

## **"Christ has redeemed us by the shedding of his precious blood": the emotional regime of Blut Christi, and its significance on the German Peasants' War, 1525**

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Blood defined how 16<sup>th</sup> century individuals perceived and interacted with the world, mediating relationships and devotion through a matrix of interrelated symbols and stigmas (Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> This relational ability of blood revolved around the body as a closed model in which its materiality could either be *sanguis* (inside) or *cruor* (shed).<sup>2</sup> Whether *sanguis* or *cruor* blood attained a cultural power to empower or accuse, liberate, or threaten. This paradox of purity and pollution emplaced an inherent material instability, imbuing blood with a malleable dynamism and power.<sup>3</sup> This conceptual matrix of blood contained a complex interrelation of nodes (Fig. 1), which could be accessed and deployed by different individuals and groups.

This matrix of nodes were assembled under as an 'emotional regime', which held affective potential for early modern individuals and groups.<sup>4</sup> First proposed by William Reddy, an emotional regime was a 'set of normative emotions, and the official rituals, practises and emotives that express and inculcate them'.<sup>5</sup> Through reiterating these emotives – performative actions which cognitively result in emotions - individuals subscribe to the emotional regime of the contemporary authority. This regime is thus politically important due to its ability to induce action through social objectives.<sup>6</sup> Thus, as a discourse which could be deployed for socio-political aims, the emotional regime of blood held the potential to motivate action. During the Peasants' War of 1525 it motivated the violence of the peasantry in their actions against not just the lords and clergy, but also buildings and Jews. Through consideration of this violence as 'rites', these actions constructed and encoded identities through an assault against the perceived pollution.<sup>7</sup> A violence which will be understood as a deployment and negotiation of the purity and pollution established through 'the theme of blood'.

This essay shall consider the hope and passion caused by salvific blood, the anger at the polluting Marian shrines and the anxiety at the perceived Jewish Other. Due to the limits of space, the eucharist shall not be considered, although, as noted in Fig. 1, it was also pivotal to the emotional regime

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<sup>1</sup> C. W. Bynum, *Wonderful Blood* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p.110; F. Matteoni, 'Blood Beliefs in Early Modern Europe', (Ph. D. University of Hertfordshire, 2009), p.20; Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood* (Cardiff, 2006), pp.134-6.

<sup>2</sup> Matteoni, 'Blood Beliefs', pp.11-20; Bildauer, *Medieval Blood*, pp.6-7.

<sup>3</sup> Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, p.173, 191.

<sup>4</sup> W. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*, p.129.

<sup>6</sup> T. M. Colwell, 'Emotives and Emotional Regimes' in S. Broomhall (ed.), *Early Modern Emotions* (Routledge, 2017), p.7.

<sup>7</sup> N. Z. Davis, 'The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France', *Past and Present*, 59 (1973), p.57.

of blood and informed the peasant violence. However, to view ‘blood’ as affecting the violence in any systematic manner would be to fall into anachronism. It held affective potential, but it was not the main driving factor of the violence. This essay will not argue that the conceptual matrix of blood affected the conflict in any quantitative manner. Instead, through isolated incidents, the emotional regime of blood non-systematically informed and directed the violence of the Peasants’ War of 1525.

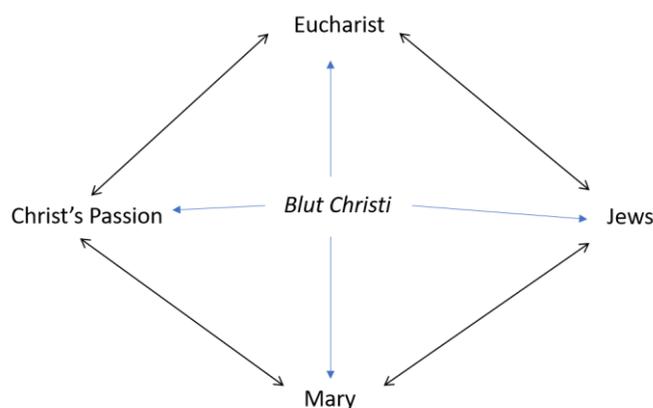


Fig. 1. Conceptual Matrix of Blood.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Blut Christi* and its Salvific Potential**

This conceptual matrix of blood was intimately tied around the loci of *Blut Christi* – the blood of Christ. *Blut Christi* was a key component in the ‘economy of salvation’ due to its purifying ability.<sup>9</sup> Through this capacity to purify, *Blut Christi* could become a liberating force inspiring hope through its promise of salvation.<sup>10</sup> This liberating potential became, a discourse which could be utilised and deployed as a radical invocation to protest and rebel in 1525.

One such instance of this deployment of the emotional regime of blood was at the Memmingen, when the Swabian League employed journeyman furrier Sebastian Lotzer and Memmingen preacher Christoph Schappeler to summarise the over three hundred articles brought by various peasant bands as grievances.<sup>11</sup> These articles were seminal in the Peasants’ War as, printed and then disseminated across central Germany, they formed an initial grievance list which, through the traditional of *gravamina*, could be added to as local grievances arose.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> A reductive exercise, Fig. 1 seeks to show the interconnection of the different concepts which revolved around *Blut Christi*, and how they interact and inform each other.

<sup>9</sup> Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, p. 191; Holtz, M. ‘Cults of the Precious Blood in the Medieval Latin West’, *Proquest Dissertations Publishing* (1997), p.178.

<sup>10</sup> Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, pp.155-7, 191.

<sup>11</sup> T. Scott, and R. W. Scribner, *The German Peasants’ War : A History in Documents*. (Humanities Press, 1991), p.254.

<sup>12</sup> B. Kümin and A. Würzler, ‘Petitions, *Gravamina* and the Early Modern State: Local Influence on Central Legislation in England and Germany (Hesse)’, *Parliaments, Estates and Representation*, 17/1 (1997), pp.39-60; For the impact of the printing press on early modern society and information exchange see E. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2012).

In the third article of the Twelve Articles, lamenting their treatment as serfs, the Memmingen peasantry noted that ‘since Christ has redeemed and bought us all by the shedding of his precious blood, the shepherd just as the highest, no one excepted’, and concluded that ‘it is [therefore] demonstrated by Scripture that we are free and wish to be free’.<sup>13</sup> This article, has demonstrated the peasant demand for material emancipation and freedom, as interpreted by historians such as Blickle and Lobenstein-Reichmann.<sup>14</sup> *Blut Christi* plays a pivotal role in this justification. The ‘shedding of his precious blood’ is both a reminder of Jesus Christ’s sacrifice, and an accusation to those – the lords – who injure him through their treatment of serfs.<sup>15</sup> Hence, the Memmingen peasantry were using *Blut Christi* as an emotional invocation to their lords, petitioning by using a Christian vocabulary which would be accessible, understandable, and hopefully affective to their lords.

