2 Being cursed: Medieval model texts

Even though the Reformation had been brought about quickly, comprehensively, and with strong political and government support, Catholic traditions, rituals, and faith lived on for a very long time in Sweden. Scholars have only recently started to question the traditional view in which the Nordic Reformations heralded a sudden and complete change of religious system.\textsuperscript{80} Analyses of prayer books, visitation protocols, and church inventories have, however, shown that Catholic rites, adoration of relics, and side altars, as well as saints, were in use well into the eighteenth century. Many people in Sweden may have practised a form of denominational syncretism for centuries, sometimes with the blessing of the Lutheran State Church – “sometimes” because in other cases the State Church rigorously enforced religious homogeneity.\textsuperscript{81}

Just as Catholic rituals and symbols remained not only intelligible, but were used on a daily basis, medieval Catholic anti-Judaism also remained intelligible and continued to be considered valid after the Reformation – this is probably one of the reasons why the reformers did not have to focus on this topic specifically. Even though transubstantiation was no longer an issue that could be invoked in accusations of host desecration, most other medieval religious tropes remained: the accusation of deicide, of torturing and mocking Christ, the alleged connection between Jews and bloodthirst, as well as greed and generally bad character traits.

That Jews killed Jesus Christ has been one of the most deadly allegations made by the Christian side – one that has been repeated in many different narratives and versions. Originally deriving from early Christian (mis)readings of the Gospels, the concept of deicidal Jews flourished during the Middle Ages, resulting in a widespread, general idea that Jews like to kill people. Ritual murder accusations were only one extreme and specific outcome of this belief, closely con-

\textsuperscript{80} Kajsa Weber, Undersåten som förstod: Den svenska reformatoriska samtalsordningen och den tidigmoderna integrationsprocessen (Skellefteå: Artos, 2013); Terese Zachrisson, Mellan fromhet och vidskepelse (Göteborg: Göteborgs universitet, 2017).


\textsuperscript{3} OpenAccess. © 2022 Heß, published by De Gruyter. [This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.]

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110757408-005
nected to the idea of Jews wanting to re-enact the murder of Christ, but also feeding on the idea that Jews were generally hostile to Christians and generally cruel. This in turn fostered the idea of a global Jewish conspiracy to kill Christians, which became particularly virulent during outbreaks of the Black Death, when Christians accused Jews of having brought the pandemic into existence through their murderous nature. All of these allegations relied on the idea that Jews as a group share certain character traits, which have been handed down since biblical times and which shape every individual’s actions and character – an idea that could be easily understood in both Catholic and Protestant societies. In medieval texts, Christians could also fantasize about Jews trying to gain control over Christians as revenge for the many abuses and atrocities that Christians were well aware of committing against Jews.⁸² Not quite as bloody, but similarly relying on the image of Jews as a historically and biologically consistent group, is the motif of Jewish rootlessness. The diaspora was seen by many Christians as an ongoing punishment for deicide, as were Jewish legal subordination and expulsion. Handed down in powerful images and legends and in the figure of the Wandering Jew, the narrative took on renewed significance in modern debates about Emancipation:⁸³ the question of whether Jews were a people incapable of living alongside other peoples, who could not feel loyalty to a Christian state, who had no roots – all of this was hotly debated in the nineteenth century. As with most other modern anti-Jewish stereotypes, this motif has been analysed mainly in its development during the nineteenth century. The idea itself was of medieval origin, however, and can be traced back to the Church Fathers, where one strand of supersessionism that was developing referred to the idea of eternal punishment, exemplified by the actual political situation in Jerusalem after the destruction of the Temple by the Romans.⁸⁴ Despite the fact that Jewish communities had been settling throughout the Mediterranean, parts of the Middle East, and North Africa during the Roman Empire, the destruction of the Temple and the expulsion of Jews from Jerusalem were seen as a sign of damnation and the beginning of Jewish homelessness. This should not, however, cause us to overlook the fact that supersessionism was far from being a unitary or monolithe-

---

⁸² See examples in Heß, “Jews and the Black Death in Fourteenth-Century Prussia.”
ic theological school of thought during the Middle Ages – it is a term covering a very broad range of beliefs. Most medieval Christian theologians displayed some form of anti-Judaism, yet the Venerable Bede and Thomas Aquinas, to give two examples, did not support the idea that the New Testament had replaced the covenant of the Hebrew Bible, but rather observed a continuation of the covenant of God with the people of Israel.\textsuperscript{85} In fact, the question of whether Thomas Aquinas followed a supersessionist argument in all of his writings, or whether there were differences between the \textit{Summa Theologica} and some of his commentaries on the Pauline letters, has been the subject of intense scholarly debate.\textsuperscript{86}

While the narrative of Jewish hostility remained closely connected to the deicide accusation, it is more difficult to trace the religious roots of Jewish rootlessness, because it has struck so many chords in modern societies and resonates with so many functions Jews have had to fulfil in the complicated processes of European nation-state building – so much so that it has become a modern stereotype. The rootless Jew of the nineteenth century, embodying migration, mobility, urbanization, professions outside the traditional spectrum, and other phenomena, has been analysed as a powerful metaphor for modernity itself while simultaneously developing into an equally powerful aspect of antisemitic polemics, culminating in National Socialist Lebensraum policies.

