



The Role of Christian Women in Ritual Murder Accusations in the 16th–18th centuries

Emilia HRUSZOWIEC

Abstract: *The main aim of this paper is to discuss the role of Christian women in ritual murder accusations that took place in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from the 16th to the 18th centuries. Although the specificity of this issue might suggest that only the figures of Jewish women were considered, the reality was in fact quite different. In many cases, the deeds of Christian women were the most important element determining the course of events. Particular attention is given here to the various roles assigned to Christian women. They were perceived not only as accusers and defenders of the faith, but also as betrayers and accomplices to crimes. As such, it is necessary to consider their motives as well as the position and roles traditionally attributed to women in Christian culture. This study is based first and foremost on anti-Jewish booklets printed within the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth between 1546 and 1772, but also draws upon information from trial records relating to the cases of ritual murder accusations, which serve as complementary sources. The comparison of these two different sources makes it possible to arrive at a clearer picture of the past and to achieve a better understanding of the issues reshaped by the authors of the booklets. Because of that, anti-Jewish literature took the form of a specific kind of manipulation that used fear and anxiety to create a social reality that profoundly shaped attitudes towards Jews and women of the Christian faith.*

Keywords: *Anti-Jewish Literature, Woman, Christians, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Ritual Murders, Blood Libel*

The legend of ritual murder is an inseparable part of European history. Accusations concerning alleged murders committed by Jews because of the blood extracted from the bodies of their Christian victims had a considerable impact on the internal situation of many early modern countries. Although similar allegations had been witnessed in ancient times,¹ they were created for different purposes.² The case of William of Norwich

1 Jolanta ŻYNDUL, *Kłamstwo krwi. Legenda mordu rytualnego na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku*, Warszawa 2011, pp. 14–15.

2 The core of ancient prosecutions was the motive that the Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus, which was unambiguously connected with the rejection of the new faith – Christianity. Moreover,

(1144) gave rise to the modern version of the legend, which not only referred to the actual political and social situation, but also indirectly shaped attitudes towards Jews both at the time and in centuries to come. On this basis, anti-Jewish literature, complemented by the trial records corresponding to the cases described in the booklets, provides a specific source of information on relations between the Jews and representatives of other faiths, especially Christians. The social contexts considered by the authors provide an insight into these two societies. A particular focus is placed here on the role of non-Jewish women in accusations of ritual murder presented in anti-Jewish literature printed within the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.³

Ritual murders are usually identified with alleged murders of Christian children committed by Jews. However, killing for blood was an integral part of many religious practices found in different cultures, such as those associated with the Incas, Aztecs, and Scythians.⁴ The extraordinary significance of ritual murders derives from their perception as a means by which the individual could communicate with the sacrum thanks to the victim.⁵ In addition, carrying out these rituals correctly was believed to ensure the goodwill of supernatural forces and to result in positive effects such as general prosperity or bumper crops.⁶ It is worth noting that in ancient times, Christians were also suspected of crimes committed to obtain the blood needed for many magical practices.⁷ Nevertheless, it should be noted that Jewish ritual murders were among the most frequently repeated allegations justified by the commandments allegedly found in the Talmud.

The blood libel, including early modern ritual murder accusations, should not be approached as a separate phenomenon. Because of its long-term presence in European history and connections with social aspects, it is also important to consider medieval

there is a high probability that ancient texts on this subject were not known in 12th-century England; Gavin I. LANGMUIR, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, Berkley – Los Angeles – London 1990, pp. 61–62.

3 To specify the timeframe of the research, the period between 1547 and 1772 should be mentioned. In 1547, the first trial for an alleged ritual murder took place in the land under Polish rule. The latter date marks the first partition of Poland. At that point the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth lost large areas of land also inhabited by Jews. This affected the social and political specificity of the state and, in a sense, anti-Jewish literature.

4 Entry *Mord rytualny*, in: Słownik portalu Wirtualny Sztetl, URL: <<https://sztetl.org.pl/pl/sownik/mord-rytualny>>, [accessed 13 July 2024].

5 Henri HUBERT – Marcel MAUSS, *Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice*, in: Oeuvres, vol. 1, Paris 1968, p. 16; Jean-Paul ROUX, *Krew: mity, symbole, rzeczywistość*, trans. M. Chrobak, Kraków 2013, p. 297.

6 *Mord rytualny*.

