

THE PRESENCE OF OBJECTS

Medieval Anti-Judaism in Modern Germany

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On the southwest corner of a large brick Gothic church in the little town of Sternberg in north Germany is a curious stone. Mortared into the wall of a chapel that juts out beside what was once the main portal of the church, the stone bears, deeply embedded in it, large prints of two bare feet, on the edges of which chisel marks are visible. A xeroxed church guide, available on a table inside the porch, mentions it only briefly, explaining that the stone, which was incorporated into the wall in 1496, is one on which the wife of the Jew Eleazar is said to have stood when she tried to sink a desecrated host in the nearby creek. Unable to cast away the host, she supposedly sank into the stone (fig. 1).

Located in the green and beautiful Mecklenburg landscape, Sternberg, like most areas of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), is now suffering from massive unemployment and the flight of its youth to the west and to urban areas.¹ Its train station is closed; even local buses run there only on weekdays. Yet in the early sixteenth century, it was a prominent enough pilgrimage site to be

Some of the work for this essay was done while the author was a fellow at the Hans Arnold Center of the American Academy in Berlin. She wishes to thank Joel Kaye, Yolande Korb, Gerhard Lutz, Karen Margolis, Gert Melville, Mitchell Merback, Guenther Roth, Dorothea von Mücke, and Stephen D. White for their assistance.

1. Sternberg had 5,300 inhabitants around 1988. (See Rosemary Schuder and Rudolf Hirsch, eds., *Der gelbe Fleck: Wurzeln und Wirkungen des Judenbasses in der deutschen Geschichte: Essays* [Cologne: Röderberg im Pahl-Rugenstein Verlag, 1988], 129.) According to its Web site, its population today is 4,900.

Common Knowledge 10:1

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Figure 1. Supposed footprints of Eleazar's wife. Outer wall of the Mary Church, Sternberg

singled out for attack in Martin Luther's famous *Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*. The cause of its pilgrimage was the objects which Eleazar's wife allegedly attempted to destroy by drowning: consecrated hosts (communion wafers) provided to the Jews by a priest in order to redeem a pawned cooking pot. (According to one account the pot actually belonged to his concubine.) Those hosts were supposedly stuck with knives or nails until blood flowed from them and then, when they could not be sunk in water, were buried on the grounds of the former court of the duke. Revealed finally to the local clergy, they were found, blood-spotted, and worked miracles. Sixty-five Jews were tortured and confessed to the host desecration. Twenty-seven were executed by burning in a place still known as the Judenberg, on the edge of which was, in modern times, the cemetery of the Jewish community. (The priest was burned a year later in Rostock.) The remaining Jews were expelled from Mecklenburg, where they are not found again until the eighteenth century.²

2. On Sternberg, see Volker Honemann, "Die Sternberger Hostienschändung und ihre Quellen," in *Kirche und Gesellschaft im heiligen Römischen Reich des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Hartmut Boockmann, Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse 3 Folge, Nr. 206 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1994), 75–102; Fritz Backhaus, "Die Hostienschändungsprozesse von Sternberg (1492) und Berlin (1510) und die Ausweisung der Juden aus Meck-

lenburg und der Mark Brandenburg," *Jahrbuch für Brandenburgische Landesgeschichte* 39 (1988): 7–26; Schuder and Rudolf, *Der gelbe Fleck*, 129–44; Hermann Maschek, ed., *Deutsche Chroniken*, Reihe Realistik des Spätmittelalters, vol. 5 (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam, 1936), 134–38; K. Schmidt, *Das heilige Blut von Sternberg*, Schriften für das deutsche Volk 18 (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1892); G. C. F. Lisch, "Das heilige Blut zu Sternberg," *Jahrbücher des Vereins für mecklenburgische Geschichte und Altertumskunde aus den*

The point of this piece is not the story of the Jews of Sternberg nor of the pilgrimage. That story is certainly worth telling for English-speaking audiences, and many Germans today are unfamiliar with Sternberg and the many similar stories from the states of Mecklenburg and Brandenburg. Even when such incidents are known, they are often thought (quite incorrectly) to be characteristically south German. But in the past two decades scholars have written much about such events, and their accounts are readily available. Recent scholarship agrees that, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, pogroms often came first, giving rise subsequently to stories that Jews had desecrated eucharistic hosts—whereas by the fifteenth century such stories, which were on the increase, tended to be elicited by torture in carefully regulated judicial procedures. The rise of legal process transformed legends and lynchings into evidence and judicial murder.³ Scholars also agree in attributing complex political and economic motives to the protagonists in such events, disagreeing only about who benefited in particular cases from the expulsions and pilgrim revenues (secular princes, ecclesiastical ones, townspeople and merchants, or local clergy?). In other words, recent research has concentrated on historical fact (what happened?), recent interpretation on political, economic, or functional explanation (who or what group profited?).⁴ My point here is not, however, events such as those of 1492, but the

Arbeiten des Vereins 12 (1847): 187–307. I acquired the four-page xeroxed guide “Kirchlicher Wegweiser” (Sternberg, n.d.) in October 2002. The accounts I cite here differ markedly about who profited from the pilgrim trade, and about the role of the church authorities in Schwerin, but all agree in focusing on the question and in suggesting competition for revenues as a major motive in the events. Honemann, “Die Sternberger Hostienschändung,” 83–88 and 95, has an interesting discussion of the “material proofs” (that is, of the objects); his focus is on why they were convincing to sixteenth-century contemporaries.

3. For an English-language discussion of this point, see Heiko A. Oberman, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Age of Renaissance and Reformation*, trans. James I. Porter (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 94–100, 124. And see Wolfgang Treue, “Schlechte und gute Christen: Zur Rolle von Christen in antijüdischen Ritualmord- und Hostienschändungslegenden,” *Aschkenas: Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur der Juden* 2 (1992): 95–116, esp. 115–16. On blood cults and wonderhosts generally, see Mitchell B. Merback, “Channels of Grace: Pilgrimage Architecture, Eucharistic Imagery and Visions of Purgatory at the Host-Miracle Churches of Late Medieval Germany,” in *Art and Architecture of Medieval Pilgrimage in Northern Europe*, ed. Sarah Blick and Rita Tekippe (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming

2004); Caroline Walker Bynum, “The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages,” *Church History* 71.4 (December 2002): 685–714; Nicholas Vincent, *The Holy Blood: King Henry III and the Westminster Blood Relic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Mark Daniel Holtz, “Cults of the Precious Blood in the Medieval Latin West” (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1997); Karl Kolb, *Vom Heiligen Blut: Eine Bildokumentation der Wallfahrt und Verehrung* (Würzburg: Echter, 1980), which is unreliable in many of its details but gives an overview from a Catholic perspective; Johannes Heuser, “‘Heilig-Blut’ in Kult und Brauchtum des deutschen Kulturraumes: Ein Beitrag zur religiösen Volkskunde” (Diss., University of Bonn, 1948); Peter Browe, *Die Eucharistischen Wunder des Mittelalters*, Breslauer Studien zur historischen Theologie, NF 4 (Breslau: Müller und Seiffert, 1938); Browe, “Die eucharistischen Verwandlungswunder des Mittelalters,” *Römische Quartalschrift* 37 (1929): 156–57; and Romuald Bauerreiss, *Pie Jesu: Das Schmerzensmann-Bild und sein Einfluss auf die mittelalterliche Frömmigkeit* (Munich: Karl Widmann, 1931).

4. Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), is an exception, dealing as it does with how the past is constructed in narrative and by memory, but the treat-

objects that still stand in German churches bearing witness to these events. For the odd stone with its large footprints is not the only physical object in the Mary church at Sternberg that carries in its very stuff slander and outrage. Nor is Sternberg the only site where such objects persist. These objects raise insistent questions not only about what happened long ago but also about what contemporary response should be.

I want to pose the question of what our response to such objects is in order to consider the issue of how we do (and/or should) memorialize, preserve, and display. Involved in these questions are others about the differences and similarities between images and objects, and about the differences and similarities between medieval attitudes and modern ones. I begin with examples of the variety of present-day German treatments of such objects as the Sternberg footprints and end this part of the discussion with a consideration of the recent installations in the Jewish Museum in Berlin. Because the legends and sites with which I shall deal are obscure to English-speaking audiences and the objects in question very strange, there is much that needs explanation. I therefore proceed slowly, mixing accounts of present-day efforts to remember and forget with some discussion of scholarship on long-ago events. Only after I have described several sites and the rather different issues they raise do I turn to an elaboration of the medieval background necessary to understand them and then finally to a consideration of what, in my judgment, constitutes appropriate response.

The Commemoration of Objects:

Sternberg, Iphofen, Deggendorf, and Poznań

First, then, the other objects at Sternberg. Inside the church, close to the entrance, in what is now the baptismal chapel but was for centuries known as the holy blood chapel, stand what the little church guide refers to as “witnesses to the supposed Sternberg host desecration and . . . gruesome judicial murder of 1492.” These objects are a large tabletop, heavily scored with knives, on which is inscribed, “Dit is de tafele dar de Joden dat hillige sacrament up gesteken und

ment is general, and objects are not its special focus. Particularly sophisticated versions of the political argument are Bruno Hennig, “Kurfürst Friedrich II. und das Wunderblut zu Wilsnack,” *Forschungen zur brandenburgischen und preussischen Geschichte* 19 (1906): 73–104, and Hartmut Kühne, “Der Harz und sein Umland: Eine spätmittelalterliche Wallfahrtslandschaft?” in *Spätmittelalterliche Wallfahrt im mitteldeutschen Raum. Beiträge einer interdisziplinären Arbeitstagung (Eisleben 7./8. Juni 2002)*, ed. Kühne, Wolfgang Radtke, and Gerlinde Strohmaier-Wiederanders

(2002): <http://dochost.rz.hu-berlin.de//conferences/conf2/Kuehne-Hartmut-2002-09-08/HTML/>. For economic and social interpretations, see Felix Escher, “Brandenburgische Wallfahrten und Wallfahrtsorte im Mittelalter,” *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands* 27 (1978): 116–37, and Charles Zika, “Hosts, Processions, and Pilgrimages: Controlling the Sacred in Fifteenth-Century Germany,” *Past and Present* 118 (February 1988): 25–64.