Recent attention by Frederick Marquardt has noted that Lotzer was imposing his own theology onto the peasant grievances that the Memmingen council had asked him to compile in late February, 1525.<sup>16</sup> Assessing the 35 surviving peasant grievances (of c.300) which Lotzer had been asked to rationalise, Marquardt isolates only two which use the theological justification that Christ died for humanity as the reason that serfdom should be abolished. Even Luther, when commenting on the Twelve Articles in his *Admonition*, condemns the grievances for ‘this article [article three] would make all men equal, and turn the spiritual kingdom of Christ into a worldly, external kingdom; and that is impossible’.<sup>17</sup>

Yet, just because justification by salvific blood was not present in the initial grievances does not mean that it was inconsequential for the peasantry. The presence of the conceptual matrix of blood, pre-grievances, meant that Lotzer could still deploy it, even if not present initially. Although not being the direct vehicle of action, like the material privations the peasantry were suffering under, *Blut Christi* still held the potential to inspire hope. In the marginalia next to Article Three, Schappeler refers to the well-known biblical passage of Isaiah 53:4-5 - ‘by his wounds we are healed’.<sup>18</sup> This poignant verse, highlighting the emotional suffering of Christ, informed the visual image of the *vir dolorum* – Man of Sorrows.<sup>19</sup> This is an image that the peasants of Memmingen would have been aware of – widely used in ecclesiastical iconography, as well as woodcuts such as Dürer’s ‘Man of Sorrows’ (1511).<sup>20</sup> Through

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<sup>13</sup> Scott and Scribner, *The German Peasants’ War*, p.254.

<sup>14</sup> F. Marquardt, ‘God, Christ and Serfdom: Christian Egalitarianism in the Twelve Articles of the Upper Swabian Peasants (1525)’, *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 107/1 (2016), p.36.

<sup>15</sup> Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, p.170.

<sup>16</sup> Marquardt, ‘God, Christ and Serfdom’, p.37.

<sup>17</sup> LW, pp.46, 55.

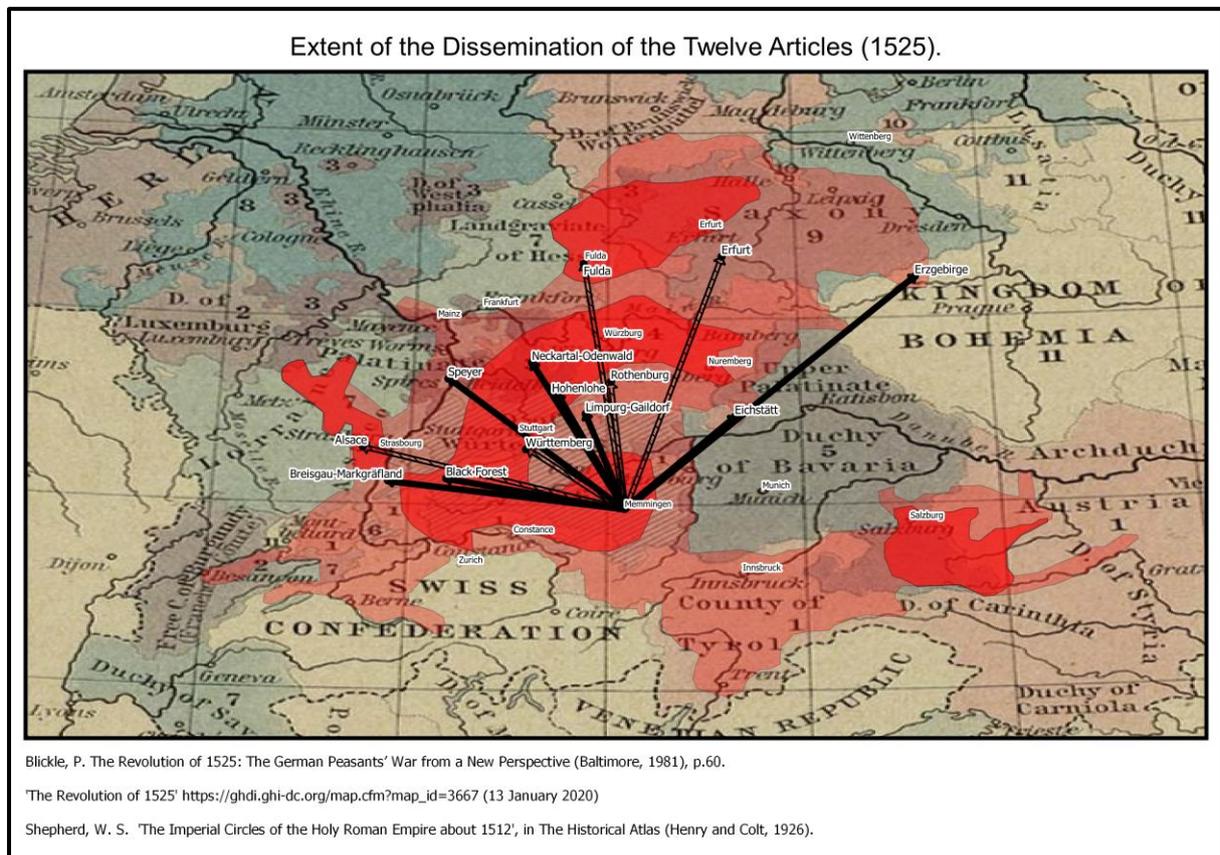
<sup>18</sup> Isaiah 53:4-5.

<sup>19</sup> J. Clifton, ‘A Fountain Filled With Blood’ in J. Bradburne, (eds). *Blood: Art, Power, Politics and Pathology* (Prestel, 2002), p.68.

<sup>20</sup> M. Rubin, ‘Blood: Sacrifice and Redemption in Christian Iconography’ in J. Bradburne, (eds). *Blood: Art, Power, Politics and Pathology* (Prestel, 2002), pp.90-1; Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, p.150; M. Rubin, *Corpus Christi: the Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1991), p.308.

Isaiah 53's inclusion Schappeler reinforces the peasantry's conflicting emotions of anxiety and hope, liberation and accusation, which Lotzer first deploys.

The articles were widely disseminated in 25 editions and 25,000 copies, cheap chapbooks, borrowing and loaning.<sup>21</sup> Despite this wide dissemination, when the Twelve Articles were reproduced in a specific regional or local setting - the Amorbach Articles, Porrentuy Band and County of Rheinfelden - *Blut Christi* was removed in favour of a solely economic justification.<sup>22</sup> This could evidence Marquardt's conclusion, yet just because Lotzer and Schappeler's deployment of the emotional regime of blood was removed upon reproduction, does not mean that it did not initially inform action. Through aural readings and 'textual communities', the Twelve Articles would have been disseminated to huge swathes of central Germany in March 1525. Blicke notes the dissemination patterns of the articles, which demonstrate their formative impact on the north and west of the uprising (Fig. 2).<sup>23</sup>



<sup>21</sup> R. W. Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (The Hambleton Press, 1987), pp.66-68

<sup>22</sup> Scott and Scribner, *The German Peasants' War*, pp.85-6, 282-4.

<sup>23</sup> Scott and Scribner, *The German Peasants' War*, p. 249; B. Stock, *The Implications of Literacy* (Princeton, 1983), p.88.