7 These accusations may have been caused by the misinterpretation of the symbolic act of consumption of the body and blood of Jesus Christ during communion. It should be noted that the Jews also made similar accusations against Christians; David BIALE, *Blood and Belief*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 2007, pp. 2–3.

allegations. Accusations made in the Middle Ages not only influenced later cases throughout the rest of Europe, but also contributed to the formation of the general rhetoric associated with the phenomena of ritual murders. Some elements were repeated in every story, sometimes in a slightly altered version.⁸ This contributed to the consolidation of particular motifs which, over time, began to serve very different purposes from those applied in the Middle Ages.⁹ Nevertheless, this does not change the fact that both modern accusations and later ones were influenced by social, political, religious, and economic changes which, in turn, influenced the perception of Jews.¹⁰ In relation to the best-known accusations, mention should be made of such factors as social unrest, war, the neglect of children (Norwich),¹¹ economic rivalry (Blois),¹² and the activities of representatives of the Church (Trent).¹³ However, these true motives were often purposefully hidden or misinterpreted by the authors of the legends. They only become apparent when the content of the legends is considered in the context of the social reality of the time or when examining sources that present them from a different point of view.

The authors of the early modern booklets usually presented a whole set of arguments to convince readers of the truthfulness of their works. Nevertheless, among the reasons given, a special place was accorded to the motif of 'Jewish anger'¹⁴ – the hatred that representatives of the Jewish faith supposedly felt towards anyone representing the 'new faith'.¹⁵ According

8 The recurrence of motifs conveyed in the legend of ritual murder is also evident in the context of another accusation that was much less popular in later periods. According to Paola Tartakoff, the allegation that the Jews were determined to turn Christians into followers of Judaism was also part of the blood libel. First and foremost, attention should be paid to circumcision, which was seen as a form of Jewish violence; Paola TARTAKOFF, *Conversion, Circumcision, and Ritual Murder in Medieval Europe*, Philadelphia 2020, pp. 47–69.

9 Paweł MACIEJKO, *The Mixed Multitude. Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement, 1755–1816*, Philadelphia 2011, p. 98.

10 P. TARTAKOFF, *Conversion*, p. 5.

11 There are grounds for claiming that William's death was caused by a lack of attention from the boy's parents during the civil war known as the Anarchy; E. M. ROSE, *The Murder of William of Norwich. The Origins of the Blood Libel in Medieval Europe*, Oxford 2015, p. 17.

12 As a result of the accusation, a Jewish woman, Pucellina (Polcelina), was burned at the stake together with other defendants as a result of being falsely accused of murdering a Christian boy. Interestingly, Pucellina was a prominent moneylender who had good relations with Count Thibaut of Blois. According to one narrative, she was supposed to be his mistress, who lost her life because of the revenge of the Count's wife. Over time, Pucellina became the heroine of many stories, especially in the Jewish tradition; Susan Leslie EINBINDER, *Pucellina of Blois: Romantic Myths and Narrative Conventions*, *Jewish History* 1998, vol. 12, no 1, pp. 29–46, here p. 29.

13 Ronnie PO-CHIA HSIA, *Trent 1475. Stories of Ritual Murder Trial*, Yale 1992.

14 Sometimes also 'Jewish Malice'.

15 This motif was so popular that it was used in the title of a work by Gaudenty Pikulski, which refers to the Jewish religious texts and customs regarding the Frankist affair; Gaudenty PIKULSKI, *Złość żydowska przeciwko bogu i bliźniemu prawdzie i sumieniu na obwinienie talmudystów na dowód ich zaślepienia i religii dalekiej od prawa bożego przez Moyżesza danego*, Lwów 1760.

to the pamphleteers, this hostility escalated, especially during Pesach.¹⁶ This association was not accidental, as this holiday is usually celebrated around the time of the Christian Easter, which commemorates the death of Jesus. This fact was often highlighted and presented in a vivid way, with the suggestion that victims of Jewish criminals were supposedly tortured in the same manner as Jesus Christ had been during the crucifixion. Over time, the legend developed, and other elements were added. Frequent reference was made to the argument that the blood obtained during rituals¹⁷ was necessary to prepare matzah, or that it was an essential ingredient for certain magical practices.¹⁸ It was even suggested that the blood of Christian children was a truly effective medicine.¹⁹ Although these motifs were the most popular ones, it is important to note that they could change over the years and centuries. However, this did not affect the specificity and message of the legend.

The origins of ritual murder accusations in the lands under Polish rule are inextricably connected with the phenomenon of Polish anti-Jewish literature, which, in turn, is linked to the social and political situation in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Nevertheless, external influences also played an important part. In this regard, it is worth considering the beginnings of Polish anti-Jewish literature, as well as the influence of the Middle Ages. As a result of the situation in other European states, the number of Jews in the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland increased significantly.²⁰ With the arrival of new colonists,

16 Pesach, also Passover, is one of the most important and oldest holidays in the tradition of Judaism. This eight-day holiday begins on the 15th of Nisan and commemorates the exodus of the Israelites led by Moses from slavery in Egypt. Pesach is characterised by special dietary requirements, especially by a ban on leavened products and the need for matzo. The Sabbath before Passover is called Shabat ha-Gadol (The Great Sabbath); Morris M. FAIERSTEIN, *Pesach*, in: The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, URL: <<https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Passover>>, [accessed 13 July 2024]; Hanna WĘGRZYNEK, *Pesach*, in: Alina Cała – Hanna Węgrzynek – Gabriela Zalewska (eds.), *Historia i kultura Żydów polskich. Słownik*, Warszawa 2000, p. 251.