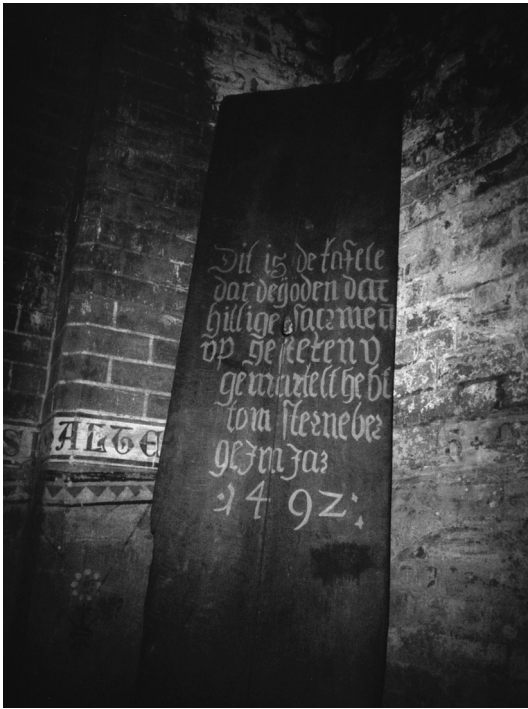


Figure 2. Tabletop on which Jews supposedly martyred a consecrated host in 1492. Baptismal Chapel, Mary Church, Sternberg

gemartelt hebt tom sterneberge im Jar 1492” (fig. 2), and a badly eroded wooden relief of the burning of the Jews.⁵ In the early sixteenth century, not only the tabletop was displayed but also the awls or nails with which the host was pierced and the iron pot the priest Peter Däne tried to redeem by providing hosts to the Jews.⁶ The pot and awls were, according to one account, carried off by marauding Swedish soldiers in 1638; the relief of the execution was severely damaged in a fire in 1741.

The objects in which the crime was supposedly inscribed, the hosts, were, in the sixteenth century, kept in a tall painted and gilded tabernacle in the holy blood chapel that was rapidly constructed for them in the parish church; the duke then built a second chapel and established a cloister on the place where the buried hosts had been found. (This multiplication of sites makes clear the competition for pilgrimage revenues.) An account by the humanist Nikolaus Marschalk in the early sixteenth century, written in order to credit the local princes (perhaps incorrectly) with the major initiative in getting rid of the Jews, charges the bishops and

5. Schuder and Rudolf, *Der gelbe Fleck*, 138, and Schmidt, *Das heilige Blut von Sternberg*, 27, give slightly different versions, but it is clear to me from personal inspection and photographs that Schmidt’s is the more accurate.

6. It is worth noting that the earliest accounts, including the confession of Eleazar’s wife, say the martyring was done with knives, not nails; see Honemann, “Die Sternberger Hostienschändung,” 83 n. 10. Presumably knives metamorphosed into nails to accord more closely with accounts of Christ’s crucifixion.

local clergy with negligence and disbelief, and suggests that they even considered consuming rather than preserving the miraculous blood-flecked hosts (a procedure for which there was actually considerable support in canon law). But the hosts became the center of a widespread cult, and records from the early sixteenth century tell of gorgeous *ex votos* hung round them, including a little silver model of the city of Colberg.

Within forty years, the cloister was closed; gifts for maintaining the eternal light before the shrine had dried up; a Protestant visitation in 1535 “forgot to ask” about the miraculous hosts.⁷ Although an unreliable account says that the hosts were consumed as communion in 1539, it appears that the holy matter which was at the center of the frenetic pilgrimages of the 1490s was not so much destroyed as neglected, then forgotten. Only a few decades earlier, however, the charge that clergy wanted to destroy (that is, consume) the hosts could be used by Marschalk as evidence of defective religiosity. Passionate debates between Protestant and Catholic scholars over the miraculous or superstitious nature of the original events survived into the eighteenth century. And the tabletop and nails, which had allegedly been in contact with the body of Christ as it suffered a reenactment of the crucifixion and were marked with his blood, continued to be displayed, as did of course the footprints. If the hosts themselves (attacked by Luther and problematic in Protestant eucharistic theology) at some point disappeared (perhaps conveniently), the contact relics (table, stone, etc.) survived. An elderly gentleman I met at a cocktail party in Berlin told me that his wife went to school near Sternberg in the 1930s and saw the tabletop with its ostensibly factual description of host abuse every Sunday when she went to church with her classmates, although she “never thought much about what it was.”

Objects such as the tabletop and the footprints are of course now deeply troubling to the church at Sternberg. A recent, popular account of the history of German anti-Semitism describes the pastor in the 1980s as embarrassed, “burdened” by the objects, which he shows, “but not willingly.”⁸ Although little is said in the xeroxed guide about the footprints, the baptismal chapel serves now as a memorial to the Jews murdered in 1492 and by the Third Reich. A large menorah stands opposite the tabletop, and a plaque beneath the wooden relief, titled “the Sternberg Pogrom against the Jews,” states that murder took place in 1492 on the occasion of “a supposed host desecration” and declares the chapel a “reminder” of 1492 and of the Holocaust. The response is, we might say, scholarly; the impulse is to set the record straight. The host desecration did not hap-

7. Lisch, “Das heilige Blut zu Sternberg,” 224.

8. Schuder and Rudolf, *Der gelbe Fleck*, 130. It would be interesting to know how recent such embarrassment is, not only at Sternberg and Deggendorf (see below) but

generally. It is my impression that the embarrassment developed only in the 1980s, but it is outside the scope of this piece to chart changes in perspective in Germany over the past fifty years.

pen. The judicial murder did. These are facts that viewers should not—should never—forget.

Perhaps the response is enough. It is more complex than the response to such objects in many places. In a number of European museums and churches, altarpieces depicting Jewish host desecrations have simply been removed from view without comment. A painting of the Regensburg host-finding in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg, which I saw in the late 1990s, is currently not on display; wings that show the Pulkau host desecration are not on view, although the altar by Nicholas Breu (c. 1520) is.⁹ Moreover, in some places, the erasure of false history has itself been, either deliberately or accidentally, erased. For example, in a little village near Deggendorf (in Lower Bavaria), site of a famous host pilgrimage, a tin plaque fixed in the eighteenth century over a crucifixion relief at the crossroads stated (quite fictitiously) that “here” the burghers took an oath on July 30, 1337, to revenge themselves on “the godless Jews” for “what they did to the host in Deggendorf.” When American troops arrived in 1945, two armed soldiers forced a local painter to go to the crossroads and cover over the word “Jews” with black paint. The so-called swearing column with its black erasure stood until 1968 when a new crossing was built. Now the relief, broken in the process of removal, and the plaque, with its crude but vivid reinterpretation, are simply gone.¹⁰

If objects have in some places been suppressed without comment, in other places they remain, also without comment. At Iphofen (near Würzburg), for example, where the legend of host desecration seems clearly to have been a projection back onto the fact of a pogrom, certain fairly late accounts tell of Jews throwing the abused eucharist into a latrine, where it was saved from filth by a spiderweb. Despite the fact that no latrine or well appears in the earliest account (itself of dubious historical value) by Rudolf of Schlettstadt, a deep depression or hole cut into the floor of the holy blood church was still revered in 1996; and a new altar designed and put into place in 1984 has a bronze grate in the form of the legendary spiderweb.¹¹ However silent now the legend, it lives on in that bronze web. (And who knows what accounts emerge when guides explain such decorative motifs to tourists, priests to parishioners, or parents to children?)

When, in December 2002, I visited the Corpus Christi church, just north of the Old Market in the city of Poznań, in Poland, I was not able to get into

9. On Pulkau, see Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, 68, 222–23 n. 121. The legend of the Regensburg desecration is now obscure; the abuser was probably not thought to be a Jew.

10. Manfred Eder, *Die “Deggendorfer Gnad”: Entstehung und Entwicklung einer Hostienwallfahrt im Kontext von Theologie und Geschichte*, Deggendorf Archäologie und Stadtgeschichte 3 (Deggendorf: Stadt Deggendorf, 1992), 445.

11. See Merback, “Channels of Grace”; Harald Schwillus, “Hostienfrevellegende und Judenverfolgung in Iphofen. Ein Beitrag zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Kirche zum hl. Blut im Gräbenviertel,” *Würzburger Diözesan-Geschichtsblätter* 58 (1996): 87–109, esp. 95 n. 34; and Eder, *Deggendorfer Gnad*, 385 n. 703. A stone relief depicting the events was until 1979 located in the center of the church.

the crypt to see the well into which the Jews supposedly threw a desecrated host in 1399. But, I was told, the well is there; on this spot stood the house of Swidwa the Jew (although the location is outside the known bounds of the old Jewish quarter). Until a hundred years ago, it was said to work miracles. “What would a guide tell a tourist today?” I queried. “He’d just say,” I was told, “there is a legend. . . .” “So no exculpatory or expiatory reference is provided?” I said. “Of course not. It’s just the past, a part of history. Everyone understands that.” And yet objects and sites have carried the Poznań story for hundreds of years. In 1620, in the same supposed house of Swidwa, a tabletop was found walled up in a pillar and was thought to be that on which the Jews pierced the host. It was carried in festive procession to the Carmelite church. (A little entry survives in the city records noting shot and powder provided for the procession.) In 1750 the queen saw the miraculous hosts of Poznań (now understood to be three in number) in a little monstern. In the early nineteenth century, a Jewish scholar named Wolf Meyer Dessauer, whose account of events appears to be partly fabricated, reported that Jews were, in the early eighteenth century, required to march in the Corpus Christi procession carrying knives and a tablet which recounted the story of the host. That Jews were required to carry such objects is not certain; what *is* certain is that requiring such objects seemed credible Christian behavior. Whether or not it happened, Dessauer could believably argue that the past was made present—humiliatingly present—by objects. Thus we might well ask whether, for those standing at the end of such a tradition, it makes sense just to keep the crypt closed, especially if everyone knows the well is there.¹²

The silence—the absence of memorialization—at Iphofen and Poznań can be understood as cleansing; it can also be an effort to forget. So can reinterpretation, even expiatory reinterpretation. Take, for example, the case of Deggen-dorf. The story of the “Deggendorfer Gnad”—precious goal of pilgrimage until the early 1990s—seems to have originated in the pogrom of 1337 and the construction of the Corpus Christi or Holy Sepulcher church which began just afterward. Early accounts of the murder of Jews mention no violation of the Christian sacrament and no miracle. One early chronicle comments for the year in question, without suggesting a causal connection, that there was a plague of grasshoppers and the Jews were burnt. The first reference to miraculous hosts comes from more than thirty years later and says simply that God’s body was found, which the people saw; they therefore decided to build a church on the spot. An elaborate legend of Jewish host desecration, and of the miraculous host preserved without decay that testified to it, bloomed in the sixteenth century and created extensive pilgrimage and cult in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

12. On Poznań, see Rodgero Prümers, “Der Hostiendiebstahl zu Posen im Jahre 1399,” *Zeitschrift der historischen Gesellschaft für die Provinz Posen* 20.1 (1905): 293–317; and

Joseph Perles, “Geschichte der Juden in Posen,” *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 13 (1864): 281–95, 321–34, 361–73, 409–20, 449–61.

