

**Art and propaganda - historical depictions of Jewish people.**

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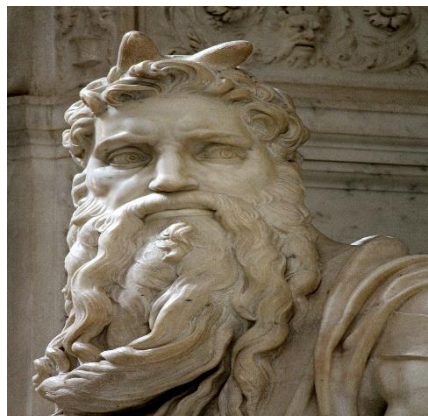
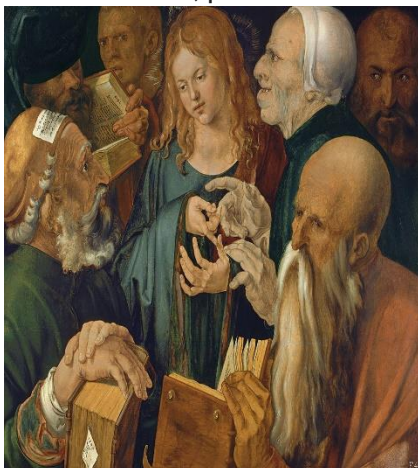
## Art and propaganda – historical depictions of Jews.

Claudia Hercman, speaking from Buenos Aires, before the service in the afternoon at West Central Liberal Synagogue on the 20<sup>th</sup> November ,2021 , explained how Jews were portrayed, particularly in the Mediaeval and Renaissance periods, in visual art. In her opinion images from these times paved the way for, prejudice, suspicion, hatred of Jews, persecution and eventually genocide.

Theodosius I (347 – 395CE), also called Theodosius the Great ,the last emperor before the Roman Empire divided into West and East, was instrumental in establishing the Nicæan Creed as the orthodoxy of Christianity, which he declared the religion of the Empire in 380CE. Before this there is no evidence of division between depictions in art of Christians and Jews. However, over subsequent centuries separation between the two grew as the Church, granted very considerable powers by rulers, rigorously enforced Christianity in Europe.

### From the Middle Ages.

Focusing on the Middle Ages (the fifth to the fifteenth Century, Common Era) and afterwards on the Renaissance, Claudia Hercman exhibited a picture, dated 980 CE, from the Codex Egberti, a gospel book illuminated in the scriptorium of the Reichenau Monastery for Egbert, bishop of Trier (980–993CE), showing Christ before Pontius Pilate. Those present appear dark haired and wearing similar clothes illustrating at that time artists made no distinctions between the Romans and Jews and indeed Jesus himself. We then observed the Proto Renaissance style “Christ among the Doctors” by Giotto painted in 1306 CE. Jesus, aged 12, is shown teaching Rabbis in a synagogue about religion. His dark skin is indistinguishable from theirs. This was compared to a painting of the same subject by Albrecht Dürer, dating to 1506, now in the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid. Jesus now appears light skinned with fair hair while the rabbis appear like devils, or animals, with evil countenances, please see below.



Christ Among the Doctors: Albrecht Durer. Michelangelo's sculpture of Moses.

Michelangelo's sculpture of Moses (circa 1513-1515), in the church of San Pietro in Vincoli in Rome, portrays him with a pair of horns, often then associated with animals and even demons. This may have been a result an ancient mistake in translation of the Hebrew