Swedish texts based on medieval and early modern models remained popular throughout the entire nineteenth century. Whether of religious, legendary, or entertaining character, together they testified to the fact that historically rooted anti-Judaism was an underlying factor in all the debates regarding Emancipation. While political and civil liberties were being discussed along with various measures, people had access to a significant number of texts in which Jews were portrayed as a trans-historical group incapable of change, forever connected to the murder of Christ. None of these texts contributed or related directly to the day-to-day political debates, but they nonetheless formed an important part of the collective archive of knowledge which informed these debates.

Central themes in the medieval and early modern model texts and their adaptations in modern Sweden were the presumed consequences of the blood curse: Jewish rootlessness, physiognomy, and character.

\textsuperscript{86} For an overview of the different positions, see Tapie, \textit{Aquinas on Israel and the Church}, 2–7.
Rootlessness and Jewish physiognomy: The Ahasver compilation

The myth of Ahasver, a shoemaker from Jerusalem who witnessed Jesus’s passage to Golgotha, denied him rest, and was consequently cursed to wander for eternity, originated in the Crusading period and subsequently spread throughout Europe. It served to legitimize the seizure and destruction of Jewish communities and goods, and it called the Jews to conversion.

The medieval legend remained intelligible and popular through the Reformation and into the modern era. In the nineteenth century, Ahasver was seen as a personification of the entire “Jewish race,” as famously stated by Arthur Schopenhauer. The figure is so prevalent in European history that there are even researchers known as “Wandering Jew scholars,” scholars of historiography or literary studies who mainly work on this figure – one of them being Galit Hasan-Rokem, who has described Ahasver as “a Jewish–Christian co-production.” She has also looked into the history of the legend in Finnish folklore, noting that a chapbook containing reproductions and translations of an originally German publication of 1602 had arrived in Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, and Finland long before the first Jewish immigrants: the first publication was issued in Denmark in 1621, in Iceland in the first half of the seventeenth century, and in Sweden in 1643. Richard Cole has, rather speculatively, tried to project the motif of the Eternal or Wandering Jew back as far as the Old Norse saga literature. One of the earliest Nordic research contributions was by Henrik Schück, who gave a speech to a student fraternity with the title Den vandrande juden in 1884. According to Schück, Ahasver is “endast en sagofigur utan all tendens” (only a harmless figure from a fairy tale without any bias, p. 121), even though he accepts the premise of the story, that Jews slapped and scorned Christ, without question.

In nineteenth-century Sweden, the legend of the Wandering Jew was extremely popular and was always presented alongside two other anti-Jewish

90 Henrik Schück, Den vandrande juden: föredrag hållt vid landsmålsföreningarnas fest i Uppsala den 23 februari 1884 ([Uppsala], [1886]).
texts, also of medieval origin: Mors Pilati, a variant of the legend of the corpse of Pontius Pilate from the Legenda aurea, and a text describing various “punishments” which the twelve tribes of Israel suffered for the killing of Jesus Christ. This trio of texts provided a kaleidoscope of the available antisemitic ideas from which various aspects and themes could be borrowed over the centuries. Grouping the Ahasver legend along with “The Punishments of the Twelve Tribes” was already well established in the German manuscript and print tradition, as was the combination of Ahasver and various Pilate legends, yet the fixed association of the Ahasver legend, the “Punishment,” and Mors Pilati seems specific for Sweden.⁹¹ What I will call the “Ahasver compilation” combined and propagated a variety of religious, racist, and general antisemitic attitudes and stereotypes; it was present even before the first Jews in Sweden, and continued to circulate as the first generations of Jews settled in the country. With more than 20 editions since 1642, 24 during the nineteenth century alone, the booklet was very widely distributed in Sweden.⁹²

To date, the Swedish text has only been discussed in one work, by ethnologist Bernt af Klintberg, who focused solely on the Ahasver motif. Other than that, it has not been the object of historical or literary studies, possibly because it is a translation, possibly because it does not belong to high culture. For an analysis of antisemitic attitudes in Sweden and for the history of antisemitic knowledge, its significance is obvious: First, it proves the transmission of various stereotypes from the Reformation era to the modern period. Second, it testifies to the Swedish public’s enduring and widespread interest in an anti-Jewish text. Third, it exemplifies the cultural transmission of hostility from the continent to the North, without any connection to actual living Jews. The third text, in particular, about


⁹² Swedish editions of the Ahasver compilation: Trenne trowårdighe och äfwen sanfärdige relationer (Gävle, 1780); Trenne trowårdighe och äfwen sanfärdige relationer (Gävle, 1797); Trenne trowårdighe relationer (s.l., s.a. [18th century]); Trenne trowårdighe relationer (s.l., s.a. [ca. 1750]); (Gävle, 1800); (Stockholm, 1823), and subsequently in Jönköping, Malmö, Lund, Norrköping, Söderhamn, Köping, Växjö, in 24 editions from 1823–1891; and in Jönköping, 1833, in an edition including the legend followed by “Lille Pytt” and a King Arthur legend (KB DK). Previous Danish translations, which would become models for the Swedish text: Sandfærdig Efteretning om een Jøde (ellers kaldet) Jerusalems skoemager Ahasverus, saa og Pontij Pilati tvende missiver om Christi død og opstandelse, saa og beretning om de tolv jødiske stammer, hvad enhver af dem har gjort den Herre Christo til spot og forhaanelse etc (København: J. Chr. Groth, 1730). Chrysostomus Dudelæus Westphalus, Sandru beskriffuelse om en Jøde, som vaar fød oc baaren til Jerusalem ved naaffn Ahaswerus ... nu nyilgen fordansket (Københaffn, 1631).
the twelve tribes, adds distinctly racist aspects to the accusations of deicide, blasphemy, and bloodlust.