The Deggendorf pilgrimage was permitted (even encouraged) by the Nazis, who attempted as a matter of policy to suppress Catholic pilgrimage sites but encouraged Deggendorf exactly because of its anti-Semitic connections. By the 1970s the cult had almost completely died. It was then deliberately revived as an expiatory eucharistic pilgrimage, cleansed (the authorities said) of “all indications of host desecration.”¹³ There was much discussion of what sort of memorial tablet to install and whether to transfer the pilgrimage to a different week in order to break historical continuity. Finally, however, in 1992, the bishop of Regensburg, against popular resistance, discontinued the pilgrimage.¹⁴

The problem at Deggendorf was not merely the anti-Semitic propaganda that had accompanied the pilgrimage. It was the host itself. And the problem was historical as well as moral. Something stimulated the building of the Corpus Christi (or Holy Sepulcher) church at Deggendorf, but evidence of claims to the finding of “Christ’s body” appear only later (sometime before 1388). Regardless of who did or did not attack it, it is not clear that an object was, at the beginning, there.

The question of the authenticity and the religious meaning of eucharistic miracles is not a new one. Hosts that resist corruption and drip blood have been vigorously debated by learned theologians and historians since the Middle Ages. According to the Catholic theological position established in the fifteenth century, the real presence of Christ in the eucharist lasts only as long as the species—the externals—are unchanged. Hence authorities came to require, in a series of councils, that wonderhosts be displayed alongside freshly consecrated ones to avoid any possibility of idolatry; if miraclehosts decayed, they were to be replaced by newly consecrated wafers. In the vigorous debates between the 1390s and 1550s over the wonderhosts at Wilsnack, most popular of all German pilgrimage sites (and incidentally, like many wonderhosts, never associated with Jewish desecration), even the Franciscan defenders of the sacred objects argued, not that these, or any, hosts *were* authentically Christ’s blood but that they *could be*, and that pilgrimage to them was spiritually useful.¹⁵ The Deggendorf host, suppos-

13. Kolb commented in 1980 that there was “heute keine Rede mehr” of the original legend (Kolb, *Vom Heiligen Blut*, 144).

14. On Deggendorf, see Eder, *Deggendorfer Gnad*.

15. The literature on Wilsnack is extensive. Especially useful are: Hennig, “Kurfürst Friedrich II”; Ernst Breest, “Das Wunderblut von Wilsnack (1383–1552): Quellenmässige Darstellungen seiner Geschichte,” *Märkische Forschungen* 16 (1881): 131–301; Breest, *Das Wilsnacker Wunderblut*, Für die Feste und Freunde des Gustav-Adolf-Vereins 77 (Barmen: Hugo Klein, 1888); Browe, *Die Eucharistischen Wunder*, 166–71; Ludger Meier, OFM, “Wilsnack als Spiegel Deutscher Vorreformation,” *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 3.1 (1951): 53–69; Jutta Fliege, “Nikolaus von Kues und der Kampf gegen das Wilsnacker Wunderblut,” in *Das Buch als Quelle historischer Forschung: Fritz Junke anlässlich seines 90. Geburtstages gewidmet*, Beiheft zum Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen 89 (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut, 1977), 62–70; Boockmann, “Der Streit um das Wilsnacker Blut: Zur Situation des deutschen Klerus in der Mitte des 15. Jahrhunderts,” *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 9 (1982): 385–408; Zika, “Hosts, Processions, and Pilgrimages”; Claudia Lichte, *Die Inszenierung einer Wallfahrt: Der Letzter im Havelberger Dom und das Wilsnacker Wunderblut* (Worms: Wernersche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1990); and Hartmut Kühne, “Ich ging durch Feuer und Wasser . . .”

edly undecayed after 650 years, was displayed, alongside a newly consecrated one, until 1990. But the monstrence had been opened several times, the holy objects scrutinized and cleaned of mold; clearly (as is entirely in accord with canon law, if not with popular belief), they had been replaced. Those who supported the postwar pilgrimage could argue only, as did the Franciscans at Wilsnack, that the hosts, whatever their provenance, were religiously useful—useful as penance, useful as acknowledgment of guilt, useful as expiation.¹⁶

Indeed, in the light of its own traditions, one might see the cult at Deggen-dorf as eucharistic, not anti-Semitic, in origin, and interpret the projection of host legends back onto a riot against the Jews less as an excuse for killing (which in many places at the time seemed hardly to need an excuse) than as a claim to miraculous presence—the stuff not only of pilgrimage (with all its economic and political benefits) but also of deeply felt devotion. To contemporaries, it may have been more a matter of seizing on the slaughter of Jews as an opportunity for miracle than crafting the miracle as an excuse (before or after the fact) for slaughter. Horrible though it seems to say it now, the Jews may have been “useful” in the Middle Ages not only as moneylenders and merchants, not only (in theological and exegetical terms) as the chosen remnant who must be preserved for a conversion that would herald the end of time, but also as creators (or, in theological terms, revealers) of holy matter.¹⁷ The emergence of such matter—miraculously resisting decay and destruction as if nonmaterial, yet bleeding as if alive—was often in the earlier Middle Ages a response to superstition, naiveté, or credulity, to accidents or mistakes in ritual; but increasingly in the later Middle Ages it was seen as the result of specifically Jewish doubt, malice, or abuse. It is quite possible to argue that the heart of the matter was matter—holy matter—and not an excuse for attacks against the Jews.

Perhaps then, it made some sort of historical as well as theological sense to transform the pilgrimage with its anti-Semitic overtones into eucharistic reverence, as ecclesiastical authorities attempted to do in the 1970s and 1980s. Christ's death on the cross is understood, in late medieval and modern Christian theology, as a sacrifice, a blood payment, an expiation for the sins of humankind. The mass reenacts that sacrifice.¹⁸ To those who supported revival of the pilgrimage,

Bemerkungen zur Wilsnacker Heilig-Blut-Legende,” in *Theologie und Kultur: Geschichten einer Wechselbeziehung: Festschrift zum einbundertfünfzigjährigen Bestehen des Lehrstuhls für Christliche Archäologie und Kirchliche Kunst an der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin*, ed. Gerlinde Strohmaier-Wiederanders (Halle: André Gursky, 1999), 51–84.

16. Kolb, *Vom Heiligen Blut*, 192–94, prints a sermon given by Bishop Rudolf Gräber at Walldürn on June 12, 1968, that makes exactly this argument apropos another famous eucharistic relic: the corporal on which wine sup-

posedly turned into Christ's blood. It does not matter, he asserts, whether sanctified wood and cloth can be rationally explained or what the priest Otto actually did long ago. The objects and the site concentrate the prayers of believers and surround them, not only with five hundred years of pilgrimage, but also with all of salvation history.

17. In a strict theological sense, desecration reveals (not creates) sacrality. See nn. 47–51.

18. Marius Lepin, *L'idée du sacrifice de la messe, d'après les théologiens depuis l'origine jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Gabriel

viewing the host could thus be seen as repentance for all sin, an acknowledgment of human responsibility for error and malice, an offering up of Christ's complete sacrifice in place of humankind's always inadequate efforts at reparation. It could even have been understood (although it was not, to my knowledge, so interpreted) as expiation for anti-Semitism, the pogrom of 1337, and the Holocaust.

And yet, no matter how much the authorities spoke of Deggendorf as eucharistic devotion—as the veneration of Christ's body and blood, present in every consecrated host—the heart of the cult was, historically, something different. The story that precipitated the pilgrimage was of a specific host that protested some sort of violation (even if it was only the violation of being lost or buried) and insisted, by its defiance of normal processes of change and decay, on its sacrality. Unless its specialness—its holy-object-ness—had endured, there was no reason for pilgrimage to Deggendorf in particular rather than to any altar on which was reserved a consecrated host.¹⁹ And something particular did, at least in the eyes of many, survive. Frescoes of the host finding had been renewed as recently as 1976–77.²⁰ The same pastor who in 1961 recounted that forty years earlier the pitiful, decayed remains of the Deggendorf wonder had been replaced with a fresh consecrated wafer reported a new relic in 1959. In the parish church of Bad Hall (in Upper Austria), he was shown a piece of linen with a dark fleck, blood from the martyring of the hosts. Although no tradition, oral or written, survived, the parish paper of Deggendorf referred to this object in October 1959 as the blood of Christ; anonymous “desecrators” now replaced “Jews” in the account. The priest wrote that he was deeply moved to stand before the reliquary containing the holy cloth and hoped it would bring new life to the Deggendorf miracle, “as was the holy Father's wish.”²¹ It seemed that, no matter how often the host in the monstrance was replaced, claims for miracles and associated holy matter would tend to emerge.

In the end, as the author of a massive and learned study devoted to the cult argued, authorities could not cleanse the legend from ahistoricity by empha-

Beauchesne, 1926), 3–331; Josef Geiselmann, *Die Eucharistielehre der Vorscholastik* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1926), 43, 88, 98–99, 411–12, and 427; P. J. Fitzpatrick, “On Eucharistic Sacrifice in the Middle Ages,” in *Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology*, ed. Stephen W. Sykes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 129–56; Donald L. Ehresmann, “Medieval Theology of the Mass and the Iconography of the Oberwesel Altarpiece,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 60 (1997): 200–226; and Bynum, “The Power in the Blood: Sacrifice, Satisfaction and Substitution in Late Medieval Soteriology,” in *Redemption: An Interdisciplinary Symposium*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2004).

19. Jan Hus in c. 1405 and Heinrich Tocke in 1412 and 1443 made exactly this charge against the Wilsnack host; see Breest, “Das Wunderblut von Wilsnack,” 169–72, 177, 188, 212. The sermon referred to in n. 16 above is a twentieth-century effort to meet exactly this sort of objection—the objection that there is no reason for pilgrimage if the provenance and history of the relic is questioned or disproved.

20. Eder, *Deggendorfer Gnad*, 460.

21. Eder, *Deggendorfer Gnad*, 432–34.

ing expiation or wipe out its anti-Semitic overtones simply by referring to other perpetrators.²² As long as the object itself was the goal and center of cult, the connotations of violation and accusation it had carried for hundreds of years continued to circle round the pilgrimage. Anti-Semitism seemed to lurk in the miraclehost itself. And yet at the core there was no retrievable story, no original desecration, perhaps no decay-resisting miracle at all (certainly not one that had perdured). Suppression not just of problematic provenance and anti-Judaism but of the object itself seemed necessary. Today at Deggendorf, there is no miraclehost; there is instead a museum devoted to educating the public about the destructiveness and horrifying devotion it once engendered.