Fig. 2. The dissemination of the Twelve Articles, fully black arrows marking ‘total reception’ and shaded ‘partial reception’ overlaid onto the extent of the Peasants’ War of 1525.<sup>24</sup>

The dissemination via textual community would have created an intimate experience for onlookers, an ‘emotional communities’ formed around the specific grievances to which the resultant communities could relate.<sup>25</sup> Erasmus Wolff’s reading of the articles in a forest near Gerstungen, or at Neustadt when they were read ‘in a ring’, show the bringing together of communities around the grievances read out from the Twelve.<sup>26</sup> These communities were inspired by the anger at the economic privations described in Articles Two (grain tithes), Four (restrictions on poaching) or Five (woodcutting), but also by the hope in the new order envisaged in the demands of the text. These were emotional aural performances which, through the reference to the shed blood of Christ, relationships independent of prior feudal connections could be established and cemented.

The emotional use of *Blut Christi* to cement relationships was continued through the linguistic terms of ‘brother’ and ‘brotherhood’.<sup>27</sup> Establishing membership through such terminology, communality of blood created exclusivity to such fraternal groups. The communality of blood created emotional communities, through collective performances and deployment of the dominant emotional regime, all sharing in Jesus’ suffering, as he suffered for those of the brotherhood. These fraternal bonds could then authorise violence against those exterior to the brotherhood.<sup>28</sup>

This language was based on a more select group than Blickle’s concept of the ‘Common Man’ and goes some way to demonstrate why certain groups chose to deploy the language of *Blut Christi*, and others did not.<sup>29</sup> Communities, such as the Allgäu, came together to deploy *Blut Christi* in relation to a Christian brotherhood. In the opening line of the grievances, they note ‘in Jesus Christ, our dearest brother’ and go on to deem ‘we are brothers in Jesus Christ our Saviour’.<sup>30</sup> The Allgäu were creating a fraternal connection between Christ and them; one sustained through the notion of *Blut Christi* and His sacrifice. Reiterated through reference to His salvation, they connected each to one another, through Him. This bond was sustained through the materiality of His blood.<sup>31</sup>

The Frankenhausen host also used this linguistic technique in a letter to Müntzer. Mirroring his greeting to them, ‘our dear Christian fathers and brothers’, they went on to implore Mühlhausen to come

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<sup>24</sup> P. Blickle, *The Revolution of 1525: The German Peasants’ War from a New Perspective* (Baltimore, 1981), p.60.

<sup>25</sup> B. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 2006).

<sup>26</sup> Scott and Scribner, *The German Peasants’ War*, pp.42, 249.

<sup>27</sup> K. Hill, ‘Brotherhood, Sisterhood and the Language of Gender in the German Reformation’, *Reformation and Renaissance Review*, 17/2 (2016), p.181.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p.184.

<sup>29</sup> P. Blickle, *From the Communal Reformation to the Revolution of the Common Man* (Brill, 1998).

<sup>30</sup> Scott and Scribner, *The German Peasants’ War*, pp.126-127.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p.127.

to their aid.<sup>32</sup> They justify this as otherwise ‘our Christian blood will be shed in great quantities’. This choice of language could just be descriptive; there were frequent contemporary allusions to ‘bloodshed’.<sup>33</sup> Yet, it could also be an implicit reference to their shared suffering. A suffering understood in relation to the Passion of Christ and emotional regime of blood. This use of the fraternal language brought together variegated and disparate communities. In doing so, it demonstrated the ability of *Blut Christi* to create emotional communities, and how these fraternal bonds informed the violence of 1525.

### Iconoclasm and Marian Shrines

Iconoclasm was also informed by the contemporary conceptual matrix of blood. Blood constructed and encoded identities (whether collective or individual) as a ‘rite of violence’ directed against buildings and established relationships to the violated or transgressed objects.<sup>34</sup> Directed through ‘zones of purity and pollution’, the peasantry negotiated and transgressed a ‘culturally specific’ landscape in which they shaped their identity through iconoclastic violence.<sup>35</sup> The iconoclasm prevalent in the Peasants’ War was one within a landscape, dotted with references to blood.<sup>36</sup>

One of the most prevalent zones of purity in the contemporary imagined cartography was that of Marian shrines. Hugely popular in the late 15<sup>th</sup>, early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, shrines such as Altötting, Bavaria or Weingarten, Württemberg became key sites of pilgrimage for miracles of healing and allusions to protection.<sup>37</sup> Yet, during the Peasants’ War these Marian zones of purity were non-systematically assaulted as the purity previously associated with Mary was polluted through erroneous belief, wrongful practise and the assumption that Christ could only be accessed at such shrines.<sup>38</sup> This set a precedent through which polemic preachers lambasted such a wrongful practice, for example Wolfgang Russ, attacking the Marian cult at Altötting, 1522 and Hans Böhm at Niklahausen, 1476.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, to this milieu of anti-Marian protestation was Luther’s oft cited, *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, in which he advised the Council of Regensburg to reform their church through the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, pp.147-8.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, pp.325, 303, 106, 323.

<sup>34</sup> Davis, ‘The Rites of Violence’, p.57; R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (London, 1995).

<sup>35</sup> M. Rubin, *Emotion and Devotion: The Meaning of Mary in Medieval Religious Cultures*. (2009), p.49; A. Timmermann, ‘Highways to Heaven (and Hell): Wayside Crosses and the Making of Late Medieval Landscape’ in C. Brusati, A. E. Enenkel, W. Melion, (eds.), *The Authority of the Word: Reflecting on Image and Text in Northern Europe, 1400-1700*, (Brill, 2011), p.389.

<sup>36</sup> See D. Carpenter *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*. (University of Wisconsin Press, 1998)

<sup>37</sup> D. Moody, ‘Healing Power in the Marian Miracle Books of Bavarian Healing Shrines, 1489-1523’, *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 47/1 (1992), pp.75-89; Rubin, *Emotion and Devotion*, pp.52, 91-104; P. M. Soergel, *Wondrous in His Saints: Counter-Reformation Propaganda in Bavaria*. (University of California Press, 1993), p.50; S. Sargent, ‘Miracle Books and Pilgrimage Shrines in Late Medieval Bavaria’, *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques*, 13/2 (1986), pp.455-471.

<sup>38</sup> Soergel, *Wondrous in His Saints*, p.64.

<sup>39</sup> Rothkrug, ‘Religious Practises and Collective Perceptions: Hidden Homologies in the Renaissance and Reformation’, *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques*, 7/1 (1980), p.114.

destruction of the shrine of the Fair Mary.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, on returning to Wittenburg in 1522, he immediately stopped Karlstadt pre-emptive iconoclasm, aghast at the results of his words.