The Swedish Ahasver compilation was most often titled *Trenne trowärdige relationer*. The basic text about Ahasver appears in many editions and languages with various second and third parts containing other anti-Jewish legends. All of the texts can be traced back to medieval models. Only six editions, all from before the nineteenth century, contain only the Ahasver legend. The editions of 1814 and 1818 contain a short sequel in which the Wandering Jew is said to have been seen in Sweden. By the nineteenth century most editions were produced in Southern Sweden, correlating with the growing interest in the myth in this region, as corroborated by other sources.³

Bernt af Klintberg has traced the Ahasver legend from the written accounts – the publications mentioned here as well as the Danish translations available in Southern Sweden, and a Danish song, which was translated into Swedish in the mid-nineteenth century – to popular beliefs and adaptations of the legend. He pays little attention to the antisemitic context but notes a change from the

---

long-standing popularity of the publications, on the one hand, and the relatively limited importance of the legend amongst the Swedish population after the Second World War. He also collected the images of the Wandering Jew which were used as cover illustrations in the various publications. All show a solitary male figure with a hat (either on his head or in his hands) and a stick, either a walking staff or a stick carrying a bundle of lasts, the symbol of the shoemaker’s profession. The figure is wearing a long coat and often a small backpack. Some of these illustrations include distinctly antisemitic iconography: a long and crooked nose, a pointed beard and pointed chin, sometimes almost touching the nose, and in some cases even swollen lips. In some illustrations, the hat has two small peaks, reminiscent of devil horns.\footnote{Ibid., 167–68.}

1 The Ahasver legend

This legend spread from the German lands to all of Europe during the early modern period. The Swedish publication is an abridged translated version of the original, printed in Gdansk in 1602 and ascribed to Chrysostomos Dudulaeus Westphalus, most likely a pseudonym. The motif itself, of a Jew condemned to eternally wander for having taunted Jesus on his way to Golgotha, is older though. The foundation for the motif of Jewish “homelessness,” as well as mercilessness at the sight of the suffering Christ and blindness to the messiah, stems from the Crusading period, and took form in many European languages.\footnote{Stefan Nied, “ich will stehen und ruhen, du aber sollt gehen: Das Volksbuch von Ahasver,” in \textit{Juden in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters: Religiöse Konzepte – Feindbilder – Rechtfertigungen}, ed. Ursula Schulze (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002), 263–65.} In the earliest medieval versions, the Eternal Jew was called Cartaphilus and was said to have first been seen by Crusaders in Armenia. The main motif was not the wandering but the function of Cartaphilus as a direct witness to the Passion of Christ as well as his conversion and pious life. The central element of his refusing Jesus respite on his way to Golgotha and the aspect of the curse were both already present.

It is difficult to trace the Swedish version directly to a model text. As the Swedish versions are almost exclusively printed together with “The Punishments of the Twelve Tribes” and “Mors Pilati,” they are likely based on a version which also contains these. One early version of the Ahasver text accompanied by “The Punishments of the Twelve Tribes” dates to 1634 and was printed in Reval, in German. Thus, the tradition may trace back to a German text model. But there
is also an Ahasver legend in Chrysostomos Dudulaeus's version in Danish, printed in 1631, though without the "Punishments," so a translation from German via Danish is also possible.

The Swedish version is quite similar to the oldest German versions, consisting of a word-for-word translation in parts, but with some abridgements. A summary of the oldest Swedish edition: During a Sunday sermon, Paulus von Eitzen, a priest from Hamburg, observes a man in shabby clothes who beats his chest whenever the name of Christ is mentioned. (The German version mentions here that the Jew has already been spotted by many members of the noble classes in England, Scotland, Denmark, and Sweden, amongst other places.) He asks the stranger where he is from and where he is staying. The stranger explains that he was born in Jerusalem in the time of Jesus, had been a shoemaker, witnessed Jesus's crucifixion and death, and had had to wander through lands and towns ever since, to tell all peoples about the events that had transpired. He also mentions that he wanted to talk about the changes in religion and government that had occurred over the many centuries, and about the lives and deaths of the apostles. Paulus von Eitzen inquires more deeply about his experiences. Ahasver says he lived in Jerusalem and had believed, together with the other Jews, Jesus to be instigating riots, and had wanted to see him dead. The verdict was delivered and Jesus was led to the place of execution. Ahasver lived by the road "från Rådstugan uth till Rätteplatsen" (between the town hall and the place of execution) and Jesus wanted to rest at his house, but the shoemaker denied him this. "I will stand here and rest a little while," Jesus then said, "but you shall not find rest in this world and shall wander hither and thither until the Day of Judgment." He was forced to follow Jesus and witness his death and was unable to return to his house or to Jerusalem but had to start wandering. When he returned to Jerusalem many years later, the city was entirely destroyed and in ruins. Ahasver believed that God made him wander and see so many people as a living witness to the Passion of Christ and as a penance and reminder of humility. He only wished that God might relieve him of his misery and grant him death someday. Paulus von Eitzen and many other scholars, well versed in the history of the Orient, questioned the man and found his story to be true.