Bible into Latin by Saint Jerome in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century. Although we are told the local Jewish community approved of the sculpture of Moses, it may have confirmed visitors in their idea of Jews as fundamentally different beings ( Remarkably such thinking is reported to exist today in some parts of the world where people never knowingly meet Jews). Next we saw the Marriage of the Virgin by Michael Pacher, painted around 1498 depicting the marriage of Mary and Joseph in a church with a Christian priest despite the fact that Christianity could not have existed at the time. In answer to the question how did Jesus become a European man ?, Claudia Hercman said it was necessary for the Church, who saw Jesus as the son of God, to disassociate him, his parents, apostles and associates from the malevolent, or at best misguided, group which in its teachings had condemned him. Although Jesus was a devoted Jew all his life, the idea he himself had converted to Christianity was promoted. In Leonardo Da Vinci's Last Supper (around 1495), one of western arts most recognisable images, in which Jesus informs his disciples one of them will betray him, all figures are European in looks, except Judas Iscariot who has a dark and semitic appearance. The Last Supper was a Pesach meal. Bread would certainly not have been on the table, unlike in Leonardo DaVinci's mural painted in Milan. Although not asserting Leonardo was anti semitic, Claudia Hercman said DaVinci and other artists, reflected the times in which they lived and the tastes of those for whom they produced their work in Italy, Spain and Germany -countries where the Church was so strong. The image of Jesus ,and those who were close to him, as Europeans travelled to Latin America in the conquests by the Spanish and Portuguese and was used in the colonies they established as a justification for a racial ordering with white people at its apex. For illustration we were shown Nicholas Correa's Saint Rose of Lima (1586-1617, National Museum of Mexico). The saint, the first to be canonised in South America, is painted as entirely white despite her mixed black and white Peruvian heritage. Not all artists painted Christ in an idealised European form. Painting during the Baroque in Holland, where the Catholic Church was less influential, Rembrandt produced Study of the Head and Clasped Hands of a young man as Christ in Prayer (The Louvre) as part of a series of paintings. Living in the Jewish district of Amsterdam, and concerned with historical accuracy, he selected Jews as models for his work. ( Rembrandt also produced several masterpieces of Jews including Portrait of an Old Jew, Portrait of a Young Jew and the Jewish Bride.)



Rembrandt: Study of the head and clasped hands of a young man as Christ in Prayer.

Moving forward in time, John Everett Millais displayed *Christ in the House of His Parents* in 1849 (Tate Britain). Painted as ordinary looking people in a workshop, this also broke with conventions of ideal depictions of Jesus and his family. The picture was condemned as blasphemous by some and severely criticised by Charles Dickens. The force of convention also asserted itself with Max Lieberman's *Jesus at Twelve in the Temple* (Hamburger Kuntshalle, Hamburg). Exhibited for the first time at the Munich International Art Exhibition in 1879, it led to a scandal. Critics were offended a Jewish painter should dare to depict the Christian theme of the boy Jesus in the Temple, especially as it was said he resembled a "Jewish urchin" off the streets. Lieberman was admonished strongly for straying too far from the traditional portrayal of the young Jesus as a divine youth and of his intellectual superiority over the Jewish scholars. Faced with all this, Lieberman withdrew the painting and years later overpainted Jesus as blond. In stark contrast the architect and artist Rod Borghese this century "restored" Michael Pacher's 15<sup>th</sup> Century *Marriage of the Virgin* depicting the betrothal of a 13 year old Jewish girl, Mary, to her Jewish carpenter fiance, Joseph, in a synagogue with all present being Jewish. This work helps counter pervasive Christianisation of the Jewish Jesus in classical artworks that fed the illusion he was of a different religion and ethnicity to others in his time.



The Marriage of the Virgin : Michael Pacher and Rod Borghese, right.

## Prominent themes in the depiction of Jews in Art.

### Ecclesia et Synagoga.

In Mediaeval Christian art throughout Europe Ecclesia and Synagoga are a pair of female figures respectively personifying the Church and the Jewish synagogue. They often appear sculpted on either side of a church doorway, for example at Strasbourg and Metz Cathedrals (In England remains of them, after being damaged in the Reformation, exist at Rochester, Lincoln, Salisbury and Winchester Cathedrals.) They are also found standing either side of the cross in crucifixion scenes, including in stained glass. Synagoga is usually the left, a position widely associated in Mediaeval consciousness with mystery and the devil.

Ecclesia is generally adorned with a crown, chalice and a cross on a staff. She looks confidently forward while Synagoga is blindfolded – her eyes are sometimes covered by a snake – droops downward, carries a broken lance and the Tablets of the Law or Torah scrolls slip from her hand.

The figures broadcast the contemporary universal Christian belief in Supersessionism - that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, therefore Judaism as a religion was unnecessary and that all Jews should convert. Synagoga's blindfold symbolised the stubborn refusal of Mediaeval Jews to agree.

Apart from their theological significance, Ecclesia and Synagoga were certainly also intended to remind Jews of their inferior and subordinate place in Christian society. Many Jews, like Christians, conducted business in churches, and would pass the figures as they came and went.