The *Judensau*

In contrast to silent removal or embarrassed reinterpretation, the efforts at memorialization in Sternberg and Deggendorf seem more considered. Instead of erasure, there is scholarly correction. Instead of decontextualized, antihistorical interpretation, there is historicizing. But, I shall argue, more needs to be said. To consider the issue further, I begin by wondering why there has been so little public discussion of objects such as the tabletop and footprints at Sternberg. After all, the past decade has seen in Germany not only discussion but also demonstrations against another anti-Semitic object: the *Judensau* or “Jew pig.”

The *Judensau* is a particularly disgusting image found almost exclusively in German churches and broadsides of the fourteenth century and later; it depicts Jews sucking from the teats of a sow and a Jewish leader examining, placing his seal on, or even eating and drinking from, the anus and genitals of a female pig. At first one animal image among many in the cycle of virtues and vices, and carrying as its primary meaning the accusation that all sinners are Jews in their greed and lasciviousness, the *Judensau* became dissociated from such cycles and, by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, served as what German historians call a *Schandbild*, an image intended to satirize, humiliate, and accuse. The association of Jews with an animal they considered unclean and with the filth (dung) of economic profit was drawn out explicitly.

Recently, in several German cities (among them Cologne, Frankfurt am Main, Bayreuth, and Nuremberg), there have been tumultuous demonstrations against such images, accompanied by vitriolic charges of murderous anti-Semitism, on the one hand, and of anti-intellectual, antihistorical image burning, on the other.²³ In Lutherstadt Wittenberg (where an inscription attributing to “the rabbi” a kabbalistic name of God was added to the relief sometime after Luther dis-

22. Eder, *Deggendorfer Gnad*. I have not been able to visit the museum at Deggendorf.

23. A check under “*Judensau*” on the Internet in February 2003 turned up dozens of entries.

cussed it enthusiastically and made a horrid joke on the Hebrew letters), a plaque has been installed of the sort we find at Sternberg: “God’s true name, the here slandered Schem Hamphoras, which the Jews saw as too holy to speak before Christians, died under the sign of the cross in six million Jews.”²⁴ A *Kunstaktion* (Artists’ Protest Demonstration) against the church of St. Sebaldus in Nuremberg accused the church of leaving information about the offensive image optional because the information is available only in a pamphlet one picks up inside the church—but the pamphlet itself (from March 2002) minces no words about either the historical tradition or the modern response:

The *Judensau* is a shaming and abusive image. With other humiliating images, it is part of our history that we neither can nor wish to deny or thrust aside. Today they are for us a warning that earlier errors must not live on and that we must stand against all anti-Semitic language. . . . The anti-Semitic representations in the St. Sebaldus church are part of the world of pogroms of 1298, 1349, and 1499. Until today these images from a different time defame and harm even when many people no longer understand their symbolic meaning. . . . The Evangelical Church of Nuremberg sets for itself the challenge that this inheritance poses. It does not play down or weaken in any way the evidence of this blindness even when the images are aesthetically beautiful stone or glass. [Here the pamphlet refers to images in the windows of Jews depicted in their Jewish hats.] They remain warning signs that cry to heaven, call to penitence, and sharpen awareness. . . . Whoever represses evil and wants to forget promotes—however unconsciously and without willing it—new inhumanity.²⁵

Why such impassioned discussion of the *Judensau*, which is after all one might say only an image, however disgusting? The tabletop at Sternberg has elicited little concern and certainly no *Kunstaktion*, although it was evidence of an alleged crime for which we know twenty-seven people were unjustly executed in excruciating pain, and its surface displayed to Christians for hundreds of years an implausible and hideous accusation.

There are of course many answers to my rhetorical question, and they have to do, among other things, with the difference between a poor little town in Mecklenburg and the rich, thriving cities of Cologne, Frankfurt, and Nuremberg. Furthermore, the obscene and scatological nature of the *Judensau* perhaps, in some awful, titillating way, draws attention. It is, moreover, profoundly inaccurate, not to say trivializing, to suggest, as I just did, that the *Judensau* is “only

24. “Gottes eigentlicher Name der geschmähte Schem Hamphoras, den die Juden vor den Christen fast unsagbar heilig hielten, starb in 6 Millionen Juden unter einem Kreuzeszeichen.”

25. Pamphlet, “Judenfeindliche Darstellungen an der Sebalduskirche zu Nürnberg” (March 2002).

an image.” It cannot be “only a picture” because, as powerful recent discussion (by David Freedberg and others) has taught us, art is never “only pictures.”²⁶ Images have power. That is why they are burned, mutilated, dynamited. The *Judensau* was not merely anti-Semitic propaganda, the conveyer and inducer of attitudes. It effected, as well as suggested, action. In the early modern period it was placed on the doorways and porches of churches, the gates of cities, and the gables of inns to announce that Jews were unwelcome, even in a talismanic way to ward off their presence or ensure that they would not return from exile.²⁷ Hence the image lurks somewhere on the border between image and object. Not only a stimulus and record of hate, it is also evidence of the historical fact of expulsion and an amulet, powerful in itself, against the crossing of boundaries, the violation of Christian space.

Nonetheless, it seems that the current outrage against the *Judensau* is outrage at what we might call the content of the image, not its talismanic quality or its specific historical role, which is mostly unknown. And that content seems particularly sinister because of a quality that has adhered to images since the later Middle Ages: what we might call their “duplicate-ability.” The *Judensau* was spread in early modern Germany through the new medium of print, just as word of it and of the *Kunstaktionen* against it is today spread via the new medium of the Internet (often, in the latter case, without the image being reproduced at all). To current sensibilities, a scatological image (even when unseen) seems more offensive and dangerous than a tabletop, however slanderous the charges inscribed upon it. And in the sixteenth century, the *Judensau* was reproduced and distributed; the tabletop was not.

The Heiligengrabe Panel Paintings and the Jewish Museum in Berlin

This discussion of image and object brings me to the installations at the Jewish Museum in Berlin. I must explain my point both autobiographically and somewhat circuitously by discussing my visit in November 2002 to Heiligengrabe.²⁸

26. David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

27. Isaiah Shachar, *The Judensau: A Medieval Anti-Jewish Motif and Its History* (London: Warburg Institute, 1974). A *Judensau* on the façade of a private house facing the main road in the little town of Kelheim near Regensburg was understood in local tradition to commemorate the expulsion of the Jews in 1442. It was removed sometime in the early nineteenth century by order of a local judge at the request of the Jews but was kept in the pharmacy and

restored to the pharmacy façade in 1895 when the house was rebuilt. It was removed (probably chiseled off) in 1945 by order of the United States army. See Shachar, *Judensau*, 38.

28. On Heiligengrabe, see Lieselotte Kötzsche, “Das wiedergefundene Hostiengrab im Kloster Heiligengrabe/Prignitz,” *Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift* 4.1 (1987): 19–32; Christa and Friedrich Plate, “Die Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen in der Wunderblutkapelle des Klosters Heiligengrabe, Krs. Wittstock,” *Ausgrabungen und Funde: Archäologische Berichte und Informationen* 32 (1987): 94–99;

On the northern rim of the Mark Brandenburg, not far from the competing cult sites of Wilsnack, Beelitz, Zehdenick, Marienfließ, and Nauen, Heiligengrabe was one of a series of Cistercian women's houses founded by the margraves to lay claim to borderlands.²⁹ It is already referred to in documents as "Zum Heiligengrab" in 1317, but the legend of its founding took on a clearly anti-Semitic character only in the early sixteenth century when the abbess—in competition with other cult sites and in a frenzied effort to preserve old belief in the face of the encroaching Reformation—had a new blood chapel built (1512) and a series of fifteen panels depicting the host desecration painted and hung in the church. (The panels, made in 1532, were based on earlier pamphlet material in Latin [1516] and German [1521]; several examples of the German version are still extant.) According to this late version, a Jew who stole or acquired a host found his hands covered with blood and buried the holy object, ground into fragments, at a place of execution beneath a gallows. He later confessed and was himself broken on the wheel. Miracles and visions in which blood figures prominently induced the bishop, the margrave, the pastor at nearby Pritzwalk, and nuns from a neighboring house to establish a cloister on the site where the miraculous host fragments had been found, bleeding and reassembled.

Although many cult sites in Protestant Mecklenburg and Brandenburg survive only as the vaguest of memories (tourists now visit the church at Güstrow to see a replica of Barlach's swinging angel, destroyed by the Nazis as degenerate art, rather than the once-acclaimed holy blood), Heiligengrabe—located, like Sternberg, in a depressed area of the former GDR—still draws visitors not only because of its lovely brick Gothic gables but also because of traces of the wonderful matter to which medieval pilgrims flocked. Excavations in 1984–86, in order to install heating under the floor of the pilgrim chapel that stands opposite

Strohmaier-Wiederanders, *Geschichte vom Kloster Stift Heiligengrabe* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1995); Treue, "Schlechte und gute Christen," 113–14; and Hubert Faensen, "Zur Synthese von Bluthostien- und Heiliggrab-Kult: Überlegungen zu dem Vorgängerbau der Gnadenkapelle des märkischen Klosters Heiligengrabe," *Sachsen und Anhalt: Jahrbuch der Historischen Kommission für Sachsen-Anhalt: Festschrift für Ernst Schubert* 19 (1997): 237–55. The Low German version of the Legend with reproductions of the woodcuts (1521) is given in Johannes Simon, *Die Legende vom Ursprunge des Klosters Heiligengrabe in der Prignitz: Nach dem Drucke von 1521 neu herausgegeben und erläutert* (Heiligengrabe: Museumsverein Heiligengrabe, 1928), based on G. Schmidt, "Rostocker Drucke zu Halberstadt," *Jahrbücher des Vereins für mecklenburgische Geschichte und Alterthumskunde* 53 (1888): 339–50.

