

Stereotypes and Prejudices on Judaism

Intellectual Output 2, Unit III



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Introduction

Dealing with stereotypes and prejudices on Judaism can be tricky, since most of them are not far from anti-Semitism. Most of the times, these stereotypes and prejudices are not about Judaism as a religion, but about Jews and their supposed behaviour. From the beginning, Christian theologians were eager to stress the common origin (the covenant between Abraham and God), but also to show Christianity as the true religion. Other stereotypes and prejudices stem from folk beliefs: for centuries, Jews were the most visible minority with different practices and habits.

Stereotypes and prejudices come from a generalization. In order to tackle them, one has to be reminded of the diversity of Judaism: there are many Jews and many trends in Judaism. It is also important to keep in mind that Judaism, like any religion, is not static and unchanging.

More information on:

- [The diversity of Judaism](#)
- [The origins of Judaism](#)
- [Rabbinic Judaism](#)
- [Judaism in Middle and Early Modern Ages](#)
- [Jewish Modernity](#)
- [Judaism in the 20th and 21st c.](#)

Jews as murderers of Christ

This prejudice is a bit strange since it is widespread and seems to use a theological argument, but it is not endorsed by the Church: the Councils of Trent (1545-1563) and Vatican II declared that Jesus was not killed by the Jews, but by the sins of mankind, and his death is not a murder, but an atonement.

Jews were seen as enemies of Christianity, accursed people who did not acknowledge the coming of the Messiah. They were marginalized and seen as unclean. Greed and love of money are part of this supposed moral uncleanness (even though they were Christian money lenders), which give birth to the enduring stereotype of the greedy and rich Jew.

Folk beliefs went further: Jews not only killed Jesus, but they still killed Christian children in order to use their blood for their rituals, especially for the bread used for Passover. These stories have no basis, since the *kashrut* strictly forbids the use of blood. There are multiple cases of Jews tried and executed after the discovery of a dead child close to their homes.



1. In 1475, in Trent, 15 Jews were sentenced to death for the murder of Simon, considered a martyr by local Christians (source: [Nuremberg World Chronicle](#))

One of the first conspiracy theories

In some stereotype and prejudices, Jews are considered as a secretive and closed community. Before being given equal rights, Jews were forced to live apart in specific areas (the ghettos). By a strange twist, the legal requirement becomes a behavioural characteristic. This stereotype created another prejudice: the existence of a secret plot to take over the world. This prejudice is behind the creation of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a fabricated text describing a supposed Jewish plot. This text, written in the beginning of the 20th century, is a plagiarism of a French political satire and an anti-Semitic German novel. The text contains only general ideas about taking control of the media and the economic and political institutions. These ideas have been used again and again in many conspiracy theories, such as the "New World Order". In a time of acute nationalism, the *Protocols* strengthened the idea that Jews were a different people and a danger to society, thus justifying the persecutions. In spite of being exposed as a clumsy forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* are still being taken at face value and are still creating many prejudices and stereotypes about Jews.



This Russian edition of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* uses occult symbols in order to emphasize the secrecy of the plot.

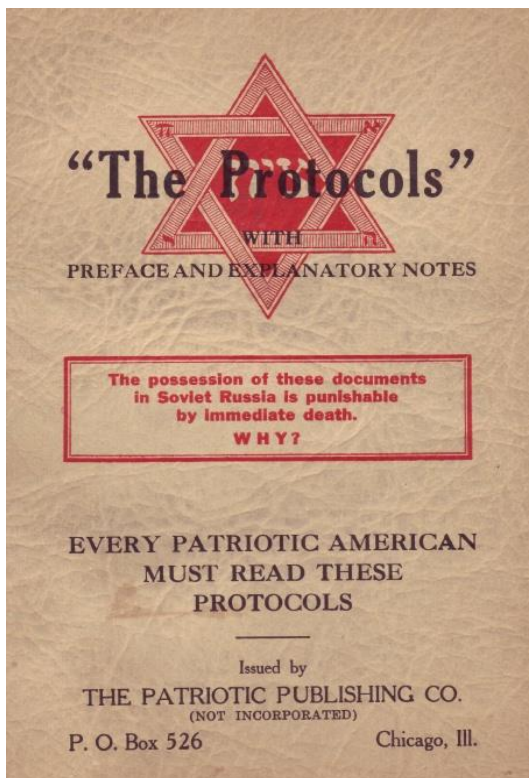
The Orthodox Cross with the words “By this [sign] you will conquer” (allusion to Constantine’s victory and conversion).

Pentagram and hexagram with the words “Mark of the Antichrist” on each side of a Tarot figure (the Chariot) with the word “Antichrist”.

At the bottom, the words “Unlawfulness” and “Great mystery”.

[Credits.](#)

2. A Russian edition of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (1911)



This American edition with a fake warning about the *Protocols* in the USSR shows another dimension of the plot stereotype: Communism and revolutionary activities are part of the Jewish plot to take over the world.

3. An American edition of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (1934)