17 It is worth noting that the motif of blood also played a significant role in other rituals associated with the Jews. According to Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, in addition to ritual murders, one should mention the desecration of the Host and of images of saints; Joanna TOKARSKA-BAKIR, *Legendy o krwi. Antropologia przesądu*, Warszawa 2008, p. 99.

18 These accusations also date back to the Middle Ages. The first cases in which the Jews were suspected of both ritual re-enactment of Jesus' passion and using the blood of victims occurred in Fulda (the Holy Roman Empire) in 1235 and in Valréas (Provence) in 1247; Magda TETER, *Blood Libel. On the Trail of an Antisemitic Myth*, Cambridge 2020, p. 5.

19 According to sources, Christian blood was essential for circumcision. Some authors simply mentioned its presence during the ritual, while others emphasised its anti-bleeding properties. Furthermore, Christian blood was supposed to remove the characteristic smell attributed to the Jews and cure the blindness of Jewish children; Hanna WĘGRZYNEK, *Praktyki medyczne we wczesnonowożytnej Polsce i ich wpływ na funkcjonowanie oskarżeń o mord rytualny*, *Czasy Nowożytne. Periodyk poświęcony dziejom polskim i powszechnym od XV do XX wieku* 2012, vol. 25, pp. 85–113, here p. 90.

20 The largest numbers of Jewish colonists arrived in the second half of the 14th century and in the 15th century. The migrations were caused by the expulsion of the Jews from Germany, Austria, Bohemia, and Silesia. The Polish sovereigns showed favour to the new settlers by granting them individual

including non-Jewish newcomers from the West, various rumours about Jewry began to spread. Initially, they were only reflected in negative comments appearing in works on other subjects, but the situation changed at the beginning of the sixteenth century. At that time, the belief that the Jews posed a threat to the Christian religion and the state became increasingly common. This is reflected, among other things, in the number of accusations related to ritual murder which were just beginning to appear in Poland,²¹ while in other European countries they were already slowly disappearing.²² The situation may have been influenced by two significant factors – the promotion of the cult of Simon of Trent by the Council of Trent (1545–1563), and the publication of *Lives of the Saints* by Piotr Skarga.²³ These aspects were also correlated as the work included a description of the life and death of the victim of an alleged ritual murder among the figures of other saints.

These factors certainly contributed to the interest of anti-Jewish authors in the subject of ritual murder. Moreover, Church policy and the popularity of Simon of Trent allowed them to take advantage of the situation. Alleged ritual murders, like most crimes and controversial cases, aroused curiosity, leading to a need for information.²⁴ This, in turn, had a great impact on the specificity of the legend, as well as on the social reception of such stories and the works in which they were presented. Hence, the cases of alleged murders described in the booklets also came to be known about thanks to the oral tradition. They were recounted through sermons²⁵ or traditional songs called ‘new stories.’²⁶ Additionally, it should be noted

privileges, for instance allowing them to bring over their families; Jacek WIJACZKA, *Oskarżenia i procesy o mordy rytualne w Polsce w epoce nowożytnej*, *Wiadomości Historyczne. Czasopismo dla nauczycieli* 2007, vol. 50, no. 3, pp. 5–15, here p. 5.

- 21 The occurrence of anti-Jewish accusations within the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was subject to geographical and religious aspects. According to Magda Teter, this dependency was particularly evident until the latter half of the 17th century. The western part of the state, inhabited mainly by Catholics, was dominated by allegations concerning desecration of the host. In the part dominated by Eastern Christianity, however, ritual murder accusations were more prevalent. The difference was caused by differences in liturgies; Magda TETER, *Sinners on Trials. Jews and Sacrilege after the Reformation*, Cambridge 2011, pp. 210–211.
- 22 Scholars have attributed this dependency to the development of the Reformation, the rejection of the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, and the popularisation of the idea of consubstantiation, according to which the bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus Christ only for the duration of the Eucharist. The shifts were also connected with the general changes in the way the world was perceived and the sense of disenchantment, inter alia, among Protestant theologians; Ronnie PO-CHIA HSIA, *The Myth of Ritual Murder. Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany*, Yale 1988, pp. 136–143.
- 23 The original title: “Żywoty świętych starego i nowego zakonu”. The first edition was released in 1579; Marcin ZGLIŃSKI, *Nagrobki i kult rzekomych ofiar rzekomych żydowskich mordów rytualnych w dawnej Polsce*, *Nigdy Więcej* 2010, vol. 18, pp. 40–45, here p. 42.
- 24 Kazimierz MALISZEWSKI, *Komunikacja społeczna w kulturze staropolskiej*, Toruń 2001, p. 29.
- 25 *Ibidem*, pp. 43–43.
- 26 Initially, new stories were only a part of the oral culture. Over time, people began to write them down and even publish them; Piotr GROCHOWSKI, *Staropolskie pieśni nowiniarskie*, *Pamiętnik Literacki* 2008, vol. 3, pp. 105–123, here p. 106.