29. It is not even very far from the more northern blood-cult sites of Sternberg, Güstrow, Krakow am See, Dobeban, and Schwerin. On sites in Brandenburg, see Karl Schäfer, "Märkische Fronleichnamsveneration und ihre kulturelle Auswirkung vor Luther," *Wichmann Jahrbuch* 2/3 (1931–32): 99–107; and Kirchner, "Das Cisterzienser-Nonnenkloster zum heiligen Kreuz in Zehdenick," *Märkische Forschung* 5 (1857): 109–83. Although it is without footnotes, Klaus-Martin Bresgott and Arnt Cobbers, *Die Zisterzienserklöster im Land Brandenburg* (Berlin: Kai Homilius Verlag, 1999), is also useful. The indefatigable opponent of blood piety, Heinrich Tocke, made stick a charge of fraudulent host veneration at Wartenburg bei Wittenberg, shortly after word of a miracle spread in 1429; see Heuser, "'Heilig-Blut' in Kult," 31, and Breest, "Synodalrede des Domherrn Dr. Heinrich Tocke von Magdeburg," *Blätter für Handel, Gewerbe und soziales Leben* (Beiblatt zur *Magdeburgischen Zeitung*), Monday, June 5, 1882, 175–76.



Figure 3. Holy grave found under the floor of Pilgrim Chapel, Heiligengrabe

the church, revealed, in the middle of the rectangular nave of the first building on the site (from the end of the thirteenth century), a holy grave: a brick vault, too small to contain a human body, over which lay a stone inscribed with the date 1287. The little grave was found under a red (that is, blood-colored) plaster floor in which were stuck as if by accident several thirteenth-, fourteenth-, and fifteenth-century coins (evidence it was the site of pilgrim offerings) (fig. 3). Further excavation revealed the vault to be positioned over several severely mutilated bodies, suggesting that the chapel was indeed built on a place of death—whether of legal execution or of lynchings, either of Jews or non-Jews, is unclear.

Recent scholarship (mostly local, archaeological, and antiquarian) disagrees about whether the little grave enclosed the wonderhost of legend, revered on the spot where it was found and its alleged violator allegedly executed, or whether it was a replica of the Holy Sepulcher at Jerusalem of a sort known in German churches from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and used in the Easter week liturgy for the burial of the host during the *triduum*.³⁰ In a brilliant and unjustly neglected study from 1931, Romuald Bauerreiss called attention to the association of cemeteries, execution sites, and pits or depressions in the earth with Holy Sepulcher churches and legends of host abuse (both Jewish and non-Jewish) and hence to the complicated connection many medieval people felt between blood spilling as expiation and blood spilling as retribution. Such ideas could make con-

30. The best-known examples are Gernrode and Wienhausen.

tact with the blood of criminals salvific, and execution sites (particularly sites of the lynchings of Jews and host abusers) places of reparation for the sins of all humankind. Bauerreiss's perception would suggest that the legend of a miracle-host or of host desecration at Heiligengrabe could have been triggered by the presence of a place of gallows and wheel.³¹ And several scholars have suggested that the vault itself—which need not have been for a Maundy Thursday host but could have contained a relic from the Holy Land, such as earth—might have given rise to the chapel name or to the legend of a miraculous host. But references to the name “holy grave” and to a wonderhost predate any Holy Sepulcher imitations known (and all of these are of a rather different type from the little vault at Heiligengrabe), whereas claims to wonderhosts were emerging in Brandenburg and Mecklenburg around 1300.

In any case, whatever the origins of the pilgrim chapel of Heiligengrabe, the site raises insistently the question of matter and memorialization with which I am concerned. Although we may never be certain what was in the little grave, the accounts that survive, and were clearly intended (in this case) to induce pilgrimage rather than persecution, all stress the centrality of holy matter: the host fragments (either asserted to be miraculously reassembled or, by the doctrine of concomitance, to be every one of them fully Christ) and also the bleeding earth with which the host was mixed. We are even told that, in the early sixteenth century, there was preserved in the chapel, as a sort of contact relic, a piece of the gallows under which the Jew buried the host. Similar holy objects (earth and wood) are found in competing cloisters in the same period.³² In the neighboring Cistercian house of Zehdenick, what was revered was bloody earth from the site where a woman had supposedly buried a host under a beer keg. And the most important Cistercian monastery in the Mark, Lehnin, displayed a piece of the tree under which Graf Otto I supposedly had a dream about the founding of the cloister. When, however, the issue of memorialization is raised today about Heiligengrabe, it is raised not about these now absent holy objects but about the pictures (fig. 4).

In November 2002, I went to Heiligengrabe to see both the little grave and the panel paintings. The representative of the Protestant foundation who showed me the chapel was circumspect (as is the church literature) about the vault in the

31. Bauerreiss, *Pie Jesu*. See also Merback, *The Thief, the Cross, and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

32. For other examples of cloisters that revered holy earth, see Faensen, “Zur Synthese,” 242. Faensen thinks

the little vault at Heiligengrabe was built to shelter the finding-spot of the wonderhost and was later part of a “cultic fusion” of Holy Sepulcher cult and blood cult—a fusion about which Merback, “Channels of Grace,” also writes.

Figure 4. One of the surviving original panel paintings (made in 1532) of a supposed Jewish host desecration. Hanging in situ in the church at Heiligengrabe



floor and its contents. She claimed only that scholars don't know what it was. In contrast, the paintings, which hang in the porch of the church (six survive), are accompanied by an explicit and painful gloss. A plaque, erected in 1996 by the curatorship committee of the convent (which is charged with the reconstruction of cloister buildings), states that the Christian prejudice against Jews revealed in the legend of Heiligengrabe has influenced history, preparing the way for the genocide of the twentieth century: "In recognition of Christian guilt and with grief at its results, we wish to put the record straight and with this to give a sign of a renewed bond between Christians and Jews." The approach of the curatorium at Heiligengrabe, like that of the Mary church at Sternberg, the Sebaldus church in Nuremberg, even to some extent the Deggendorf pilgrim site, is historicizing and expiatory. There was no host abuse by Jews. Christians today castigate themselves for the consequences, over centuries, of stories that have damaged, shamed, and incited to murder.

I was surprised, however, to discover on my visit to Heiligengrabe that only two of the surviving original pictures were there. The other panels on display were replicas. Where were the other originals? In the Jewish Museum in Berlin, I was told. I did not remember such an exhibit from the Jewish Museum, but when I returned to the city I went to look. I could not find the panels from Heiligengrabe.

There has been much criticism of the present installations in the Jewish Museum. The controversial Libeskind building is itself a sculpture; and many feel that, for all its beauty, it is ill suited to house anything. In any case, to almost

any eye, the current exhibits are squeezed in awkwardly; the installations fight visually with the building, whose slanted windows, absolutely integral to the design, are nonetheless sometimes covered over to make wall space. Perhaps partly because of space constraints, the exhibits seem sketchy and, to many viewers, overly didactic. The Middle Ages receive little attention. The massacre of Jews at the time of the First Crusade is noted; charges of host desecration, of ritual murder, and of well poisoning tend to be conflated, but some space is, quite appropriately, given to the host desecration charge in Berlin in 1510 (a case very similar to the Sternberg trials).³³ I was, however, puzzled not to find the Heiligengrabe panels, supposedly on loan to the museum. I expected these images to be the center of a display, their cartoonlike graphics and bright color riveting passersby in their rush from one case to another. This was the actual paint and wood that recorded a lie passed down to posterity for hundreds and hundreds of years. The only reason for their absence I could think of was that they had already been returned to the cloister. So I asked.

No, I was told, the paintings are still here. But they're in the basement. We borrowed them only in order to scan them into the computer. If you want to see reproductions, go down to the educational center and call up the computer entry on host desecration.

This I did, and saw a perfectly adequate and well-intentioned computerized presentation, taken mostly from a perfectly adequate and well-intentioned book about anti-Judaism in German history.³⁴

But what about the objects? Does it matter that they are stored away in the basement, with only a digitalized version available? The reproductions in the computer presentation are small and muddy—no clearer to my eye than the reproductions in the book from which the text was taken. But one could make bigger and sharper computerized images. The paintings are hardly great art. They were copied from woodcuts in pamphlet literature, which could be duplicated through the new medium of printing. One could argue that the digitalization of these images only carries further what the author of the pamphlet and its patron the abbess had in mind. Moreover, if the best reaction to such material from the past is to historicize it, to set the record straight, what good is the exhibiting of a panel or two? Is it not better to make a video or an on-line program that can be sent widely to schools so children will see that legends and rumors they may still hear are not true? Is it not, in any case, more important to take action against evil language that associates Jews with pigs or with hunger for blood (whether or not one sees images) than against a painting or tabletop from an obscure Mecklenburg

33. On the Berlin-Brandenburg case, see Backhaus, "Die Hostienschändungsprozesse," and Oberman, *Roots of Anti-Semitism*, 94–100.

34. The presentation seems largely based on Schuder and Rudolf, *Der gelbe Fleck*.

village? Perhaps display of the panels would only pander to a sentimental and elitist attachment to originals that is increasingly out-of-step with our throwaway culture. Attendance figures tell, after all; and the Jewish Museum, with its didactic and digitalized exhibits, is crowded—more crowded even than that tourist mecca, the Pergamonmuseum. (Berlin museums such as the Gemäldegalerie and the Kunstgewerbemuseum offer, on an ordinary day, only echoing silences.)

I want to argue that the original objects do matter, and for two reasons. The first is a scholar's reason. We cannot hope to understand the medieval and early modern periods if we look only at *narratives* from the past. Recent work on medieval sites of host desecration has been, as I suggested above, mostly historicist, positivistic, and reductive. What happened? Who managed events? Who profited? How was group identity formed? Even work that concentrates on how memory constructed and preserved the legends (as it surely did) focuses quite naturally on how the historical accounts are fashioned, hence on texts. But to a medieval pilgrim, theologian, innkeeper, or markgraf, it was the matter, the stuff, the object, that was the center of it all—a powerful and dangerous center.³⁵ The vault at Heiligengrabe where something is absent, the Deggendorfer monstern where something was present, a stone, a tabletop, a cooking pot, a carved gable or capital, a panel painting—these are not all parallel objects, and I shall say more about that below. But it was the need for holy matter, for some tangible way of encountering a God who was also far away, that drove piety on the eve of the Reformation and incited preachers to efforts to manipulate, control, or discredit it. To say that stories of Jews, serving women, or criminals violating a wafer are stories that not only record but also create the object violated is not to discount other motives for action or to ignore or excuse horror and pain. To focus on the objects is rather to see the pain and the danger in them: the blood still there.