While in Hamburg, the Jew lived a humble life; he would only accept a little food, and when he received money he would give it to another beggar. He was sad and pensive all the time and meditated on God's will, hoping that God would forgive him his sins one day and take him as his child again. He regretted his sin. He spoke fluent German and a number of other Eastern and European languages, which he never learned but which came to him through God's will. Whenever he heard someone swearing, he admonished them to honour the Lord's name, and whenever he heard Christ's name, he would kneel down.
and moan. The text concludes that this and much more had been told by Paul von Eitzen in 1574 and also that the Jew had been seen in many towns around the Baltic Sea, including Lübeck, Wismar, Danzig, and Königsberg. The narrator then asks the reader for help – is the person Paulus von Eitzen describes the same person who he has heard of in Schleswig and in many other places? Additional claims of Ahasver’s being spotted between 1604 and 1634, which appear in the version by Dudulaeus with the same appendix, do not appear in the Swedish versions, which are all dated Reval, 11 April 1604.⁹⁶

2 On the straff hwarts läkte ibland juderne lida måste (On the punishment which each tribe of the Jews must suffer)

The second part of the Swedish publications is included in most print editions along with the Ahasver legend, but also appears independently in various contexts. It is catalogued as a cycle of three anonymous songs from a manuscript from Ulm, not dated but probably post-Reformation.⁹⁷ It was also included together or as an appendix in editions of the Evangelium Nicodemi. Evangelium Nicodemi is an umbrella title for an assortment of apocryphal texts describing the Passion of Christ, his descent to hell, and his resurrection. One branch of this textual tradition can be traced to Heinrich von Hesler, who produced a rhyming version of the Evangelium Nicodemi in the mid-fourteenth century in Middle High German, probably commissioned by the Teutonic Order. Another branch of the textual tradition was in prose; it consisted of three parts (Acts of the Trial of Pilate, The Capture of Joseph of Arimathea, and Christ’s Descent into Hell) and focused on the various misdeeds individual Jews were said to have committed during the Passion.⁹⁸ The different branches are all heavily anti-Jewish, sometimes containing direct admonitions to secular rulers to expel all Jews from their lands. During the Middle Ages, a rich vernacular tradition derived from the Latin and Greek fourth-century originals, with rhymed, prosaic, and dramatic

adaptations of the legends in many Germanic and Romance languages, including Danish and Swedish. The Old Swedish version of the *Evangelium Nicodemi*, written down in Vadstena in the late fifteenth century (Cod. Holm. A 110), did not contain “The Punishments of the Twelve Tribes.” The connection between *Evangelium Nicodemi* and “The Punishments of the Twelve Tribes,” and their association with various legends of Judas and Pilate, was thus thematically logical, but did not follow from one specific medieval example.

The text itself enjoyed a lively transmission in various early modern contexts. It was included, for example, in Johann Jacob Schudt’s description and chronicles of the Jewish community in Frankfurt, where it appears as chapter 20 in book VI. Schudt frames it with a description of the *foetor judaicus*, a distinctive bad smell which is said to have followed the Jews since biblical times. He refers to Dudulaeus as one of his sources but also credits other authors who have investigated the idea of a bad smell being a punishment for the deicide, such as Abraham a Sancta Clara (died 1709). The text about the twelve tribes also fit Schudt’s agenda, since it combines religious hostility tracing back to apocryphal legendary sources with specific kinds of physical harm that befall Jews either once a year or regularly. These bodily afflictions are described as “punishments” for various misdeeds during the Passion of Christ.

The text takes up other textual traditions, such as the legend of Jesus passing by a pigsty in which Jews were hiding their children, miraculously recognizing the children inside, and then turning them into pigs. This legend appears in many variations, including independently from the entire tradition of “The Punishments of the Twelve Tribes,” in fairy tales and legends from various European regions, and is supposed to serve as an explanation as to why Jews do not eat pork.

---


102 Johann Jacob Schudt, *Jüdische Merkwürdigkeiten*, lib. VI, cap. XX (Frankfurt: Hocker, 1717), 344.
A summary of the oldest Swedish edition: The introduction explains that the information about the punishments comes from a Jewish convert and doctor from Italy and was first published in Mantua. The tribe of Reuben caught Jesus in the garden and beat him there. Their punishment is threefold: everything they touch withers within three days, nothing they plant grows, and no grass grows on their graves when they die. The tribe of Simeon crucified Jesus, nailing him to the cross; every year on Good Friday, all children of this tribe bleed all day long and suffer great pain. The tribe of Levi beat Christ and spit in his face; they cannot spit anything to the ground, everything they spit sticks in their beards. The tribe of Judah mocked Jesus; they are so disloyal to one another that every year they kill 30 of their own family members. The tribe of Zebulon gambled for Christ’s clothes; they must spit blood every year on 23 March, from morning to evening. (23 March is not a fixed holiday, but coincides with the earliest possible date for Easter.) The tribe of Issachar shackled and whipped Jesus; every year on 25 March, they suffer bloody wounds and boils all day long. (25 March is the Feast of the Annunciation in the Catholic calendar.) The tribe of Dan said “may his blood come upon us” (Mt 25:27); they smell bad one day every month, and they can only rid themselves of the smell if they smear themselves with Christian blood. The tribe of Asher slapped Jesus’s face and beat him; their right hand is half-a-hand shorter than their left. Members of the tribe of Naphtali put their children in a pigsty when Jesus was led to Caiaphas; they asked him what was inside, hoping to accuse him of lying, but he said “your children,” and the children were turned into piglets when they were let out. To this day, members of the tribe of Naphtali have four teeth like pigs, ears like pigs, and also smell like pigs. The tribe of Joseph forged the nails with which Jesus was nailed to the cross, and on a woman’s advice they made the nails less sharp in order to increase his pain; now they suffer from worms inside their bodies every year on a certain date, and the women among them are particularly afflicted in their mouths. The tribe of Benjamin gave Jesus vinegar to drink; they cannot look above themselves but must always look at the ground, they have small worms in their mouths and a sour taste, and are always very thirsty.