Ecclesia and Synagoga : Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris.

## Judensau.

While Ecclesia and Synagoga was directed against organised Jewish religion, Judensau, an image of Jews in obscene contact with a large sow, was aimed clearly at Jews as individuals. First appearing during the 13th century in Germany, it persisted in popularity for some 600 hundred years. The Stadtkirche, in Wittenberg has an early 14<sup>th</sup> Century Judensau on its façade portraying a rabbi looking under a sow's tail and other Jews drinking from its teats. Martin Luther, who regularly preached there in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, and was virulently hostile to Jews, especially in his later writings (particularly in *On the Jews and Their Lies*, *Von den Jüden und iren Lügen*, a 65,000-word treatise written in 1543 dripping with anti-semitism), approved of the image and located the Talmud in the sow's bowels.

“Here on our church in Wittenberg a sow is sculpted in stone. Young pigs and Jews lie suckling under her. Behind the sow a rabbi is bent over the sow, lifting up her right leg, holding her tail high and looking intensely under her tail and into her Talmud, as though he were reading something acute or extraordinary, which is certainly where they get their Shemhamphoras” ( *Vom Schem Hamphoras* 1543).

Although Judensau are mainly found in Germany, some appear in Cathedrals and churches in other countries including France, Poland and Austria. One is in Uppsala Cathedral dated 1435 when no Jews are known to have lived in Sweden – an instance of anti-semitism without Jews, a phenomenon which existed elsewhere, including England after the Edict of Expulsion in 1290.

The Lutheran Church has been called upon to remove the Stadtkirche Judensau. A case to achieve this was recently argued unsuccessfully before the district and regional courts. It may be appealed higher. Opinions differ whether Judensau should be taken down or kept and publicly explained as historical gross expressions of anti-semitism.



The Stadtkirche, Wittenberg. Early 14<sup>th</sup> Century Judensau

## The Blood Libel.

The falsehood, a libel that lasted many centuries, that Jews, requiring their blood to make matzos for Pesach, abducted and ritually murdered Christian children, originated in Norwich during 1145. Rapidly spreading throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, the libel resulted in the arrest and killing of Jews by mobs and sometimes after trial, usually preceded by torture to extract “confessions”, for example in 1255 following the death of “Little Hugh” in Lincoln. A number of boys whose death was attributed to Jews were declared saints, or at least venerated. Shrines to them were built in churches and cathedrals attracting pilgrims, confirming in many distrust and hostility to Jews. They were also shown in paintings. The crucifixion of William on a rood screen in Holy Trinity church, Loddon. Norfolk is an example. Another is the blood libel in Sandomierz Cathedral in Poland. Prints and illustrations in books appeared such as in Hartmann Schedel's *Weltchronik*, 1493 depicting the ritual murder in Italy of Simon of Trent in 1475. Colouring books for children were sold depicting Jews, with exaggerated features and distinctive hats, conspiring, capturing and killing Simon, collecting his blood for use in matzos and then eating them. Further pages showed execution of Jews by burning and beheading. Those executed included baptised Jews - evidence, in Claudia Hercman's opinion, that Jewishness was now seen as located in blood and race – permanently different and always to be suspected - rather than solely in religion. In 1965 the Second Vatican Council removed William of Norwich, Simon of Trent and others from the Canon of Catholic Saints on the basis there was no evidence they were murdered by Jews. Tradition and folk memory grounded in centuries is, however, more difficult to eradicate and some people still celebrate their saints days. Also newly created pictures of the murder of the boys may be found on the internet.

The Host desecration fabrication is closely related to blood libel. In Christianity bread consecrated by priests represents the body of Christ – the sacred Host. According to the fiction, this was desecrated by Jews before it was consumed by Christians during Mass. If the Host was stabbed then so was Jesus, amounting to the gravest act and sin. Pictures and stain glasses were created, and remain in churches, notably in Brussels, Catalonia and Germany, of Jews stabbing and torturing the Host seated at tables which, in at least one, appears to levitate. A medieval painting of host desecration by Jews may be viewed in the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya in Barcelona, please see below.



Painting of Blood Libel, Sandomierz Cathedral, Poland.