This leads me to my second reason. For it seems to me that the very nature of these objects as objects, and not merely their medieval context, suggests how they should be displayed. All objects—the things human hands make and invest with function and significance—in some sense carry their history with them. Objects are specific, although mass-produced objects may seem virtually interchangeable and images of particular objects may be very widely disseminated. Nonetheless, as they are used and abused, objects take on marks that carry and convey their particular history. When I bake with my mother's rolling pin at Thanksgiving, it is the particularity of its worn surface and cracked knob that seems to bring back all the pies I saw her make when she was still alive. This capacity of carrying specificity is characteristic to some degree of all objects, I

35. This is not the same as to say that medieval people—or some medieval people—really believed these stories, or that “belief” or “religiosity” was at the center of it all, as many historians do. The question remains: what kind of

religiosity? What kind of belief? Otherwise one ends up saying only that religiosity is central to religiosity, which is not a very interesting conclusion.

shall argue, but it is especially so for the objects I discuss here—objects that have been used to inflict or justify evil. Hence even today it matters whether they, in all their specificity, are chiseled away, suppressed without comment, or replaced with digitalized images. It is better to leave them where they have always stood, I think, but washing away the blood they carry in such complicated ways is not as easy as setting up a menorah opposite them or canceling a pilgrimage. Perhaps indeed the importance of the objects lies exactly in the fact that they cannot be cleansed.

The Medieval Background

My first point—the scholar’s point—needs considerable elaboration. The medieval objects I have considered—bits of trees, stones, tables, cooking pots, blood-spotted bread, paint on wood—are all in some sense relics. Relics are a particular kind of object. First collected and revered in the late third century, they were pieces of the bodies of the martyrs or bits of matter (earth, cloth, etc.) in contact with those bodies, and were venerated by the Christian faithful as especially powerful witnesses to and contact with God’s presence.³⁶ Although it is not quite correct to say, as scholars often do, that the relics *were* the saint (or at least one must qualify this statement by adding that the saint was also in heaven before the throne of God), relics and contact relics (the bodies and matter that touched them) were at the very center of early medieval religion, absorbing older pagan traditions of holy trees, earth, wells, and so forth. Indeed, objects were more crucial in establishing and conveying sacrality than place (site); and even ordinary adherents could convey self through object. Pilgrims, for example, brought the empty tomb of Christ back from the Holy Land by bringing a linen strip, measured to its length, or a bit of its earth; penitents could give themselves to God by donating, to his altar, wax candles measured to the length of their own bodies. Moreover, we have evidence from as early as the seventh century of claims to the relics of Christ’s body: his blood soaked into the column of the flagellation or collected on Golgotha, even his baby teeth or the flesh of his foreskin.³⁷ None of these holy objects authenticated itself entirely or simply by its material presence. Something testified to its history, to its contact with the sacred; but the tes-

36. Recent bibliography on relics is voluminous. For an introduction, see Nicole Hermann-Mascard, *Les reliques des saints: Formation coutumière d'un droit* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1975); Patrick J. Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages*, rev. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990); Peter Dinzelbacher, “Die ‘Realpräsenz’ der Heiligen in ihren Reliquiaren und Gräbern nach mittelalterlichen Quellen,” in *Heiligenverehrung in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Peter Dinzel-

bacher and Dieter Bauer (Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 1990), 115–74; Arnold Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien: Die Geschichte ihres Kultes vom frühen Christentum bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1994); and Anton Legner, *Reliquien in Kunst und Kult: Zwischen Antike und Aufklärung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995).

37. See Bynum, “Blood of Christ,” 691–99.

timony was not necessarily in our modern terms “historical.” It could be a parchment or inscription that accompanied the object, an oral tradition, a dream directing the discoverer to discover it, or a miracle it suddenly worked.

As G. J. C. Snoek has recently shown, the eucharist was in many ways a sort of super relic throughout the Middle Ages.³⁸ Not only was it treated, liturgically and devotionally, as a relic (buried in altars with relics, used as an amulet against disaster, etc.); it was divine power present in matter, and surrounding objects absorbed its power as did the wood and earth of holy graves. Because it was, like the bodies of the saints, taboo, it could in the technical sense of the term be polluted; touching it was mortally dangerous if one was impure.³⁹ Yet the consecrated bread and wine were also more than, other than, relics; and many theologians worried about the parallel. As the “real presence” of Christ in the eucharist was increasingly emphasized and then, in highly technical discussions (from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries) elaborated and disputed as “transubstantiation,” the consecrated elements came to be understood as holy matter exactly in their un-see-ability. Christ was present in the sacrifice of the mass on the altar—and fully present in every fragment and in both kinds—but the species covered and hid as well as manifested. Although, as Peter Dinzelbacher has argued, relic and eucharist were both “real presences,” eucharist *was* Christ in substance and essence, relics were not. Moreover, relics were visually what they were—the bones were St. Francis’s bones, the tunic of Mary was Mary’s cloak—whereas what the eucharist was (flesh and blood) was hidden under bread and wine in order to avoid terrifying the faithful. Hence, when the bleeding body of Christ veiled in the eucharist erupted into visibility in miracles or visions of the bleeding host, ordinary Christians felt themselves in touch with the horror and splendor of God, and theologians were deeply worried, some so much so that they developed elaborate theories to assert that what was seen in such visions and miracles could *not* be the real presence. (What changed in transubstantiation was substance, not accidents. Thus according to the ingenious Thomistic formulation, if the accidents changed, what appeared would not “really” be Christ but a special visualization overlapping the real accidents of bread and wine.) Fifteenth-century synods and councils not only, as I explained above, insisted that a freshly consecrated host be displayed alongside a supposed miraclehost and

38. G. J. C. Snoek, *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist: A Process of Mutual Interaction*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought 63 (Leiden: Brill, 1995). On the competition between eucharist and relics, see Yrjö Hirn, *The Sacred Shrine: A Study of the Poetry and Art of the Catholic Church* (1909 in Swedish; London: Macmillan, 1912), 135–36; and Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600–1300)*, vol. 3 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago:

University of Chicago Press, 1978), 180. Snoek treats the parallels.

39. Hubertus Lutterbach, “The Mass and Holy Communion in the Medieval Penitentials (600–1200): Liturgical and Religio-Historical Perspectives,” in *Bread of Heaven: Customs and Practices Surrounding Holy Communion*, ed. Charles Caspers, Gerard Lukken, and Gerard Rouwhorst (Kampen, the Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1995), 61–81.

suggested the replacement of any wonderhost touched by decay; they also supported the suppression of such objects by consuming them or walling them up in depositories where soiled altar linen was placed.⁴⁰ (The miraculous finds of Christ's blood or contact relics in pillars or altars—for example, the hosts at Andechs, the tabletop at Poznań—are perhaps the consequence of such earlier deposits. Charges such as Marschalk's that ecclesiastical authorities wanted to destroy God's miraculous body by consuming it clearly reflect conflict among Christians about proper veneration of such supposed manifestations of God's presence.)

In relics, too, we discern a complicated dynamic of seen and unseen. Yes, the bone of the Magdalen was the Magdalen's bone, but from the early thirteenth century, "naked display" of relics was forbidden, and the containers (reliquaries) in which the bones or bits of cloth were preserved are characterized by a complex disjunction. Increasingly, reliquaries became what German historians call "speaking reliquaries," ostensibly manifesting the shape of what was within (arm, foot, skull, etc.). But, as Cynthia Hahn has shown, what is inside is often not the shape that is spoken. (Arm reliquaries can contain bits of skull or feet, for example.) Moreover, the very stuff of reliquaries contradicts and sublimates what is inside. Encased in gold and crystal, studded with gems whose color glistens forever, frozen and incorruptible, the blood of Christ and the bones of the martyrs are denied the corruptibility of earthly existence. The covering contradicts as well as expresses the nature of the human remnants within. Many saintly bodies supposedly declared their sanctity at autopsy or upon exhumation by manifesting incorruptibility, but even where no such claim was made, the reliquary spoke not fragmentation and putrefaction but triumph over it.⁴¹ Miraculous hosts—holy matter—also spoke their immateriality. Bread, they nonetheless defied their accidents by bleeding as does living flesh, and by resisting the decay to which all matter is condemned.⁴²

As Hans Belting has shown, paintings and sculptures in the Middle Ages partook of something of the quality—the holy stuff-ness—of relics.⁴³ Our earliest freestanding sculptures in the Middle Ages, the Throne of Wisdom stat-

40. See Browe, "Die Verwandlungswunder"; Dinzelbacher, "Die 'Realpräsenz' der Heiligen"; Bynum, "Blood of Christ"; and Wolfgang Brückner, "Liturgie und Legende: Zur theologischen Theoriebildung und zum historischen Verständnis von Eucharistie-Mirakeln," *Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* 19 (1996): 139–66.

41. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 200–226, 318–29; and Cynthia Hahn, "The Voices of the Saints: Speaking Reliquaries," *Gesta* 36.1 (1997): 20–31.

42. Another aspect of the resistance of holy matter to change is the motif of survival through fire and water, on which see Kühne, "Ich ging durch Feuer."

43. Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). I should point out, although I cannot pursue it here, that from the time of the iconoclastic controversy on, medieval theologians, philosophers, and spiritual advisers discussed in sophisticated terms the distinction between image and the "reality" it represented. See, for example, Jeffrey Hamburger, "Seeing and Believing: The Suspicion of Sight and the

ues of Mary and the Christ child, are probably reliquaries.⁴⁴ Early crucifixes and panel paintings had relics in the head of the Christ figure or in the panel itself. Some icons were understood to be literally images of Christ or Mary, either painted from a vision that appeared to the painter or handed down directly from heaven (and hence, in an absolutely literal sense, objects from above). Whether or not bits of holy matter were embedded in them, images were holy matter in the later Middle Ages. They warded off evil as amulets; they bled when attacked by heretics. Many were accorded indulgences, so that the very act of viewing them could provide exactly calculated numbers of days or even years of freedom from the expiatory suffering of purgatory. Indeed, images not only represented objects; they also, as Bauerreiss suggests, generated objects. The powerful *Schmerzensmann* (a dying or dead Christ, upright and bleeding in his tomb), surrounded by the *arma Christi* (the instruments of his torture), may have been the source, not only of legends of Jewish violation of the host, but also of those churches where depressions or pits (tombs) are revered as finding-spots of wonderhosts. If icons of a bleeding Christ rising from a pit in the earth could provide days or years of expiation, then it was only a little step to finding a physical pit from which a bleeding Christ (a wafer or waferlike object) arose.⁴⁵

Thus it is clear that the objects once revered and still displayed in German churches—although not all relics in the same sense—participate nonetheless in a powerful sense of holy matter that we moderns understand only imperfectly and at a distance. Panel paintings, tabletops, wonderhosts, were not conceptually so far apart as they seem today.