\[103\] This information may hint towards the Epistola contra Judaeorum errores, which was included as an appendix to Paulus de Sancta Maria’s Scrutinium scripturarum, printed as an incunabulum several times in Mantua. The Epistola, which scholars now believe to be the product of fourteenth-century Christian polemics, dealt primarily with punitive supersessionism but did not contain the specific details as to the punishments of the twelve tribes; see Bernhard Blumenkranz, “Alfonsus Bonihominis,” in Encyclopaedia Judaica (Jerusalem, 1971), t. 2, col. 607.
3 Om Pilati ändalycht och orolige döda kropp

This narrative does not focus on Pilate’s life but on his suicide and the fate of his corpse. It developed in Christian legends since the twelfth century, following the initial example of the *Vita Pilati*, an anonymous Latin prose text in which previous legends about Pilate’s life were for the first time complemented with the story of his corpse and the continuous damage it caused. Among the apocryphal texts about Pontius Pilate, the *Mors Pilati* is a relatively late addition from the fourteenth century.  

Central aspects from this version, however, are missing in the Swedish text, such as the place names Vienna and Lausanne. The detail about the unjust judge was a late addition, entering the tradition with the *Helian* and Bible epic.

The immediate text model for this short (one page in most printed versions) legend cannot be identified. The story itself is based on the medieval *Legenda aurea*, which was the first account of Pontius Pilate’s life after he sentenced Jesus to death. The medieval East Norse adaptation, *Fornsvenska legendariet*, does contain texts about Pilate’s death, but it is not possible to establish a direct line of translation within Sweden: it is equally likely that *Om Pilati ändalycht* was transmitted together with the other two texts in the Ahasver compilation via the German lands and Denmark. However, it testifies to a direct tradition of anti-Jewish hagiographic and legendary texts in Sweden from the medieval period to the nineteenth century.

The printed Swedish versions contain only basic elements: Pontius Pilatus is summoned to Emperor Tiberius in order to justify his condemning Jesus to death. He travels to Rome but is terrified and kills himself. His body is thrown into the river Tiber but finds no rest; it is tossed around until it lands on a mountain near Lucerne in Switzerland (previous stations of the body known from other versions, such as Lyon and Lausanne, are not mentioned), where it lies to this very day, torn at by wind and snow, so that people cannot live nearby. In

---

105 Mattig-Krampe, *Das Pilatusbild*, 57–58.
106 Ibid., 76.
some printed editions, the legend ends with a sentence describing Pilate’s fate as a warning to all judges who condemn innocent people.

The eternal traitor: Judas legends

The Judas legend is another medieval story with anti-Jewish content, almost as popular as the Ahasver legend. It is similar to the Ahasver tradition in that it, too, is a medieval text which remained popular into the modern period in Sweden, providing an example of the enduring effects that medieval anti-Jewish exempla continued to have, even in a Protestant or secular context.

Unlike the purely mythical and unquestionably Jewish Ahasver, the figure of Judas has a biblical foundation in the Gospels, and its synonymy, or identification with, the Jewish people is strong, though not unequivocal. A rich medieval apocryphal and legendary tradition views Judas as the prototypical traitor. The Gospel of Luke mentions that “intravit autem Satanas in Iudam” (Lk 22:3), and thereby posits a direct connection between Judas and the devil, or of Judas being the devil’s tool. Both his name and the various shades of evil which were associated with Judas suggested he was a pars pro toto for the entire Jewish people: an enemy of Christ, a traitor for money, close to Satan.

Legenden om förrädaren Judas, hans födelse och leverbne till dess han utvaldes till Jesu Apostel was printed at least six times between 1800 and

---

109 En kort dock märkwärdig historia, om den wederstyggelige och förgiftige förrädaren Judas,
1896; an older version, probably translated from Danish, was printed in 1740. The original text stems from Jacobus de Voragine’s *Legenda aurea* and the Swedish versions are a very close translation. This medieval Latin version of the Judas legend, in its turn, probably stems from a Byzantine tradition, in which Oedipus-motifs were Christianized.¹¹⁰ The *Legenda aurea* was a medieval bestseller, copied and disseminated in thousands of manuscripts and incunabula, and was even translated into Old Swedish. The published version from 1896 is, however, more comprehensive than the one in *Fornsvenska legendariet*,¹¹¹ and thus represents a reinvention or repopularization of a medieval text, rather than being in the direct lineage of the Old Swedish model. There is also an Old Swedish version in *Själens tröst*, an early fifteenth century compilation of didactical texts.¹¹²

The Judas legend has gone through a long series of transformations and adaptations; by the end of the thirteenth century it had been translated into many European vernaculars, had been interwoven with legends about Mary Magdalene, and served various didactic purposes. Even one of the Swedish editions, Uppsala 1827, presents the text with a Mary Magdalene addition:

> En märkwärdig historia om den wederstyggelige förrädaren Judas, hans härkomst, födelse och lefwern, smt hwad synder han bedrivit ifrån sin ungdom, intill desz han bl ef Christi apostel. Huwartill är fogod[!] en sköna andelig wisa om: wår frälsare Jesus och den botfärdiga synderakan Maria Magdalena.