In 1524, one of the first instances of iconoclasm in the Peasants' War occurred at Mallerbach in Wurttemberg as, influenced by the radical preacher Thomas Müntzer, the small town of Allstedt desecrated the local Marian shrine. Writing to Duke John of Saxony, the soon to be elector of Saxony and secular lord of Allstedt, the 'council and commons' admonished that the continued adoration of 'the devil at Mallerbach ... is as intolerable to us as subjugation to the Turks' and one that was done 'under the name of Mary'.<sup>41</sup> The Allstedters argued that the erroneous belief and pilgrimage is the devil causing such devotional madness, a madness that was polluting Mary. These sites concentrated the emotion of the iconoclasts into what Diarmaid MacCulloch deemed a 'carnavalesque mixture of the spontaneous, the calculated and the ritualistic'.<sup>42</sup> This Rabelaisian explosion of anger was one inspired by the encroaching pollution of wrongful worship.

However, Mary did not just represent the purifying ability of *Blut Christi*, she became increasingly tied up with Jews in the conceptual matrix of blood.<sup>43</sup> The memory of the encounter between Mary and the Jews was etched dramatically onto the built environment of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Germany. As Miri Rubin notes 'as Mary became more visible in streets and squares, so did the possibilities for unfortunate clashes between Christians and Jews around her'.<sup>44</sup>

This clash arose non-systematically in the Peasants' War as on one hand, Marian symbols did not inform the violence of the Peasants' War. For example, the hugely popular *Schöne Maria* of Regensburg, built after the expulsion of the Regensburg Jews (1519) attracted over 50,000 pilgrims in the first month of its construction, yet was left unaffected by the conflict of 1525.<sup>45</sup> When Fig. 8 is considered one can see that although the Peasants' War was not directed by the Jewish expulsions of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, certain key towns were located within the epicentres of conflict.

One such town that had converted its Jewish synagogue into a Marian church was the northern Bavarian town of Rothenburg ob der Tauber. The Jewish community was expelled in 1520 at the behest of Johann Teuschlin, and the synagogue converted into a Marian shrine.<sup>46</sup> The alliance formed between Teuschlin – one of the leaders of the urban insurrection in 1525 - and the Rothenburgers was solidified

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<sup>40</sup> Soergel, *Wondrous in His Saints*, p.60.

<sup>41</sup> Matheson, *Collected Works*, pp.80-1.

<sup>42</sup> D. MacCulloch, *All Things Made New: Writings on the Reformation* (2016), pp.38-9.

<sup>43</sup> Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, p.158-9; A. Creasman, 'The Virgin Mary against the Jews: Anti-Jewish Polemic in the Pilgrimage to the Schöne Maria of Regensburg, 1519-1525', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 33/2 (2002), p. 963.

<sup>44</sup> Rubin, *Emotion and Devotion: The Meaning of Mary in Medieval Religious Cultures*. (2009), p.67.

<sup>45</sup> Soergel, *Wondrous in His Saints* (1993), p. 57.

<sup>46</sup> Haverkamp, A. (2018). 'Germany' in Chazan, R. (eds). *The Cambridge History of Judaism, Volume 6: The Middle Ages*. (Cambridge University Press), p.273.

through his support for the expulsion of the Jewish community in 1520.<sup>47</sup> This established a relationship between preacher and community. One that, brought about through the anxiety of the Jewish Other and the emotional regime of the blood libel, enabled Teuschlin to direct the iconoclasm of the Peasants' War five years later.

The built environment of Rothenburg, and its symbolic links to blood, had been present long before 1520, however. The Rothenburg complex formed a space of devotion around the salvific *Blut Christi*, bounded by the Chapels of the Holy Blood and Saint Michael, which both held Tilman Riemenschneider altar pieces (Fig. 3 and 4).<sup>48</sup> This complex, and the altarpieces, formed a 'purposive spatiality' which pulled the surrounding community into devotion of the Holy Blood.<sup>49</sup> Through affective devotion emotional communities were formed in front of the Passion of Christ and salvific phial of Holy Blood, moving across the face of the altarpiece the audience was invited by figures mild and congenial, framed by the towering stained-glass window (Fig. 5).<sup>50</sup> These symbols formed visual reminders to the congregation of the salvific power and hope inspired by *Blut Christi*. Although it is necessary to not be too prescriptive when interpreting space's impact upon individuals, one can begin to see the centrality of the conceptual matrix of blood to devotional experience in Rothenburg.<sup>51</sup>

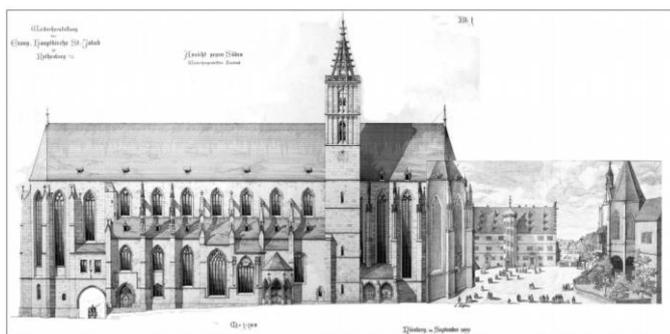


Fig. 3. Parochial Complex of Rothenburg.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>47</sup> R. Vice, 'The German Peasants' War of 1525 and its Aftermath in Rothenburg ob der Tauber and Würzburg', *ProQuest Dissertation Publishing*. (1984), p.200.

<sup>48</sup> K. M. Boivin, 'Holy Blood, Holy Cross: Dynamic Interactions in the Parochial Complex of Rothenburg', *The Art Bulletin*, 99/2 (2017), p.56.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* P.67.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* P.56; J. Bier, *Tilman Riemenschneider: His Life and Work* (University Press of Kentucky, 2015), p.7; L. Turnbull, 'Discursive Affect and Emotional Prescriptiveness : On the "Man of Sorrows" in 14<sup>th</sup> cent Italian painting' in P. Madern et al. (eds.), *Performing Emotions in Early Europe* (Brepols, 2018), pp.226-238.

<sup>51</sup> L. Jerram, 'Space: A Useless Category for Historical Analysis?', *History and Theory*, 52/3 (2013), pp.400-413.

<sup>52</sup> Boivin, 'Holy Blood, Holy Cross' p. 43.



Fig. 4. Tilman Altarpiece, Church of the Holy Blood.<sup>53</sup>

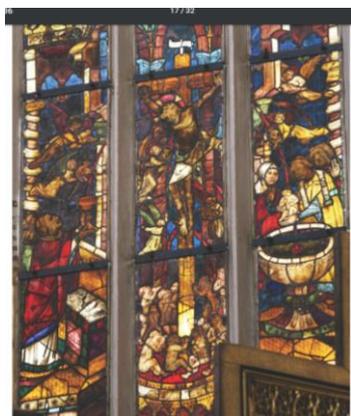


Fig. 5. Stained Glass window showing *Blut Christi* pouring into and purifying a baptismal font (right) and the chalice held up by priest (left).<sup>54</sup>

The first instance of iconoclasm in Rothenburg was the beheading and chopping of arms off a Crucifix in the Chapel of the Pure Mary.<sup>55</sup> The Chapel was the converted synagogue which Teuschlin had consecrated back in 1520, becoming a pilgrimage site after assorted miracles were associated with it.<sup>56</sup> It is noteworthy that this was the first site of Rothenburg's iconoclasm, as it reflects the deep-seated memory of the Rothenburgers, and the anxiety and fury of the conceptual matrix of blood. This violence continued sporadically, leading to all religious services ceasing on the Good Friday of 14<sup>th</sup> April, not to be restarted until after the rebellion. This was followed, on 18<sup>th</sup> April, by an attempted assault on the

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<sup>53</sup> Boivin, 'Holy Blood, Holy Cross' p. 53.