that anti-Jewish literature did not serve a solely informative function. The most significant feature of this type of literature was its marked ability to shape social attitudes. Primarily, this was because of the negative feelings and emotions it stirred up. The authors referred above all to fear and anxiety. Owing to the specificity of these feelings/emotions, people's imaginations could be influenced more easily and effectively, and thus manipulated.²⁷ This is also evident in another method employed by the pamphleteers; specifically, the authors often presented a reshaped reality of the time to achieve their intended goals. They made reference to social tensions, wars, or natural disasters, for example, and attributed them to completely different reasons, which allowed them to influence people's imaginations more effectively. As a result, the authors shaped people's attitudes, especially towards the Jews, who were usually seen as internal strangers with a negative influence on the situation in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and its society.

Despite the fact that anti-Jewish literature, as the name suggests, was directed against the Jews, because of its nature and specificity works belonging to this category should be approached as a specific source of information about the social situation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in general. Thus, the cases of ritual murder accusations described in the booklets also shed light on the situation of women in early modern Polish society. Primarily, the reader's attention is drawn to the perception of women and their roles in the allegations concerning the alleged ritual murders which took place in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Importantly, the figures of women appearing in the stories recounted by the pamphleteers were not isolated cases. Women are mentioned in thirty-six out of eighty-eight cases.²⁸ Moreover, in some their deeds are considered to be the most important elements determining the course of events. Hence, the information presented in the booklets had the capacity to evoke strong emotions and, as a result, to affect people's imaginations, especially since the women appearing in the stories were authentic figures who were not presented accidentally. Through their attitudes and deeds, the authors sought to achieve their intended goals. Thus, it should come as no surprise that the roles assigned to these women were varied.

27 Jean DELUMEAU, *La peur en Occident (XIV^e-XVIII^e Siècles). Une cité assiégée*, Paris 1978, pp. 14–15.

28 The list of ritual murder accusations was created on the basis of the research carried out by Zenon Guldon, Jacek Wijaczka, and Hanna Węgrzynek. It covered the cases that took place between the years 1547 and 1772, which is consistent with the subject of the article. In addition, it is worth mentioning that the number of accusations in which women were mentioned may have been higher in reality. This is due to the fact that the sex of the victims was not specified in all cases. Moreover, sources may still reveal new information about alleged ritual murders; Zenon GULDON – Jacek WIJACZKA, *Procesy o mordrytualne w Rzeczypospolitej XVI–XVIII wieku*, Kielce 1995; Jacek WIJACZKA, *Proces o mordrytualny w Kopysiu w latach 1693–1694, Czasy Nowożytne. Periodyk poświęcony dziejom polskim i powszechnym od XV do XX wieku* 2003, vol. 8, no 14, pp. 9–41; Hanna WĘGRZYNEK, *Czarna legenda Żydów. Procesy o rzekomemordrytualne w dawnej Polsce*, Warszawa 1995.

Interestingly, although this type of literature might seem to suggest that attention was focused solely on the stigmatisation of behaviours represented by the Jews, the reality was completely different. Of course, there are figures of Jewish women in the legends,²⁹ but they are not as complex as the Christian ones, who, against expectations, were not always portrayed in a positive light. Christian women in fact make up the majority of the cases. Last but not least, it should be noted that the role of female figures is dependent on the traditional roles assigned to women and their status in Jewish and Christian culture.

On this note, the category of accomplices to crimes should be examined first. Interestingly, this is the only category that unites representatives of both faiths. While both Christian and Jewish women could be considered as accomplices to crimes, the authors of the brochures presented their motives in a completely different light. To demonstrate this contrast, Jewish women became accomplices simply because they belonged to the Jewish community. It should come as no surprise that women helped their husbands, relatives, and other members of society. Not only did they reportedly prepare matzah with the blood of murdered children,³⁰ but they also helped hide the victims' bodies. As for Christian women, the authors often mention women associated in some way with the lives of Jewish families, such as servants, wet nurses,³¹ or even neighbours. The best-known example is the character of Nastaszka (Nastka), a maid who, after the ritual murder in Świniarów described by Szymon Hubicki, along with the wife of the main murderer, hid the body in a nearby bog.³² Significantly, the story features both of these female figures, while the character of the main murderer is relegated to the background.