(A noteworthy story about the horrible traitor Judas, his origins, birth, and life, and those sins he engaged in since his youth, until he became an apostle of Christ. Supplemented by a fine spiritual song about: our saviour Jesus and the repentant sinner Mary Magdalene.)

The other editions include only the Judas Iscariot legend; thereby focusing on the unrepentant sinner and, potentially, the Jew.

---

The Swedish version provides the Judas-Oedipus legend.¹¹³ Judas’s mother Liboria (in *Legenda aurea: Cyborea*) has a prophetic dream that her unborn child will do great harm to herself and her husband. She throws the baby into the sea, but not unlike Moses he is found by a queen and raised together with her own son, whom he kills after learning that he is a foundling. After some adventures, Judas unknowingly kills his father Reuben, and his subsequent marriage to his mother is brokered by Pontius Pilatus. In order to atone for these sins, he approaches Jesus and becomes his favourite disciple. The biblical part of the story is only alluded to, the legend ending with the observation that the more he learned what was good from Jesus, the worse Judas became, to the point that he was even constantly stealing money from him.

The popularity of the text is an example of continuity between Catholic and Protestant didactic texts and contents. As early as 1614, and several times during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, an adaptation of the legend by Jacobus Petri Rondeletius (1518–1662), titled *Judas Redivivus*, was printed in Sweden. Taking place partly in a monastery, it contains most of the persons and events of the legend, but its main message is that parents who do not beat their children are responsible for them ending up in hell.¹¹⁴ The author was a Lutheran priest and schoolteacher in Söderköping, and the play was meant to be staged with schoolboys as actors.¹¹⁵

The Swedish version of the story mentions Judas’s Jewish faith several times, which might have pointed towards identifying the traitor with Jews in general. The very last sentence presents its moral: “så plägar världen ännu idag löna bevista välgärningar” (This is how the world deals with secret good deeds to this day, p. 10). It is difficult to say to what extent Swedish readers would have identified the person from the popular legend with the Jewish people. “Judas” had been used in Swedish as a synonym for a backstabbing person, and also for a moneylender, since the end of the eighteenth century, with terms like “Judaskysen” (Kiss of Judas, an act of kindness but indicating betrayal) and “judasstycke” (an act of betrayal) being in use since the sixteenth century. A tree and a swamp bear the name in Swedish, as well as in German and English.¹¹⁶

---


The antisemitic impact of the Swedish editions of the legend cannot be estimated without a thorough analysis of the development of the Judas motif in Swedish Lutheran theology, didactics, and literature, which will be difficult given its popularity in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some examples: At the very end of the nineteenth century, the drama *Judas* by Tor Hedberg presented a philosophical view of the Passion from Judas’s perspective. From the seventeenth century on, a number of published sermons were centred on the Judas motif. In 1874, a text by Protestant Reformed Church theologian Friedrich Wilhelm Krummacher was translated and printed under the title *Judas läger*, originally as part of the collection of sermons, *Blicke ins Reich der Gnade*. It does not, however, deal with Judas Iscariot, but rather provides an exegesis of Num. 2:3 regarding Juda, the biblical people.¹¹⁷ In 1891, the bestselling crime novel *Monsieur Judas*, by British author Fergus Hume, was translated and published in Sweden.¹¹⁸ In 1911, another teacher, Nils Krok, wrote *Judas Iskariot: skådespel i 3 akter*. In 1882 in Lund, Catholic convert Axel Hellqvist published a response to what he perceived as a personal attack in a public sermon, *Judas Iskariots utgång ur apostlakretsen*, in which conversion to another Christian denomination was paralleled with Judas’s betrayal of Jesus.¹¹⁹

We lack a systematic study of adaptations of the Judas motif in Swedish theology and/or literature.¹²⁰ The number of printed books on the topic, most of them intended for entertainment or edification, suggests that publishers and authors expected their public to already associate the name with specific connotations. Depending on the discursive context, these might have been distinctly antisemitic or only slightly anti-Jewish.

---

Ahasver, Pilate, and Judas: medieval models for a non-existent minority

The publications presented here cover a wide range of anti-Jewish knowledge, dating back to late antiquity and the Middle Ages, which testifies to the fact that Christian anti-Judaism contained essentialist, and therefore (proto-)racist, aspects almost from its beginnings. The Ahasver compilation and the Judas legends, all traceable to model texts from the period of the Church Fathers to the early sixteenth century, were reprinted many times, appeared throughout the country, and also had their counterparts in other Nordic countries. They all have both a medieval past in East Norse, and thus Sweden and Denmark, and an early modern parallel means of transmission from the continent via its print production. The number of editions throughout the entire nineteenth century that are based on these three medieval models makes them a significant addition to the archive: easily available and supplemented by oral traditions, sermons, and belletristic works, Ahasver, Pilate, and Judas form the backbone of “knowledge” about Jews, connecting contemporary Jews to Bible stories, and assigning them the role of evil in Christian eschatology. Together, they paint a vivid picture of Jews as eternal, male, sinister, and physically distinguishable from others.