<sup>54</sup> Boivin, 'Holy Blood, Holy Cross', p. 56.

<sup>55</sup> R. Vice, 'Iconoclasm in Rothenburg ob der Tauber in 1525', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 89 (1998), p.58.

<sup>56</sup> R. Vice, 'Ehrenfried Kumpf, Karlstadt's Patron and Peasants' War Rebel', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 86 (1995), p.155.

old Marian altar, the iconoclasts only stopped by armed Catholic burghers.<sup>57</sup> The iconoclasm in Rothenburg, although not going so far as to burn down the Chapel of the Pure Mary or destroying the phial of the Holy Blood in the Tilman Altarpiece, was, at least partially, informed by the matrix of blood.

Yet, care must be taken when deeming that a universal rationale exemplified the Marian iconoclasm of the Peasants' War. Philippe Buc has highlighted that language prevents modern scholarship from adequately recreating contemporary social conventions and rituals.<sup>58</sup> Although not taking this point to where meaning is being invented, as Buc does, to prescribe wholesale iconoclasm only according to this rationale is an anachronism. Rather, attempts at ritualised violence were isolated incidents, as certain subgroups and individuals acted regarding the emotional regime. When considered alongside the sheer extent of Marian Shrines, and the amount that were within the environs of the Peasants' War itself (Fig. 6), there is little sustenance to the argument that the violence of the Peasants' War was specifically targeted against Marian shrines, despite the examples of Mallenbach and Rothenburg. Instead, a conclusion of availability should be taken, that it was often the nearest church that was assaulted. Nonetheless, when considered alongside Müntzer and Luther's polemics, Marian shrines did still represent something more than the local abbey. Their presence within the contemporary conceptual matrix of blood informed violence against them in a subtly different manner to other, non-Marian churches or abbeys.

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<sup>57</sup> Vice, R. 'The German Peasants' War of 1525 and its Aftermath in Rothenburg ob der Tauber and Würzburg', *ProQuest Dissertation Publishing*. (1984), p.243.

<sup>58</sup> P. Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton, 2001).

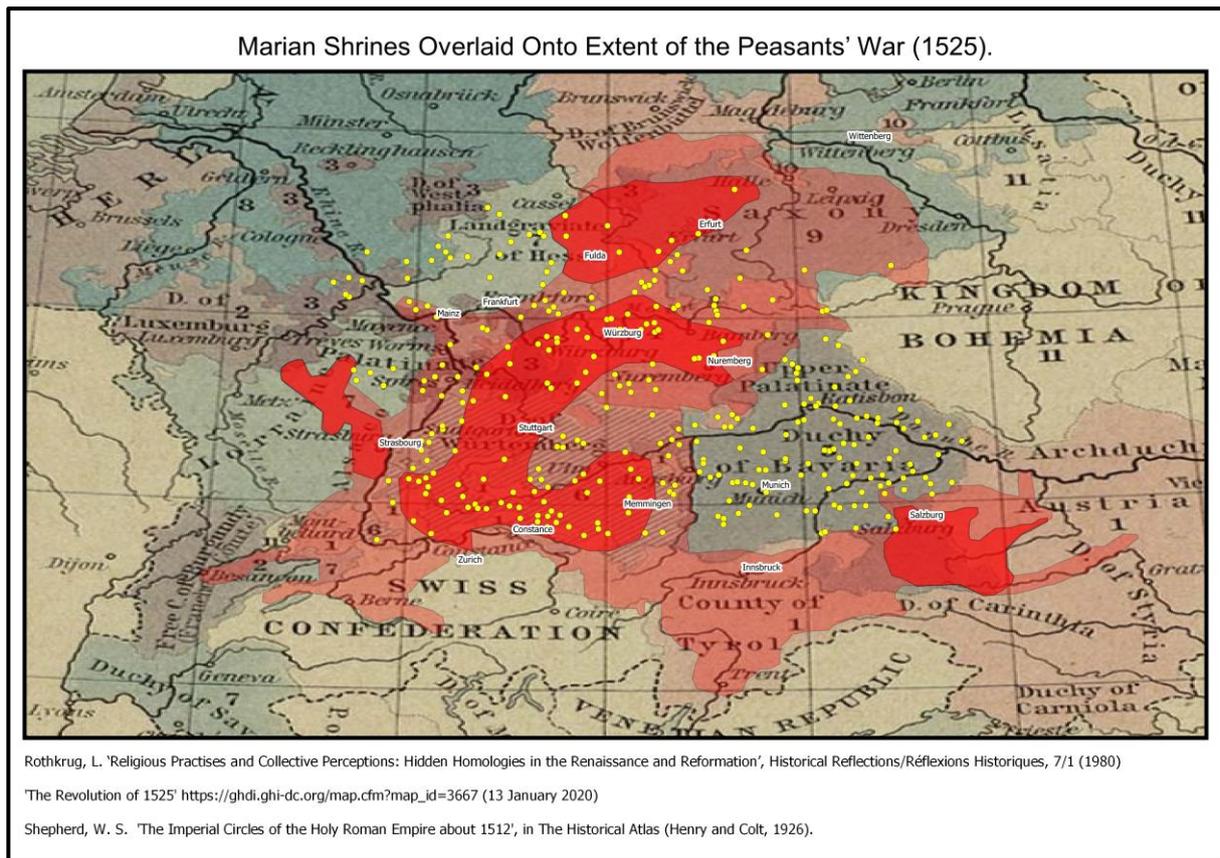


Fig. 6 Marian Shrines Overlaid onto Extent of the Peasants' War (1525).

### The Jewish Other and Blood Libels

Pivotal to the late-medieval conceptual matrix of blood was the figure of the Jew. Historically othered, the culture of suspicion and collective anxiety towards this community reached peaks in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>59</sup> These peaks informed the violence of the Peasants' War. Successive waves of blood libels in Endingen (1470), Trent (1475), Passau (1478) and Freiburg (1504), the publication of inflammatory literature like *The Nuremberg Chronicle* (1493), the insidious woodcuts of Jews of Michael Wodglemut and Wilhelm Pleydenwurff and the carnival plays of Nuremberger Hans Folz reinforced anti-Semitism in central and southern Germany in the years preceding 1525.<sup>60</sup> This imagined other informed the collective anxiety which permeated in the wave of such inflammatory attacks. An anxiety that, as this essay has argued, was deployed during the Peasants' War non-systematically, informing pockets of the violence of 1525.