The motif of accomplices to the crime also appears in stories concerning the desecration of the Host. Most such stories, taking into consideration both foreign and domestic cases, focused on a female character who, acting against religious rules and her own conscience, steals the sacramental wafer from a church and passes it on to the Jews in return for

29 Jewish women were mostly portrayed as accomplices to crimes or defendants in mass accusations. They were rarely depicted as co-murderers; Emilia HRUSZOWIEC, *Rola kobiet w oskarżeniach o mordy rytualne w świetle wczesnonowoczesnego piśmiennictwa antyżydowskiego*, in: Anna Landau-Czajka (ed.), *Na marginesie dziejów. Studia z polsko-żydowskiej historii społecznej. Kobiety i młodzież*, Warszawa 2023, pp. 21–35.

30 Szymon HUBICKI, *Żydowskie okrucieństwa nad Najświętszym Sakramentem i działkami chrześcijańskimi*, Kraków 1602, f. 19v–20r.

31 Although the case of Christian servants and wet nurses working in Jewish houses was problematic for both Jews and Christians, such a practice was not a rarity, especially as the employment of Jewish women could raise halakhic problems. With regard to Jewish law, it is also noteworthy that Christian women employed by Jews often became part of the family's everyday life as rabbinic law forbade the nursing of Jewish infants in the nurse's home. This was only possible within a Jewish home; Magda TETER, *Jews and Heretics in Catholic Poland, A Beleaguered Church in the Post-Reformation Era*, Cambridge 2006, pp. 63–64.

32 S. HUBICKI, *Żydowskie okrucieństwa*, f. 20r.

financial gain or the cancellation of debts.³³ When obtained in this way, the Host was also considered as an object of Jewish rituals associated with the blood libel.³⁴ Despite the obvious differences, there are a number of similarities between these two legends. First and foremost, attention should be drawn to the authors' intended goals. These stories, and others like them, were intended to discourage Christians from interacting with Jews. Usually, the most effective method used by the pamphleteers was to combine the contemporary social situation with the arguments presented in the ecclesiastical polemic. Through their works, they sought to prove that any relationship with representatives of the Jewish faith posed a physical threat or led to sin and, as a consequence, perdition. Sometimes, similar arguments were also used in relation to women, especially as both groups, women and Jews, were seen as mythical creatures³⁵ and/or representatives of the devil.³⁶ Generally, however, it was much more common to hold the belief that women were particularly disposed to sin, and thus succumbed to Jewish influence.³⁷ This is directly confirmed, for instance, by the example of Nastaszka, who became an accomplice simply because she was the neighbour of a Jewish family. However, there were other forms of contact that were condemned much more than cases such as these. Much more controversial, for example, was the case of Christian workers, especially female servants, employed by Jews. The pamphleteers often emphasised that Jewish employers abused their position of power to force Christian workers to carry out particularly hard work, even on Sundays and other religious holidays. Additionally, female servants were supposedly sexually abused by Jews.³⁸ The problem became more serious when ecclesiastical legislation officially forbade the employment of Christians by Jews.³⁹ These factors all contributed to the common

33 Cf. Przeclaw MOJECKI, *Żydowskie okrucieństwa, mordy i zabobony*, Kraków 1598, f. 15v–18r; S. HUBICKI, *Żydowskie*, f. 2v–6v; Tomasz TRETER, *Sacratissimi corporis Christi historia et miracula, quae in ecclesia Posnaniensi ordine Sacrae Carmelitanum diuna bonitas operator*, Brunsbergae 1609.

34 J. TOKARSKA-BAKIR, *Legendy*, p. 120.

35 Joanna TOKARSKA-BAKIR, *Ganz Andere? Żyd jako czarownica i czarownica jako Żyd w polskich i obcych źródłach etnograficznych, czyli jak czytać protokoły przesłuchań*, in: Maria Janion – Claudia Snochowska-Gonzalez – Kazimiera Szczuka (eds.), *Inny, inna, inne. O inności w kulturze*, Warszawa 2004, pp. 110–148.

36 According to one medieval narrative, Jews and women were linked through a demonic kinship. The Jews were the sons of the devil and women his daughters, and hence they had similar goals; Miri RUBIN, *Gentile Tales. The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews*, London 1999, p. 75.

37 During the Middle Ages and the early modern era, there was a common belief that personal features and behaviour were shaped according to gender. Throughout Europe, women were perceived as weaker and destined for different activities than men; Maria BOGUĆKA, *Women in Early Modern Polish Society, Against the European Background*, London – New York 2016, p. 111.

38 Sebastian PETRYCY, *Polityka Aristotelesowa. Przydatek: Jeśli Żydzi mają być cierpieni w Rzeczypospolitej*; Kazimierz BARTOSZEWICZ, *Antysemityzm w literaturze polskiej XV–XVII w.*, Warszawa – Kraków 1914, p. 127.

