



Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late-Medieval Jews

Miri Rubin

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This powerful book tells of the creation and growth of one of the principal anti-Jewish stories of the Middle Ages and the violence that it bred. Beginning in Paris in the year 1290, Jews were accused of abusing Christ by desecrating the Eucharist—the manifestation of Christ’s body in the communion service. Over the next two centuries this became an authoritative, awe-inspiring tale that spread throughout Europe and led to violent anti-semitic activity in areas from Catalonia to Bohemia—particularly in some German regions, where at times it produced region-wide massacres and “cleansings.”

Drawing on sources ranging from religious tales to Jews’ confessions made under torture to religious poems, Miri Rubin explores the frightening power of this narrative. She looks not just at the occasions on which massacres occurred but also at those times when the story failed to set off violence. She also investigates the ways in which these tales were commemorated in rituals, altarpieces, and legends and thus became enshrined in local traditions. In exploring the character, nature, development, and eventual decay of this fantasy of host desecration, Rubin presents a vivid picture of the mental world of late medieval Europe and of the culture of anti-semitism.

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