This emotional regime, centred around *Blut Christi* and the Jewish torture of Christ, was a discourse whose plasticity some preachers mined to create their own emotional regime. The collective anxiety caused by the Jewish pollution was deployed by Müntzer as he lambasted that 'fierce hatred

<sup>59</sup> R. Po Chia-Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder, Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1988, p.3

<sup>60</sup> Po Chia-Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, pp.23-110.

was stoked up in the Jews who affected purity before the people, just as our virgin Martin does now...'.<sup>61</sup> Müntzer used the collective anxiety of the pollution of the Jews in comparison to the 'virgin' Luther, deriding both of their deceitful purity. Müntzer continues this polluted comparison when he calls Luther 'Brother Fatted Pig' in *Vindication and Refutation* (1524); a possible allusion to the polluted and dirty *Judensau*.<sup>62</sup> Informed by Mary Douglas' notion that 'the anxiety about bodily margins express danger to group survival' the established discourse of the polluted Jew was deployed by Müntzer to Luther to deride his teaching as a blight which polluted the collective if an individual came into contact with it.<sup>63</sup> This comparison is continued when Müntzer notes that 'the Jews wanted to see Christ insulted and humiliated on every occasion, just as Luther now tries to treat me'.<sup>64</sup> Müntzer brings forth the contemporary anxiety of Jewish Host desecrations, again alluding to his own purity and, crucially, salvific ability, which Luther was corrupting. This collective anxiety was one that surrounded the Jewish blood libel, and that Müntzer deployed tactically in his campaign against Luther.

The Jew as a mirror was another way that Müntzer attempted to form an emotional regime from his faithful. Catch-all phrases such as 'heathens, Jews and Turks' were staples of his sermons, often with heathen substituted for 'pagan', to tap into the contemporary anxiety of the Other.<sup>65</sup> By implicating the Other in his speeches, Müntzer held up a mirror to his faithful, a mirror with which he could show them that his ascetic regime was necessary. For, if the faithful did not subscribe to his doctrines, Müntzer threatened that 'God will humble you by making the heathen flourish'.<sup>66</sup> Müntzer looked to redeploy this apocalypticism of the Other rhetorically, to show his faithful the vices of Christianity, through comparison to the known vices of the Other. In *Protestation or Proposition* (1524) Müntzer noted that 'we ... have gorged ourselves' in contrast to 'the Jews [who] help their brothers, we rob ours'.<sup>67</sup> Subsequently, inverting the normative cultural trope of the usurious Jew in reference to the greed of unfaithful Christians, accentuated through polluted and dirty words such as 'gorged'.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Matheson, *Collected Works*, p.341.

<sup>62</sup> Matheson, *Collected Works*, p.242; A. G. Stewart, 'Man's Best Friend? Dogs and Pigs in Early Modern Germany', in P. F. Cuneo (ed.), *Animals and Early Modern Identity* (Gower, 2014), pp.19-44.; Wittenberg had contained a *Judensau* from 1305, on the façade on the Stadtkirche where Luther preached and in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, the *Judensau* was growing as a visual trope and becoming increasingly obscene and personalised, aided by the expansion of the woodcut. B. Wiedl, 'Laughing at the Beast: The *Judensau*: Anti-Jewish Propaganda and Humour from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern Period' in A. Classen (ed.) *Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times*. (De Gruyter, 2010).

<sup>63</sup> M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London : Routledge, 2003), p.125.

<sup>64</sup> Matheson, *Collected Works*, p.333.

<sup>65</sup> Matheson, *Collected Works*, pp.66, 69, 219, 271, 315, 317; F. Soyer, 'Racial othering – Jews', in S. Broomhall (ed.), *Early Modern Emotions* (Routledge, 2017), pp.297-300.

<sup>66</sup> Matheson, *Collected Works*, p.317.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, p.196.

<sup>68</sup> R. Po-Chia-Hsia, 'The Usurious Jew: Economic Structure and Religious Representations in Anti-Semitic Discourse' in R. Po-Chia-Hsia and H. Lehmann, *In and Out of the Ghetto: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany* (Washington, 1995), pp.161-176; Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*, p.146; Po Chia-Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, p.65; Creasman, 'A Virgin Mary', pp.956-67

However, Müntzer's use of the 'Jew' is non-systematic, and is contained within his correspondence intermittently, with a last reference by Müntzer on the 22 September 1523 in a letter to Count Ernst von Mansfield.<sup>69</sup> The only concerted use of Jews is within his *Vindication and Refutation*, apart from this his inference of them is scattered, and haphazard. This reinforces the notion that the conceptual matrix of blood was one that could be deployed as-and-when, but that it didn't drive the conflict in any meaningful and decisive way.

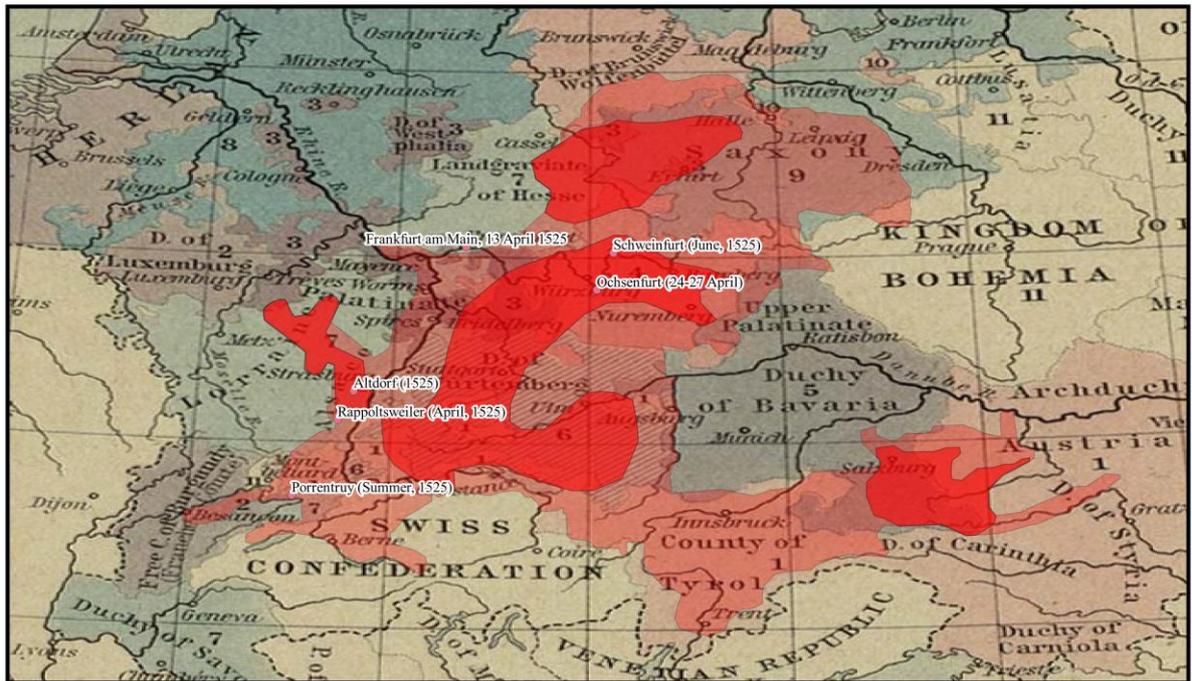
Jews were an intermittent part of the peasant grievances. Through searching 'Jew', 'Jews' and 'Jewish' in Scott and Scribner, only six documents reference them.<sup>70</sup> Subsequently, as shown in Fig. 7, there was limited breadth of inclusion to the Jews in the quantitative stimulation of the peasantry. Consulting Fig. 8, one sees the extent of the towns Jews had been resident in and had been expelled from. Hence, despite being well known to many communities, Jews were conspicuously absent from the peasant grievances. From this methodology four centres emerge: the Basel environ Porrentruy, Strasbourg, Frankfurt and the area around Würzburg. For reasons of space, this study shall only consider the Strasbourg centre and Frankfurt.