39 J. TOKARSKA-BAKIR, *Legendy*, p. 382.

perception of working for Jewish employers as a highly demeaning situation. Not only did this influence the social perception of such workers, but it also had an impact on their position among other members of their congregation and, according to the brochures, on their life after death.⁴⁰ On the other hand, it is important to bear in mind that the authors of these brochures often reshaped the reality of the time in their accounts. Therefore, this phenomenon was related to reality, but not in a literal sense. Thus, there was a different background to the stigmatisation of contacts between the representatives of these two faiths, like other motifs. Moreover, it is also worth noting here that there was a shortage of skilled servants and workers⁴¹ at the time, and thus the arguments presented in the brochures encouraged readers to choose an appropriate employer, who, according to the authors, could not be a Jew.

The role of accomplices to a crime is not the only one which was influenced by the Church. This is much more evident in the context of the victims of alleged ritual murders. The figures of innocent children fit perfectly into the politics against the Jews.⁴² The murders themselves were perceived as an evil deed, but if they were presented in the right way, they could be used as a means to achieve specific goals. Hence, the victims of alleged ritual murders were usually Christian children taken from their mother/parents through an act of trickery. It is also not insignificant that the children were tortured in the same manner as Jesus Christ during the crucifixion, leaving deadly marks on the victims' bodies. These elements would certainly have aroused people's interest, but they also stirred up their emotions. As a result, the legends became a perfect tool of manipulation, uniting members of the Christian community while also attracting new ones.⁴³ Secondly, these elements appeared in almost every story, which made it easier to recognise alleged victims

40 Mateusz BEMBUS, *Kometa to jest pogróżka z nieba na postrach, przestrożę i upomnienie ludzkie*, Kraków 1619, p. 36.

41 Jacek KRUPA, *Postrzeganie Żydów w Rzeczypospolitej w czasach saskich*, in: Bogdan Rok – Filip Wolański (eds.), *Staropolski ogląd świata. Materiały z konferencji Wrocław 23–24 października 2004 r.*, Wrocław 2004, p. 230.

42 According to Magdalene Schultz, the situation was connected with a change in the perception of children between 1100 and 1200. Furthermore, it is important to consider the changes in art. Specifically, paintings depicting Mary with the infant Jesus at first presented him as an adult of reduced size. Regarding the changes mentioned here, Jesus was depicted as an infant, which could have influenced the legend of ritual murder; Magdalene SCHULTZ, *The Blood Libel: A Motif in the History of Childhood*, in: Alan Dundes (ed.), *The Blood Libel Legend. A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore*, London 1991, p. 284.

43 This is perfectly illustrated by the case of William of Norwich, whose story only became popular after the publication of a work by Thomas of Monmouth. Thanks to this purposely created narration, the devotion of William began to develop. Importantly, his story was often used as the basis for accusations against Jews and whole Jewish communities all over Europe in the centuries to come; Miri RUBIN, *Introduction*, in: Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, M. Rubin (ed.), London 2014, p. VIII, XXIX–XXXI.

of the Jews as saints. Consequently, more and more local saints attracted pilgrims from all over Europe on account of their miraculousness.

Regarding this context, it is important to highlight that Polish legends were only based on foreign examples. Over time, they gained their own specificity. This is confirmed, inter alia, by the fact that girls and adult women⁴⁴ also numbered among the victims of alleged ritual murders.⁴⁵ In the legends found in Western Europe, the main victims were boys. This change in the victims' gender did not significantly affect the substance or significance of the legend. Moreover, this could have been connected with the growing popularity of the cult of the Mother of God in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at the time.⁴⁶ According to Magda Teter, the increasing worship of the Virgin Mary was the result of the Counter-Reformation activities of Polish Catholic clergy against Protestants.⁴⁷ From the end of the 16th century, the Church tried to encourage the penetration by building new altars or even entire sanctuaries to prove that Mary was not only the mother of God.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the cult of Mary was also an important element of Sarmatian culture, especially in the 18th century.⁴⁹ The development and significance of Marian worship is particularly evident through the tradition of crowning Marian devotional images. After the first event of its kind, the coronation of the icon in Częstochowa in 1717, such events began to take place regularly within the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.⁵⁰ More importantly, this phenomenon did not have only religious connotations. The worship of the Virgin Mary very frequently became an element involved in reinforcing the power of noble and, in particular, magnate families. Not only did the nobles fund sanctuaries on their estates, but they also took care to keep the cult alive, for instance by organising special devotional

44 Women were recognised as victims in accusations in Polanica (1703) and Nisko (1710); Z. GULDON – J. WIJACZKA, *Procesy*, pp. 99–101.

45 The legends popularised within the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth also included the figures of adult male victims; *Dekret w sprawie o zamordowanie okrutne przez Żydów chrześcianina Antoniego pod Zaslawiem, ferowany w Zamku Zaslawskim dnia 17 kwietnia roku 1747* [s. l.] 1747.

46 Jacek WIJACZKA, *Ritual Murder Accusations in Poland throughout the 16th to 18th Centuries*; in: Susanna Buttaroni – Stanisław Musiał (eds.), *Ritual Murder. Legend in European History*, Kraków 2003, p. 208.