It was such holy matter that Jews (and others) supposedly violated in host desecration. It is, in fact, highly improbable that Jews acted as Christians charged. Christians accused them of scheming to acquire consecrated wafers in which they deliberately perpetrated a second crucifixion of the body of Christ. And indeed we do have evidence both that they mocked the “superstitious” Christian idea that bread could become God’s body and that they viewed the eucharist as a dangerous or taboo object.⁴⁶ We have, however, no reason to think they tested Christian claims or “crucified” a stuff that they did not believe to be divine. But under-

Authentication of Vision in Late Medieval Art,” in *Imagination und Wirklichkeit: Zum Verhältnis von mentalen und realen Bilder in der Kunst der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Alessandro Nova and Klaus Krüger (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2000), 47–70. Medieval theorists also discussed the difference between image and holy object (relic) and argued that relics had elements of representation; for Thomas Aquinas’s sophisticated treatment of the topic, see P. Séjourné, “Reliques,” in vol. 13 of *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1936), col. 2360–63.

44. Ilene H. Forsyth, *The Throne of Wisdom: Wood Sculptures of the Madonna in Romanesque France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972).

45. For a powerful analysis connecting the finding-site of miraclehosts and images of the *Schmerzensmann*, see the new study by Merback, “Channels of Grace,” which I am grateful to have been able to read in manuscript.

46. Michel Tarayre, “Le Sang dans le *Speculum Maius* de Vincent de Beauvais: De la science aux *miracula*,” in *Le Sang au moyen âge: Actes du quatrième colloque international, Université Paul-Valéry, Montpellier, France, November 27–29,*

standing the context makes it clear why in the later Middle Ages host desecration was to Christians a more frequent and more serious charge than ritual murder. Murder—even ritual murder—was homicide; host desecration was attempted deicide, murder of God. (In the Brandenburg-Berlin judicial process of 1510, Jews were burned for host desecration, but a man who had confessed to ritual murder was allowed to enter a monastery.)⁴⁷

This background helps to explain and justify my suggestion above that the point of charges against the Jews was often less their execution and expulsion than the holy matter they were thought to provide.⁴⁸ It is striking, for example, that the panel paintings from Heiligengrabe do not include the execution of the Jew (although the woodcuts do) but concentrate on the miraculous matter the event produced. In the account itself, as in many other desecration legends, the death of the Jew stands apart as a separate incident at the beginning of the story; far greater attention is given to the wonderhost and its subsequent history of miracles.

Theologically speaking, of course, host desecrations could not “create” holy matter. Desecrations could occur only to consecrated hosts.⁴⁹ The appearance of blood was thus a revelation of the real presence of Christ effected by the words of consecration. In this sense, violation only made visible the transubstantiated substance by a special imposition of miraculous accidents. Yet it is also correct to say that, in the stories from Deggendorf, Sternberg, Heiligengrabe, and many other sites, desecration made the host enduring, incorruptible holy matter rather than a wafer that should be consumed (and would cease, once it decayed or was digested, to be Christ’s body). Without violation, God remained hidden; desecration led to revelation—a revelation that lasted. As the provost Eberhard Waltmann of Magdeburg wrote to John of Capistrano in 1452 (in a debate over the miraclehost at Wilsnack), matter changes to blood to reveal God’s anger, to express disgust at sin and unbelief.⁵⁰

In the course of the fifteenth century, host violation grew ever more dan-

1997, *Les Cahiers du CRISIMA* 4 (Montpellier: Université Paul-Valéry, 1999), 353, cites evidence that Jews may have required that Christian wet nurses abstain from nursing Jewish infants for three days after receiving communion. On the general matter of Jewish criticism of Christian belief and practice, see Gavin Langmuir, “The Tortures of the Body of Christ,” in *Christendom and Its Discontents: Exclusion, Persecution, and Rebellion, 1000–1500*, ed. Scott L. Waugh and Peter D. Diehl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 287–309.

47. The two charges were sometimes conflated, as when Jews were accused of murdering Christians in order to extract consecrated hosts they had swallowed.

48. It is important to remember, however, that the broadsides that spread the stories were often intended to foment anti-Jewish action as well as to encourage pilgrimage. The broadsides informed those in other regions that Jews accused of host desecration might flee their way. See Honemann, “Die Sternberger Hostienschändung,” 90–93.

49. The issue comes up in the early retellings of the Wilsnack legend, where the miraclehosts have to defend themselves against the suspicion that they had not been consecrated and therefore could not be miraculous. When the bishop of Havelberg threatened to reconsecrate the hosts, they bled to ward off the *iniuria* of double consecration. See Kühne, “Ich ging durch Feuer.”

50. Breest, “Das Wunderblut von Wilsnack,” 260–62.

gerous to the violators. Early legends of wonderhosts often attribute them to the superstition of lower-class women, to ritual impurity, or to ordinary criminals, and in a number of such stories no perpetrator is punished or even sought out. As the bleeding hosts came to seem more and more powerful and accusatory, those who provided the occasion for such eruptions of blood appeared ever more sinister. Jews, who could be more easily condemned and executed, seemed the obvious perpetrators. But the horror they supposedly produced was also a miraculous manifestation of God—an object in which he could be seen and touched. Processes against the Jews (such as those at Sternberg and Berlin-Brandenburg) or legends telling of their guilt (such as the apocryphal stories at Deggendorf and Heiligengrabe) were not only opportunities for economic gain through the expulsion of hatred outsiders; they were also moments of special encounter with the flesh of Christ. And if the bleeding was truly Christ's blood, then objects such as tabletops, knives, or nails that touched it, even a stone that touched the feet of someone (such as Eleazar's wife) who had touched it or a panel that made vivid its presence under a gallows, were not just evidence of a crime. They were also an ambiguous sort of contact relic, saturated not so much with the evil of the violators as with the power of a God who revealed himself in its midst.⁵¹ In a distorted and hideous *felix culpa*, desecration produced the holy matter that led to special access to the divine.

Objects and Images Today

I do not expect the little church guide at Sternberg or the exhibits in the Jewish Museum in Berlin to explain the medieval context of their objects at length, as I have done here. Nor do I deny the importance of simple outrage and repentance, simply expressed. It is useful to set the record straight. Plaques and computer presentations that repeat the mantra “never forget” are obviously a better response than silently removing embarrassing material or rewriting legends to recast offensive language. It can, moreover, require considerable moral courage to call off a popular pilgrimage. But I would argue that the objects of which I am writing have even today a power not fully acknowledged by digitalizing them, cancelling their accompanying devotions, or glossing them with historicizing statements. We need more than the knowledge that the associated charges are untrue. We need to confront the objects themselves.

An objection might be raised here, one adumbrated by the discussion above

51. It is worth noting that, as at Sternberg, the tabletop in the Brandenburg case was revered along with the knife and a piece of the host in the cathedral. The tabletop on which a particle of the host sent to Spandau was supposedly tortured was venerated in the bishop's court chapel in Berlin.

of the *Judensau* and of the panels from Heiligengrabe. For, as I have already suggested, images and objects are not quite the same. Even at Heiligengrabe, the panel paintings, the wonderhost, and the holy earth represent and embody the sacral in somewhat different ways. Why then lump together paintings, carved capitals, bleeding hosts, and miraculous footprints in my discussion of response?

In modern museum practice, no theory would conflate image and object. We occasionally find catalogs that treat, for example, Degas's pictures of milliners as evidence of worker alienation; exhibits in historical museums frequently underline a particular shoe or arrowhead with boutique lighting, aestheticizing it and isolating it from the everyday.⁵² But no contemporary theory would treat a modern painting as simply a piece of evidence or an object. The very word of choice used by contemporary art historians—*images*—suggests some vestige of *representation*, of presenting something in a medium it isn't. Paint, wood, steel, and so forth present to us as if they were, for example, apples or the color red (but they are not, and thus they call attention to the "not-ness"). Even minimalist (literalist) or pop art calls attention to the gap between itself and objects by in some sense questioning—or even insulting (by mimicking)—their object-hood.⁵³ As Hans Belting has argued, there is a gulf between the later Middle Ages, "the era before the era of art," in which pictures and statues (like relics) manifested a divinity they participated in, and the very self-conscious Renaissance playing with illusion, which calls attention to the "non-object-ness" of art.⁵⁴ The gorgeous textile behind a medieval Madonna is a frame for, a declaration of, her sacrality; the painted Renaissance curtain, exactly because it is so precisely like a curtain, makes it clear that it is not a curtain. A medieval image is an object in a way that a Renaissance or modern painting is not.⁵⁵ But modern viewers inevitably react with modern, not medieval, viewing habits and assumptions. Hence, however much image and object were conflated as holy matter or embodiment of sacrality in the Middle Ages, it could be argued that it is strained and simplistic to conflate them in a discussion of modern response.

It is, moreover, significant that, in a number of places where holy objects

52. More could be said about museum practice. Although I do not agree with all of his distinctions, a start toward thinking about questions of the display of objects in museums is found in Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 42–56.

53. See Michael Fried's classic essay "Art and Object-hood" (1967), reprinted in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 148–72. I am not concerned here with Fried's point about minimalist art as theater nor with his valuing of various

types of art, but rather with his statements about the way in which mid-twentieth-century art comments on "object-hood."

54. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*.

55. Some recent discussion emphasizes the "power" of all images, giving even modern art a curiously medieval aura. See, for example, Freedberg, many of whose most telling examples of images that act or elicit action are medieval. Influenced though I have been by this work, it seems to me to go a little too far in assimilating later periods to the Middle Ages.

were venerated in the later Middle Ages (hosts and the instruments that supposedly tortured them, figures that bled, sacred earth, and so forth), these objects have been replaced by images (statues and paintings, called by German historians *Gnadenbilder*) as the goal of pilgrimage.⁵⁶ Although such figures (often allegedly wonder-working) cross any line that contemporary theory may attempt to draw between image and object, devotional focus has shifted from the nonrepresentational bone or bit of linen or wood to objects that “image” the salvation figures—Mary and Jesus—they evoke. And Catholic theology scrupulously draws a distinction between the “veneration” they may receive as reflections and reminders of the divine, and the “worship” due only to God. Even in a devotional context, then, modern response tends to distinguish image and object, privileging image. (This separation may help to explain why contemporary reaction to the *Judensau* is more virulent than to the Sternberg table and footprints.)