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<sup>69</sup> Matheson, *Collected Works*, p.66. The quote reads 'I will ... let Turks, pagans and Jews know you for the unbalanced, insane person that you are'. As before noted, this is more a stock filler phrase, and lacks real precision regarding Jews.

<sup>70</sup> It should be noted that Scott and Scribner is an edited collection of primary documents, a history of the Jewish presence in Peasants' War has not been written; they may have been much more prevalent than Scott or Scribner deemed in their editing of material.

References to 'Jews' in Scott and Scribner (1991) (Pink), Overlaid Onto Extent of Peasants' War (1525)



Scott, T. and Scribner, B. The German Peasants' War : A History in Documents. (Humanities Press, 1991).

[https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/map.cfm?map\\_id=3667](https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/map.cfm?map_id=3667) (13 January 2020).

William R. Shepherd, 'The Imperial Circles of the Holy Roman Empire about 1512' in The Historical Atlas (1926).

Fig. 7. References to 'Jews' in Scott and Scribner (1991) (Pink), Overlaid onto Extent of Peasants' War (1525).

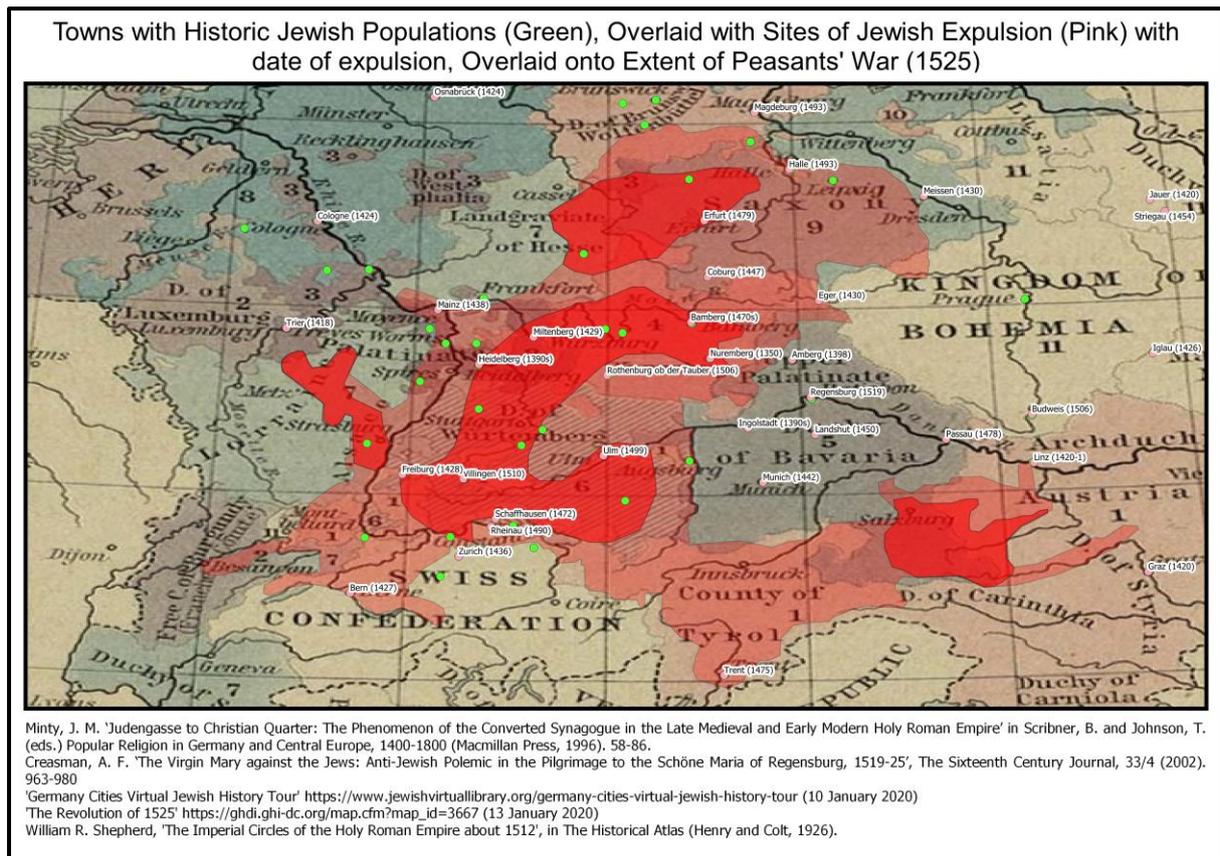


Fig. 8. Towns with Historic Jewish Population (Green), Overlaid with Sites of Jewish Expulsion (Pink) with date of expulsion, Overlaid onto Extent of Peasants' War (1525).

The Strasbourg centre highlighted the difficulty faced by Jews in meeting the horizon of expectation of local communities. Interactions between Jews and the Peasants' War was split between the peaceful negotiations of Rosheim and the violence of Ribeauvillé. The community of Ribeauvillé in the Alsace was roughly 35km from Rosheim, and yet, whereas Josel was negotiating 'a spruce of relief', the Ribeauvillé tanner Hans Schott, leader of his peasant band, argued that he wished 'to admit Jews no longer to the town of Ribeauvillé'.<sup>71</sup> The differences between these two responses to Jews demonstrates the variability and non-systematic deployment of the emotional regime, and how different communities could manipulate it in manifestly different ways depending on their own prejudices.

At Ribeauvillé, the peasant band included Jews on their list of targets. Central to the peasant demands was being allowed to drink the Jewish wine in the city, which Ulrich permitted. There is a total of four references to 'du vin des Juifs' in Ulrich's account, implying the sustained destruction and knowledge of the Jewish houses in the city.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, the movement of the Ribeauvillé band to Bergheim led to the destruction of all Jewish books, and 'devastated' the synagogue in a sustained

<sup>71</sup> Scott and Scribner, *The German Peasants' War*, p.230, 192.