47 M. TETER, *Jews and Heretics*, p. 122.

48 *Ibidem*.

49 Filip WOLAŃSKI, *Kaznodziejstwo Kacpra Balsama na tle przepowiadania wybranych jezuitów w Rzeczypospolitej w epoce saskiej*, *Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka* 2023, no. 3, pp. 95–113, here p. 97.

50 Aleksandra WITKOWSKA, *Uroczyste koronacje wizerunków maryjnych na ziemiach polskich w latach 1717–1992*, in: Antoni Jackowski (ed.), *Przestrzeń i sacrum. Geografia kultury religijnej w Polsce i jej przemiany w okresie od XVII do XX w. na przykładzie ośrodków kultu i migracji pielgrzymkowych*, Kraków 1996, pp. 87–103.

ceremonies related to the theatre in some way.⁵¹ The sermons formed an important part of the ceremonies. Interestingly, some of them were also preached by the Jesuits,⁵² who often expressed anti-Jewish attitudes. Moreover, the miracles that occurred through the intercession of certain images of Mary were also usually written down. Interestingly, they were intended not only to attract new pilgrims, but above all, to glorify the surname and convince others that the family was blessed with a special divine protection. To achieve these goals, the antiquity of the venerated image was often invoked.⁵³ However, other methods, or even tricks, were also often used.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, this was not the only element of the reality of the time used by the authors of the booklets. First and foremost, the phenomenon that defined the period was the high level of child mortality, though this was not due to criminality alone. Primarily, children's deaths were caused by a lack of hygiene and poor medical knowledge.⁵⁵ Moreover, attention was often paid to the fact that children were neglected and not properly supervised, which was also noticeable in the early modern era⁵⁶ and should be seen as a lasting influence of the previous centuries.⁵⁷ The most characteristic example which confirms this situation is the trial in Sandomierz (1710) described by Stefan Żuchowski.⁵⁸ The woman who was taking care of the missing boy only noticed his disappearance the following day. She lodged a formal complaint only after discovering that the body had been found in the Jewish

51 Agata DWORZAK, *XVIII-wieczne uroczystości z udziałem cudownego obrazu Matki Boskiej Tarkowskiej. Przyczynki do funkcjonowania lokalnych sanktuariów maryjnych w Rzeczypospolitej*, in: Wojciech Walczak – Karol Łopatecki (eds.), *Stan badań nad wielokulturowym dziedzictwem dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, Białystok 2013, p. 155.

52 F. WOLAŃSKI, *Kaznodziejstwo*, p. 107.

53 Agata DWORZAK, *XVIII-wieczne uroczystości*, pp. 156–157.

54 The most prominent example is the work by Jan Fryderyk Sapięha, who, under the falsified name of a chaplain, Jakub Walicki, wrote the history of the Miraculous Image of Our Lady of Kodeń. Sapięha presented the incredible history of a painting which was said to be a gift from the Pope to one of his ancestors. Interestingly, according to another version of his work, the image was allegedly stolen from the Pope; Dagmar VYSLOUŽILOVÁ, *Protected and Protecting. Dual Relations between the Sapięha Family and the Miraculous Image of Our Lady of Kodeń*, in: Angelica Bertoli – Giulia Gelmi – Andrea Missagia – Maria Novella Tavano (eds.), *A Driving Force. On the Rhetoric of Images and Power*, Venice 2023, pp. 146–147.

55 Kalina BARTNICKA, *Dziecko w świetle pamiętników i powieści polskiego Oświecenia*, *Rozprawy z Dziejów Oświaty* 1992, vol. 35, pp. 37–86, here p. 41.

56 Stefan GARCZYŃSKI, *Anatomia Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej Synom Ojczyzny ku przestrodze i poprawie tego co z kluby wypadło, mianowicie o sposobach zamnożenia Polskę ludem pospolitym, konserwowania dziatwy wiejskiej przez niedostatek i niewygody marnie ginącej, i wprowadzenia handlów i manufaktur zagranicznych. Dawniej spisane, z przydatkami teraz wydane* [Wrocław 1753], pp. 41–44.

57 According to the medieval accusations and protocols of ritual murder trials, the lack of supervision of children was the rule in previous centuries. It was not unusual for parents to leave their children alone without providing them with any care; M. SCHULTZ, *The Blood Libel*, p. 280.