The duplicate-ability of images has, furthermore, been capitalized upon, especially since the advent of printing. Not only have engravings and prayer cards of wonder-working statutes (for example, the Virgin of Altötting) circulated for hundreds of years, depictions of Jewish host desecrations have served widely as anti-Semitic propaganda. It was pictures of the pictures of the events at Sternberg and Heiligengrabe that circulated, not pieces of—or even images of—the footprints or the little vault. (The Sternberg events turned up depicted on the local inflation currency [*Notgeld*] in Mecklenburg in 1922.)⁵⁷ To be sure, pieces of the true cross, little containers of holy earth, bits of cloth impregnated with power from contact with the tombs of saints, circulated too; but they aroused suspicion if mass produced, exactly because it seemed necessary that, as objects,

56. For example, Neukirchen bei Heilig Blut, Willisau, and Erding. On the change from relic to devotional image (*Gnadenbild*) as a goal of pilgrimage, see Kolb, *Vom Heiligen Blut*, 160–83, and Alois Döring, “St. Salvator in Bettbrunn. Historisch-volkskundliche Untersuchung zur eucharistischen Wallfahrt,” *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Bistums Regensburg* 13 (1979): 35–234, esp. 120. On Erding, see Anton Bauer, “Eucharistische Wallfahrten zu ‘Unserm Herrn,’ zum ‘Hl. Blut,’ und zum ‘St. Salvator,’ im alten Bistum Freising,” *Beiträge zur altbayerischen Kirchengeschichte* 21.3 (1960): 37–71. One must be careful not to date this shift too early. In the fifteenth century, what one sees is competition between different kinds of blood relics (for example, between Schwerin, Zehdenick, Wilsnack, Marienfluss, Heiligengrabe, etc.). On the issue of duplication, it is important to note that prayer cards and replicas undoubtedly did become both propagators and goals of pilgrimage in the later Middle Ages. On the general shift, in the early modern period, from relic to apparition as the trigger of pilgrimage, see William A. Christian, *Apparitions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain* (Prince-

ton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981); Pierre-André Sigal, *L’Homme et le miracle dans la France médiévale (XIe–XIIe siècle)* (Paris: Cerf, 1985); and Philip M. Soergel, *Wondrous in His Saints: Counter-Reformation Propaganda in Bavaria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 20–30. Many historians relate this shift to the increased prominence of “visuality” in late medieval piety. The point is both correct and also, at the moment, overemphasized in scholarship. See Robert Scribner, “Vom Sakralbild zur sinnlichen Schau,” in *Gepeinigt, begehrt, vergessen: Symbolik und Sozialbezug des Körpers im späten Mittelalter und der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Klaus Schreiner and Norbert Schnitzler (Munich: W. Fink, 1992), 309–36. Basic is still Anton Mayer, “Die heilbringende Schau in Sitte und Kult,” in *Heilige Überlieferung: Ausschnitte aus der Geschichte des Mönchtums und des heiligen Kultes. Festschrift für Ildefons Herwegen* (Münster: Aschendorf, 1938), 234–62. On bleeding hosts as on the borderline between objects and images, see Zika, “Hosts, Processions, and Pilgrimages,” 60.

57. Schuder and Rudolf, *Der gelbe Fleck*, 142–44.

they carry with them some specific materiality, some indication of derivation from a particular, historically locatable source. Both because of their intrinsic duplicate-ability and because of their nature as representation of something other than their material, images seem different from objects. Even medieval images might seem, then, to demand from modern curators and custodians a different treatment, and from modern viewers a different response.

Nonetheless, I would argue that there is both a historical and a conceptual connection between object and image. Cult objects and wonder-working statues blur the distinction still; the miraculous corporal at Walldürn, for example, was until fairly recently replicated on little silks that were touched by the relic, absorbing its power.⁵⁸ Even today, both the devout and the curious take away from shrines prayer cards with images of *Gnadenbilder* and little bags of holy earth. From such objects and replicas, it is not far to the small pieces of metallic cloth given out to onlookers when Christo and Jeanne-Claude wrapped the Reichstag in June and July of 1995. The scraps of fabric were not mere mementos to remind viewers of what they had seen; viewers participated in the art itself when they held and preserved these little pieces, so to speak, of the action.

In the modern museum as well, images partake of objecthood, if not in quite the way they did in medieval churches. They not only “represent”; they are. As I suggest above, our response to any painting involves in complex ways our sense of how its materiality, its “stuff-ness,” its paint and canvas, create the image, which both represents and deceives. Indeed, both medieval devotional objects and modern paintings have a more complex relationship to representation than we sometimes admit. If we compare, for example, reliquary (object) and portrait (art), we see that both, in ways we have not thought about sufficiently, are veiling and revealing. Just as the painted Renaissance curtain, or the Warhol tomato soup can, or even a Rothko white on white, both *are* and *are not* what we see, so the reliquary and the wonderhost inside it are and are not what they appear. The consecrated bread is invisibly the body of God, whether or not one sees red drops or believes them to be blood; the gold and crystal frame the contents as glorified and imperishable, contradicting while revealing the “bread-ness” of the bread. For all the differences before and after “the era of art,” even modern images are never only images, just as medieval objects are not only objects.

Hence, whether we look from a medievalist’s perspective or a modern one, against the background of a notion of holy matter or in the context of the poly-

58. On the pilgrimage at Walldürn, see Kolb, *Vom Heiligen Blut*, 160–63. A striking example of the fusion of image and holy matter is a model of the *Schmerzensmann* at Erding from the eighteenth century that is actually molded from the holy earth of the host-finding site. See Merback, “Channels of Grace,” n. 56.

semy of the concept “object” itself, the footprints, wells, sculptures, hosts, relics, and monstresances I have discussed here are odd and complex things. They are all, in some sense, objects—but objects with overtones of image as well. Revealing and querying what they convey, they are what they are; yet each represents (if only partially) a horror that lies beyond. Despite the differences among them, the question they raise about memorialization is essentially the same. It is the simple question I have already asked. Does it matter whether the objects themselves are preserved and displayed?

My answer is finally based less in my scholarly study of medieval devotion, or in a consideration of theories of objects and art, than in an empirical observation about how we see and remember. For all the modern shift to image and duplication, I do not think we have in fact forgotten the power of objects. Believers and nonbelievers who tour European churches not only wonder at the splendor and cost of the furnishings but often feel the ghostly presence of the past in the traces left by hands and lips on devotional objects—both relics and *Gnadenbilder*—that have been kissed over the centuries by the pious. Ordinary visitors to museums do not want concrete, specific, tactile things from the past (shoes, christening dresses, fans, pipes, commonplace books, etc.) to be replaced by videos and computerized presentations. Supplemented, yes; replaced, no. People watch *Antiques Roadshow* on television exactly because they may be present at the moment when an ordinary object is revealed to be a carrier of history; it is not only the economic value that titillates.

The power of objects becomes clearer if we contrast them with photographs. The little piece of cloth I treasure from the Wrapped Reichstag brings the Berlin of the mid-1990s back to me in a way no postcard picture can. Touching my grandmother’s butter mold creates an immediate connection to my childhood that bears no relationship to the melancholy and rather diffuse sense of absence stimulated by photos of a plump woman in an Alabama farmyard half a century ago. A photograph, an “image”—exactly because it captures, represents, a moment that was “then”—underlines for us the distance since it was made; what it images is not here. An object that *was* there and *is* here connects us with that *was* because it still itself *is*.⁵⁹

There is a moment in W. G. Sebald’s novel *Austerlitz* in which the hero, walking the streets of Terezín, where his mother died in a camp, comes to a closed emporium whose window sets out dozens of objects that in all probability belonged to the camp’s victims: paperweights, buttons, a miniature barrel organ, a lampshade, a stuffed squirrel. Sebald writes:

59. A photograph can, of course, be treated as an object—that is, we can relate to it less because of what it images than because we remember the occasions on which we took it out and scrutinized it, etc. Noting this only, how-

ever, confirms my point both about how objects work for us and about the porous (but not nonexistent) line between image and object.

What secret lay behind the three brass mortars . . . the endless landscape painted round a lampshade . . . showing a river running quietly through perhaps Bohemia or Brazil? And then there was the stuffed squirrel, already moth-eaten here and there, perched on the stump of a branch . . . which had its beady button eye implacably fixed on me, and whose Czech name—*veverka*—I now recalled like the name of a long-lost friend. What, I asked myself, said Austerlitz, might be the significance of the river never rising from any source, never flowing out into any sea . . . what was the meaning of *veverka*, the squirrel forever perched in the same position . . . ? They were all as timeless as that moment of rescue, perpetuated but forever just occurring, these ornaments, utensils, and mementoes stranded in the Terezín bazaar, objects that for reasons one could never know had outlived their former owners and survived the process of destruction, so that I could now see my own faint shadow barely perceptible among them.⁶⁰

I would argue that, even without the mirroring glass of a shop window, we find our selves reflected in the objects that survive from our destructive European past. This is exactly because what we find is the objects themselves.

Yet the little vault at Heiligengrabe that, some thought, contained a tortured god; the table at Sternberg; the *Judensau* on the bridge at Frankfurt with its talismanic message of expulsion; the well in Poznań—these objects carry not the pathos of Sebald's squirrel or painted lampshade but a deeper horror. They are not in shop windows or even museums but in churches—institutions in which live the traditions and beliefs that led to the persecutions and pogroms of long and not-so-long ago. They are vestiges of the perpetrators, not the victims. What is inscribed in them is accusation, not loss. The self they connect us with is a self we have been in our European past—a self that persecutes and kills.⁶¹ The Sternberg table and the panels from Heiligengrabe are not just objects; they are horrible objects—evidence for and record of scapegoating, fear of the other, inflicted pain, opportunism, warped devotion, and deep belief. In the words inscribed upon them and the ghostly traces of blood supposedly shed long ago, they bear the marks of moments in history that lived into the twentieth century. The same wood that testified to and stimulated atrocities at Sternberg in 1492, at Heiligengrabe in 1532, is still there today.

Hence I am certain that the *Judensau* should not be removed at Nuremberg nor the footprints at Sternberg. Just as I am certain that the paintings from Heili-

60. W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York: Random House, 2001), 195–97.

61. A character in the wonderful novel by Rachel Seiffert (*The Dark Room* [New York: Vintage Books, 2002], 207) cries out in horror and anguish that in today's Germany schoolchildren identify with the victims in the camps, not

understanding that their grandparents were the killers rather than the killed. (The novel is a complex depiction, of course, and does not necessarily espouse this particular perception.) Objects such as the tabletop at Sternberg, with its inscription, make it impossible to forget that Western Christian culture killed.

gengrave—the real panels, and not replicas or digitalized presentations—should be hung. And I suggest that there and at Sternberg, Iphofen, Frankfurt, Poznań, etc., memorialization should include something more than the distancing of historical correction. Glosses should say more than that the events were other than legend tells; repentance should acknowledge more than that the legacy of false history does damage. Glosses, Artists' Protest Actions, even exorcizing liturgies, should cry out that the objects are still there and that in them we encounter—touch as well as see—the immense wrongdoing of our Western past. We should seek out that encounter. There is a special sense in which, as long as the objects survive, we shall never, can never, forget.