### The Black Death.

In 1348 the Black Death, bubonic plague, extended into Europe and then rapidly over it. Over four years, it is likely 45–50% of the continent's population died of plague in what remains the most fatal pandemic recorded in history. In a pre-scientific age people searched for answers why this disaster had befallen them. Many found them in religion. One explanation was the devil was working to destroy Christianity and, amongst other outsiders, had recruited Jews, to assist him. Rumours circulated and pictures appeared showing Jews poisoning drinking wells. The first massacres of Jews took place in 1348 in Toulon and Catalonia. Pope Clement VI in that year tried to protect Jewish communities, issuing two papal bulls stating those who blamed the plague on the Jews had themselves been "seduced by that liar, the Devil" and emphasised that "It cannot be true that the Jews, by such a heinous crime, are the cause or occasion of the plague, because through many parts of the world the same plague, by the hidden judgment of God, has afflicted and afflicts the Jews themselves and many other races who have never lived alongside them." He urged clergy to protect Jews and offered them papal protection in the city of Avignon. The Pope's appeals were little heeded. Many attacks against Jewish communities took place, the most terrible being in Strasbourg, a city not yet reached by the plague, on the 14<sup>th</sup> February, 1349. About 2,000 were murdered, the single worst killing of Jews until the Shoah. Soon after the Jewish community in Frankfurt am main was destroyed and in August 1349, the Jewish communities in Mainz and Cologne were annihilated. A Miniature from a 14th-century manuscript *Antiquitates Flandriae* shows Jews being burned at the stake. By 1351, 60 major and 150 smaller Jewish communities had been destroyed. During this period many Jews relocated to the safety of Poland where they were welcomed by its monarch.



Jews burned at the stake in Strasbourg during the Black Death 1349, from *Antiquitates Flandriae*, 14<sup>th</sup> Century.



## Bestiaries.

Bestiaries — Mediaeval books of beasts, including some that were fantastic — were among the most popular of illuminated texts in northern Europe during the Middle Ages (about 500–1500), especially in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> England. In societies with very low literacy rates they were important in religious teaching, requiring recognition of creatures rather than an ability to read. Bestiaries largely focused on each animal's religious meaning. The key theme was how to be a good Christian. Bestiaries divided animals between good and evil. In general the good animals were on the top of the page and the evil on the bottom. An example of this is the Aberdeen Bestiary (Aberdeen University Library) from the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. Good animals included the stag, the phoenix and the panther. Amongst the bad were the dragon, the cat, the weasel, the jackal, the hyena and also the owl - seen as a dirty and appearing at night. This bird was often associated in bestiaries with Jews and depicted as being attacked by virtuous birds. A misericord (raised seat) in Norwich Cathedral dating from the 15<sup>th</sup> Century (long after the expulsion of Jews from England) has a carving of an owl perched on the branches of a vine being mobbed by five starlings, please see below. The owl representing the “ Jewish Church which when offered the light of Christ’s teaching preferred darkness”. Links were also made between Jews and cats, representing heresy, toads, because they puff themselves up, and crows because they collect shiny objects. Jews and synagogues were also connected with donkeys.



A detail from the 12<sup>th</sup> Century Aberdeen Bestiary.



Misericord from Norwich Cathedral, 15<sup>th</sup> Century.

## **Banishment.**

An illustration from the margins of the Rochester Chronicle, created in 1355 (British Library, Shelfmark: Cotton MS Nero D II), shows Jews being beaten in England during the previous century. In the late 1200s, a series of laws were created restricting freedoms of Jewish people. They were not allowed to own land, and after death their money went directly to the Crown, not their children. In 1275 Edward I passed a law forbidding Jews from usury (lending money for interest). Though permitted to earn a living as tradesmen or farmers, they were not allowed to join guilds or own farmland. Having entered poverty, the King could no longer collect taxes from them. Many hundreds were arrested, imprisoned or hanged. In 1290 Jews were banished without exception from the country and only granted permission to return by Oliver Cromwell in 1656. Expulsion from other European countries and cities followed: France 1306; Bern, Switzerland 1348; Hungary 1360; Upper Bavaria 1442; and Spain 1492.



The Rochester Chronicle showing Jews being attacked, bottom right.