Though always grouped in the same way in the various print editions, the three parts of the Ahasver compilation differ widely regarding their antisemitic content. The third text, the Pilate legend, does not contain any antisemitic elements or references to Jews at all. It is contained in all the Swedish editions of the compilation, attributing a small share of the guilt for Jesus’s death to a Roman. The larger share, however, remains the Jews’, and it is accompanied by a harsh verdict on contemporary Jews as the direct heirs of their biblical ancestors. In Latin and vernacular medieval texts, the legendary tradition around Pilate is both broad and varied. Both he and his family appear in Bible stories, in independent legends, and as part of didactic collections, such as Legenda aurea and Seelentrost. In many textual traditions, connections between the Pilate legend and anti-Jewish texts exist: they appear together in the Evangelium Niconemi, in Passionale poetry, and in connection with Judas legends. Thus, the Pilate legend in the Ahasver compilation is not antisemitic per se, but it perpetuates a centuries-long tradition of texts containing the anti-Jewish Christ-killer accusation, peopled with various other apocryphal characters that have their own supposed connections to the evil deed. In the High and Late Middle Ages, Christian iconography had increasingly not simply included Pilate among those who tortured and killed Jesus but had presented him as being himself a Jew. Visual representations had also created a firm connection between Pi-
late and Judas, as had already been argued by Origen, who portrayed both as being blind to the truth and unwilling to recognize the messiah.¹²¹

In the Ahasver legend itself, the language of the Swedish text is relatively sober and seems unbiased. It is also less anti-Jewish than the German model: in several instances the German text mentions Ahasver being a witness “against the Jews,” to remind “the Jews” of their sins, and his initial motive was to gain stature amongst “the Jews” by denying Jesus rest. In all of these instances, the Swedish text leaves out “the Jews”; this turns Ahasver into a generic witness located within Christian society, which he is supposed to enlighten through his miserable example. Not the Jews specifically, but humankind in general, is sinful and needs to be reminded to repent. The Swedish text contains very little drama. The Jew in shabby clothes, not warm enough for a Scandinavian winter, evokes pity rather than fear, even though the basic idea of his wandering for many centuries remains disturbing. The text explicitly presents him as an example to Christian societies: he is the model of a repentant sinner and good humble Christian; even though he has not been baptized, and is therefore doomed, he firmly believes in Christ as the messiah and in God’s power to punish and forgive. He is an illustration of the Augustinian idea of Jewish witness, yet shows this to be a paradox: as they were already present during Christ’s lifetime, the Jews are witnesses to the fundamental change in the relation between God and his people, which at the same time makes them obsolete. The pity the Swedish reader might feel for Ahasver is the pity for someone who suffers a severe punishment, but also for someone who has fallen out of his time.

In the nineteenth century, the Ahasver figure became an illustration of aspects of modernity that were projected onto Jews: homelessness, cosmopolitanism, lack of loyalty to a home country, the distress of being lonely and rootless and not belonging.¹²² In Sweden, which prior to the end of the nineteenth century had not experienced any real modernization or urbanization, these aspects were played down compared to the religious aspects. The Swedish Ahasver is less like the modern creature of literature produced in Berlin and Vienna and more like an incomplete convert, illustrating the Jewish inability to fully embrace the mystery of the Christian faith despite having witnessed it. At the same time, he is more pious than many Christians, humbly accepting small donations and alms but giving whatever money he receives to other poor people and admonishing those who use Christ’s name in vain. The emphasis in the German model

---

¹²² For example, see Singer, “Between Eternity and Wandering.”
texts on how many people in various areas have seen Ahasver is replaced by only mentioning places very close to the reader: the harbour towns on the Baltic rim. There is also no attempt to modernize the text: all of the nineteenth-century versions still date the story to 1604, presenting it as a historical fable. The originally medieval motif is used in Sweden for almost 200 years, the text basically unchanged, only the cover illustrations being updated. And it was not only read: referring to records in folklore archives in Sweden and Finland, Bengt af Klintberg has shown that the Wandering Jew was quite popular as a folktale and in popular accounts, especially in the South of Sweden, where people adapted the legend from the printed chapbook into local variations embellished with details about how Ahasver had been seen and spoken to.¹²³

At the end of the century, a translation of French author Eugène Sué’s *Le Juif errant*¹²⁴ was published, and even though the figure of the Wandering Jew plays only a marginal role in the text, the title alluded to the medieval model texts, which were well known in Sweden at the time. Several collections of novels “about life in Stockholm” were published under the pseudonym *Den Vandrande Juden*,¹²⁵ even though they had no explicitly Jewish themes. Georg von Rosen, a renowned painter and professor at the Royal Swedish Academy of Fine Arts, painted a picture titled *Ahasverus*. It is, however, impossible to judge the impact of the Ahasver motif solely from the Swedish publications, given the variety of its audiences and versions. In 1871, a small booklet containing two legends from Nuremberg and Poland was published under the title *Den wandrande juden*, in which the motif was used but applied to Jews other than the shoemaker from Jerusalem. In both legends, the wandering is a result of an unpleasant characteristic or misdeed of a Jewish man, who is condemned to move from one place to another without respite. The title illustration shows the protagonist of the first legend, a man who has a prosthetic leg, which forces him to run without rest. His coat is shown flailing, revealing the mechanical leg, and his face, with stereotypical nose, eyes, and beard, bears an expression of pain and horror.¹²⁶