<sup>72</sup> L. Baillet, 'La Guerre des Paysans: Un cas de conscience dans la famille de Ribeaupierre', *Bulletin philologique et historique* (1967), pp.389, 397, 399, 401.

attack against the local Jewish population.<sup>73</sup> The violence against the Jews coexisted with the Peasants' Revolt. The Jews, due to the memory of the blood libel and their othering through the matrix of blood, became potential targets for the peasantry; targets that the community of Ribeauvillé took advantage of.

However, in Ulrich von Rappoltstein's report of the 24<sup>th</sup> April, Schott, noticeably does not mention the Jewish angle to his demands.<sup>74</sup> This omission from Ulrich's account should be taken as a warning in deducing how central the Jews were to the Ribeauvillé peasantry. For, due to his confession by torture, Schott's presentation of the anti-Semitic element to his actions would have given some form of rationale to the Ulrich. Ulrich had had to dispel disquiet in the community in 1520 as Jewish lenders had demanded loans on immovable property.<sup>75</sup> The emotional regime of blood, in which the Jews were contained, gave Schott a convenient discourse to deploy when under confession. Hence, the actions of Ribeauvillé do show that the Jews were on their list of targets, just not as centrally as suggested by Schott.

The Strasbourg centre was also the site of the negotiation of Josel of Rosheim. Coming to petition the Alsatian band at Altdorf Abbey, led by Erasmus Gerber, Josel 'spoke to their hearts with the Book'.<sup>76</sup> Fraenkel-Goldschmidt argues that the ability of Josel to negotiate with a man like Gerber was due to their shared language of the Gospel.<sup>77</sup> However, this shared language was a necessary but insufficient condition as other prominent religious leaders from Strasbourg – Martin Bucer, Wolfgang Capito, Zell – also attempted, and failed, to negotiate with Gerber. Rather, it was Josel's distinguished place in the Rosheim community which enabled his negotiation. Using *histoire croisée*, Debra Kaplan extrapolates the collaboration both between Josel and Georg Ittel, one of the leaders of the Alsatian band, and the previous mayor of Rosheim, and his sustained relationship with the Strasbourg magistrates.<sup>78</sup> Although 'they subsequently failed to keep their promise', Josel notes later that 'this statement of theirs came as a great relief to us at this time'.<sup>79</sup> Josel demonstrates that the Jews knew of Christian culture to the extent that they understood the possibility of the deployment of the blood libel and collective contemporary anxiety.<sup>80</sup> His relief demonstrates the Jewish comprehension of the potential of the emotional regime of blood, and when Gerber's promised not harm his, or other, Jewish communities, Josel's fear of anxiety-stimulated Christian violence was momentarily satisfied. Thus,

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p.413.

<sup>74</sup> Scott and Scribner, *The German Peasants' War*, p.193.

<sup>75</sup> Baillet, 'La Guerre des Paysans', p.358.

<sup>76</sup> C. Fraenkel-Goldschmidt, *The Historical Writings of Joseph of Rosheim: Leader of Jewry in Early Modern Germany*, tr. N. Schendowich (Brill, 2006), p.146.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p.146.

<sup>78</sup> D. Kaplan, 'Entangled Negotiations: Josel of Rosheim and the Peasants' Rebellion of 1525', *AJS Review*, 40/1 (2016), p.129.

<sup>79</sup> S. Stern, *Josel of Rosheim: Commander of Jewry in the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation*, tr. G. Hirschler (Jewish Publication Society, 1965) p.77.

<sup>80</sup> Kaplan, 'Entangled Negotiations', p.133.

Josel of Rosheim's actions, when compared to those of Ribeaupillé and Hans Schott, demonstrates the non-systemic approach to Jews in 1525.

Moreover, in the Frankfurt Articles, Jews are mentioned twice. Article 12 admonishes the 'intolerable and great usury' and Article 25 claims that 'many a poor man has had his goods burnt by the Jews'.<sup>81</sup> There had been disquiet in Frankfurt's Gentile-Jewish relations throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> and into the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Frankfurt Jews were implicated in the Endingen case (1470), and after the publicity of the Simon of Trent murder, an image of Simon in 'martyrdom' was painted on the wall under Bridge Tower (Fig. 9), the town's busiest gate, as a warning to visitors.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, when the Frankfurt peasants and town councillors negotiated their grievances, it was done 'at the gates', potentially under the viscerally graphic image.<sup>83</sup> An image of 'bloodthirsty realism', in much the same visual tradition as the Man of Sorrows, the Frankfurters were deploying the contemporary collective Jewish anxiety. This anxiety was situated in the matrix of blood and informed by the precedent of the Jewish blood libel and the visceral image of the tortured Simon.<sup>84</sup> Yet this does not explain the whole picture, as anger at Jews, and subsequent expulsions were motivated by 'an atmosphere ... of economic and practical pragmatism'.<sup>85</sup> In Frankfurt this economic and demographic pressure was a growing concern for the urban community as, due to internal migration, the amount of Jewish families had doubled - from 60 male household heads to 120 between 1512 and 1530.<sup>86</sup> This economic pressure can be seen to have incensed the Frankfurt peasants, and motivated their deployment of the contemporary anxiety towards Jews, as part of the conceptual matrix of blood, to justify their grievances to contemporary authorities.



Fig. 9 Simon of Trent Wall Painting, Frankfurt am Main.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Scott and Scribner, *The German Peasants' War*, p.192.

<sup>82</sup> Po Chia-Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, p.35.

<sup>83</sup> Fraenkel-Goldschmidt, *The Historical Writings*, p.145.

<sup>84</sup> Po Chia-Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, p.61; Turnbull, 'Discursive Affect and Emotional Prescriptiveness', p.238.

<sup>85</sup> Minty, J. M. 'Judengasse to Christian Quarter: The Phenomenon of the Converted Synagogue in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Holy Roman Empire' in Scribner, B. and Johnson, T. (eds.) *Popular Religion in Germany and Central Europe, 1400-1800* (Macmillan Press, 1996), p.73.

<sup>86</sup> F. Backhaus, 'The Population Explosion in the Frankfurt Judengasse in the Sixteenth Century' in *The Frankfurt Judengasse: Jewish Life in an Early Modern German City* (Vallentine Mitchell, 2010), p.28.

<sup>87</sup> Po Chia-Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, p.61.

## Conclusion

The ‘theme of blood’ in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century is the focus of sustained and varied historical accounts. Yet its influence on the Peasants’ War has not been considered before. It has thus been argued that ‘blood’, grounded in the precedent set in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, directed distinct parts of the violence of 1525. Affecting a sustained emotional resonance on 16<sup>th</sup> century southern Germany, blood should be understood in a multitude of interrelated ways. Yet, this essay has sought to highlight the non-systematic deployment of this emotional regime. It did not affect all the violence of 1525. Instead, through a consideration of the salvific potential of *Blut Christi*, the targeted iconoclasm of Marian shrines, and the omnipresent Jewish threat, the emotional regime of blood has been discussed in relation to this interrelated matrix of symbolism and stigmas. This matrix was centred around the ability to both purify and pollute, and the subsequent emotions of anxiety, and hope. Emotions that, in their deployment, non-systematically informed the violence of 1525.

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