel Halkin, *Across the Sabbath River: In Search of a Lost Tribe of Israel* (Boston, 2002).

16. See Hagar Salamon, “Ethiopian Jewry and New Self-Concepts,” in *A Life of Judaism*, ed. Harvey Goldberg (Berkeley, CA, 2001), 227–40, and “Racial Consciousness in Transition: From Ethiopia to the Promised Land,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 19–20 (1998): 125–46 (in Hebrew).

17. Hagar Salamon, “Blood between the Beta Israel and Their Christian Neighbors in Ethiopia—Key Symbols in an Inter-Group Context,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 15 (1993): 117–34 (in Hebrew), and *The Hyena People: Ethiopian Jews in Christian Ethiopia* (Berkeley, CA, 1999). Salamon has summarized the latter book in her “Religious Interplay on an African Stage,” in Biale, *Cultures of the Jews*, 977–1008.



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