The second text in the Ahasver compilation, “The Punishments of the Twelve Tribes,” goes several steps further. It connects Jews to all aspects of Jesus’s trial,

¹²⁴ Eugène Sue, *Den vandrande juden: öfversättning från franskan af W. Granath; med talrika illustrationer af P. Hedman* (Stockholm: Lundquist, 1898).
¹²⁵ *Skildring af modernt Stockholmsliv: från Österlånggatans mysterier* (Stockholm, 1893); *Fri kärlek: en huvudstadsberättelse* (Stockholm, 1893); *Grefvinnans konstaffel: en konturteckning ur “high life”* (Stockholm, 1893); “I sängkamrar och boudoirer”: *pikanta rader ur en ungkarls dagbok* (Stockholm, 1893); *På hotell Cupido: en bild ur Stockholm nattetid* (Stockholm, 1892).
torture, and crucifixion. All the details of the passio found in apocryphal texts and described in sermons, as well as images like those in the Biblia pauperum – the crown of thorns, the shackling to a pale, the beating, throwing dice for his clothes, the sponge full of vinegar – appear in this text, where they are attributed to Jewish perpetrators.¹² By listing all the tribes of Israel, the Jewish people are presented as having collectively participated in the torture and killing of Christ. The deicide is thus a collective endeavour of the Jews as a people. No reason is given for their hatred and collectively planned action, which therefore appears as a consequence of the cruel and evil character of the people as a whole. Furthermore, in “The Punishments of the Twelve Tribes,” this character finds its expression in physical appearance – a feature not only of modern racist and biologicist conceptions but also of medieval thought: what is ugly on the inside must also be ugly on the outside. Additionally, the text explains various illnesses as being the result of an evil character and of the sins of past generations. It portrays all Jews, without exception, as suffering from mysterious and disgusting afflictions, either permanently or at particular dates in the year, all in the Easter period; that is, in the period of their presumed crimes. The medieval stereotype of the foetor judaicus, a particular Jewish smell,¹² is also evoked and traced back to participation in the Passion of Christ. Other, not strictly pathological, features are the inability to look up or to spit on the ground – evoking the image of Jews as bowed and hunchbacked, as well as having bad manners and being dirty. In this regard, it is connected to the way in which a “Jewish iconography” developed in the Middle Ages out of the traditional portrayals of evil in the Crucifixion scenes, connecting this to Jews.¹²⁹

In just a few pages, the text brings together an array of anti-Jewish stereotypes, all combining aspects of the “Christ-killer” motif with physical Otherness,


deviancy, and deformity. Traditional medieval stereotypes, such as male menstruation, the foetor judaicus, and the blood curse, are mentioned alongside less well-known ideas about worms, pig-like teeth, and causing infertility in plants. As all of the twelve tribes of Israel are mentioned, there is not a single Jew who has not inherited part of the punishment. Through inherited guilt, contemporary Jews are very obviously connected to the Jews of the (apocryphal) Gospels.

The third text, about the body of Pilate, ties in with the motif of connecting the historical period of Christ’s Passion with the present time. Its antisemitic content derives from the fact that from the tenth century on, various apocryphal hagiographic sources, such as the Evangelium Nicodemi,¹³⁰ have portrayed Pilate as a Jew and a preeminent villain.

The common denominator between the three texts in the Ahasver compilation is the idea that people active in the trial, torture, and killing of Christ were so evil that their deeds reverberate over centuries and millennia and can never be forgotten, haunting both the living and the dead. Lisa Lampert-Weissig has noted that the medieval development of the legend already established a specific Jewish temporality in Christian eyes: Jews are the same in the past, the present, and the future. Even though the Wandering Jew converts and is more pious than most Christians, he is not redeemed.¹³¹ Jews, both the disturbing centuries-old Ahasver and the tribes of Israel, serve as the most visible surviving point of connection between the ages. In early modern Sweden, when most of the country’s inhabitants had never seen an actual Jew, the Ahasver compilation must have made quite an impression as to what these people were like: evil, ugly, afflicted with mysterious diseases, foul-smelling, and as old as the Bible.

In the case of the Judas legend, the aim was twofold: to show that Jesus was able to forgive even the worst sins and also to besmirch Judas. Even though the legend is mainly about the backstory to Judas becoming Jesus’s disciple, Christian readers would have already known that he was the one who betrayed Jesus for money – in the Gospel of John version he did so out of anger about an unprofitable sale – and who killed himself afterwards. The name Judas has become a synonym for bad character, betrayal, sin, and greed. In some medieval Passion plays, Judas is also the sinner who doubts Christ’s infinite ability to forgive, and who therefore kills himself out of despair at his betrayal.

The identification of Judas as a representative of all the Jewish people derives from Origen; it was sharpened from the fourth century onwards, intensified in the writings of the Church Fathers, and facilitated by the similarity of the names. The theological implications of a person who thinks and acts in an un-Christian way were merged with the favourite religious Other, and also with the idea of Jewish greed and the ecclesiastical struggle against usury. While the religious interpretation of Judas still contains positive aspects – the ambiguity of faith and trust and the paradox of Christ’s prophesied betrayal and death, for which Judas is a necessary tool – the modern era has separated Judas from these positive aspects while still projecting the negative aspects onto Jews as a group.¹³²