## Jews power and money.

Notions, prevalent in later centuries, that Jews greedily seek wealth, lust for world power and benefit from wars have mediaeval origins. Banned from most professions and membership of Christian trade guilds Jews, often had little choice in entering money lending. Indeed in that capacity were of great use to monarchs, especially in England, as sources of heavy taxation and periodic confiscation of wealth. Money lending contributed to the already negative image of Jews which was depicted and entrenched in visual art.

In Mediaeval Europe authorities deemed it necessary for those involved in lending, trade, business and other interactions to be able to discriminate who amongst them was Jewish. Accordingly, Jewish males were compelled, especially in Germanic lands, to wear pointed hats. An example, similar to that compulsory for Venetian Jews, may be seen worn by the Jewish poet Susskind von Trimberg, in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century Codex Manasse (Wikimedia). Earlier illustrations may be seen in pictures in the Moralised Bible, 1225-45.

The Rothschild family's rapid accumulation, beginning in the eighteenth century, of wealth through banking, was met by rampant anti-semitism expressed in grotesque cartoons - those published in France by Edward Drumond, founder of the Antisemitic League of France in 1889, in his "newspaper" La Libre Parole, are notorious examples, please see beneath..



German Jews from the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. Herrad von Landsberg, Hortus deliciarum.

### **Jews and Yellow as a colour.**

In the *Payment of Judas* by the Flemish artist Gerard Seghin, painted about 1600, Judas, dressed in yellow, is to receive thirty pieces of silver for betraying Jesus. He also wears clothes of yellow in Carravaggio's *Taking of Christ* (1602 National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, please see below). Similarly in *Betrayal of Christ*, a Dutch work from around 1650 in the Victoria and Albert Museum, please see below, Judas wears a yellow cloak. From the 12th century onward, Judas began to be transformed into a personification of all Jews at a time when many Jews in Europe were pushed into unpopular economic roles such as usury, which the Catholic church regarded as sinful. In the popular mind yellow became associated with betrayal, treachery and cowardice. Jews were obliged to wear yellow round badges or belts or pointed hats or berets of that colour to differentiate themselves from the general populace. Centuries later during German occupation of Europe in the Second World War Jews were forced to wear yellow badges, usually in the shape of a Star of David.



Betrayal of Christ, Unknown, 1650, Victoria and Albert Museum. Above Carravaggio's Taking of Christ (1602 National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin).

## The Wandering Jew.

During the 13<sup>th</sup> Century the myth of the eternal Wandering Jew, who taunted Jesus on his way to being crucified and was then cursed to walk the planet until Christ returns, began to spread in Europe and to be represented in art, especially church decoration. Harking back to deeply embedded folklore of earlier periods, a gargoyle, half man and half goat (a goat was considered an evil creature), representing the Wandering Jew was erected above Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris following a fire in the 1880s. The Wandering Jew, or Eternal Jew, as a theme has featured in literature of many countries. A nineteenth century representation by Gustav Dore is produced below.



### **Historical stages in visual representations of Jews.**

Bernard Starr helpfully sets out five stages in art depicting Jews from mediaeval to modern times in *"Jesus, Jews, and Anti-Semitism in Art: How Renaissance Art Erased Jesus' Jewish Identity and How Today's Artists Are Restoring It"*:

1-Early Medieval art up to the twelfth-century: no visual distinction between Christians and Jews.

2- 1100-1150: Jews are introduced in Christian art to represent the "blindness" and failure of Judaism and to serve as "witnesses" to the superiority of Christianity.

3- 1150 -- early Renaissance: Demonization, physical distinction of Jews and other stereotypes begin.

4. High and late Renaissance through the seventeenth century: The virtual removal of Judaism in Christian art with depictions of Jesus, his family, followers and Christianity showing no connection to Judaism.

5. Eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries: The resurgence of explicit anti-Semitic art, mostly in the form of printed images and other visual propaganda.

Claudia Hercmans highly informative and well presented talk provided us with numerous examples of how visual art over many centuries, most with low literacy and education, powerfully promoted and sustained prejudice and reinforced suspicion of Jews with terrible consequences. Arising from this, she poses two poignantly and thought provoking linked questions " Can propaganda be considered a form of art? Can art be considered a form of propaganda?"