58 Stefan ŻUCHOWSKI, *Proces kryminalny o niewinne dziecię Jerzego Krasnowskiego, już to trzecie roku 1710 dnia 18 sierpnia w Sendomirzu okrutnie od Żydów zamordowane*, [s. l.] 1713.

district. Moreover, the Jews testified that the body was marked by an infectious disease.⁵⁹ An earlier prosecution in the town of Punia (1574) is also worth mentioning here. In this case, a Jew was accused of murdering a seven-year-old girl called Elżbieta, the daughter of a widow. The crime was made possible because the girl's mother left the house to visit her neighbours. Interestingly, the Jew found out about her absence thanks to the Christian servants collaborating with him.⁶⁰ These examples also draw attention to another important fact, namely that although child neglect was not uncommon, the presence of the Jewish communities and the popularity of the legend of ritual murder allowed parents and carers to relieve themselves of guilt or even escape punishment by blaming the Jews.⁶¹

These instances also introduce indirectly the next role assigned to Christian women; attention was drawn to the figures of degenerate mothers, or in some cases female caregivers, who supposedly provided the Jews with their next victims, usually their own children.⁶² According to some authors, mothers did this for the same reasons as those associated with the desecration of the Host. For this reason, among other things, this role was particularly stigmatised among the pamphleteers and had extremely negative connotations. There was a particular emphasis on the fact that the role of the mother was one of two social roles assigned to women in early modern Polish culture.⁶³ Therefore, women accused of infanticide were often perceived as witches, because only the devil could induce a mother to kill her own child, even indirectly.⁶⁴ It is noteworthy that this crime was usually applied to unmarried women, whose social situation, and also perception, was problematic.⁶⁵ Interestingly, the same was true for widows who were forced to earn their own living after the death of their husbands. This is confirmed by the case of Mandzia, a peasant who failed to find work because of her child, and for this reason was said to have offered to sell her own child to the Jews.⁶⁶ Financial motivations are a common element in other stories too.

59 Ibidem, p. 2.

60 Piotr SKARGA, *Żywoty świętych starego i nowego zakonu z pisma świętego i z poważnych pisarzy i doktorów kościelnych wybranych*, p. 1, Wilno [1579], p. 281.

61 M. SCHULTZ, *The Blood Libel*, p. 282

62 In some examples, women in the role of degenerate mothers can be considered as part of the group defined as accomplices to the crime. However, the number of such cases determined the fact that they were classified in a separate group.

63 The second role was the role of the wife; M. BOGUCKA, *Women*, p. 111.

64 Merry E. WIESNER, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge 2000, p. 64.

65 In many countries, the authorities prohibited people from hiring unmarried pregnant women or providing them with accommodation; M. E. WIESNER, *Women*, p. 63.

66 The case mentioned here took place in Dunajgród in 1748. Under torture, Mandzia admitted that Mendl Ejzykowicz had offered her work. When she came to his house, he got her drunk and killed her son. According to the court decision, the Jews were sentenced to imprisonment, and Mandzia was subjected to compulsory treatment; Iliya GALANT, *Dwa rytualnych procesa po aktam Kiewskiego Centralnogo Archiva*, Kijów 1924, pp. 21–37; Z. GULDON – J. WIJACZKA, *Procesy*, pp. 59–60.

In 1595, in Gostynin⁶⁷ a woman was believed to have sold three of her children to the Jews.⁶⁸ A great deal more is known about the alleged crime in Sochaczew, where a three-year-old boy, Jakub, was murdered. According to one of the authors, his mother sold him to the Jews for the price of three grosze.⁶⁹ The Jews, in turn, supposedly drained the blood from his body and then threw it into the river. Eventually, the body was found and placed under the main altar of a local church as an object of worship.⁷⁰ Here it is also worth considering another story which may shed some light on the real side of the legends. This story also deals with financial issues, but in a completely different way from the previous examples. In Sandomierz, three accusations of ritual murder took place, but it is also worth considering the events of 1698.⁷¹ The cause of the matter was the deed of Katarzyna Mroczkowicowa, who planted the body of her dead daughter in the ossuary of the Collegiate Church. She justified her decision by noting the high cost of a funeral, which convinced the court.⁷² Nevertheless, the bishop of Kraków cancelled the judgment. He claimed that Małgorzata's body had deadly marks on it that would not have been present in the event of a natural death.⁷³ Moreover, the bishop did not believe Katarzyna's explanation that she first placed the body in her own house, where it was bitten by cats and rats.⁷⁴ During the trial, the woman was tortured and changed her testimony several times. In the final version, she brought her still-alive daughter Małgorzata to the Jew Alexander Berek⁷⁵ and then took the body away a few hours later.⁷⁶ Furthermore, his guilt was confirmed by the victim alone,

67 Although the authors provided different place names, according to the research of Z. Guldon and J. Wijaczka, it took place in Gostynin; Z. GULDON – J. WIJACZKA, *Procesy*, p. 96.

68 P. MOJECKI, *Żydowskie*, k. 7v–8r.

69 Piotr PRUSZCZ, *Forteca duchowna Królestwa Polskiego, z żywotów świętych, tak już kanonizowanych i beatyfikowanych, jak też świętobliwie żyjących patronów polskich, także z obrazów Chrystusa Pana, i Matki Jego Przenajświętszej, w Ojczyźnie naszej cudami wielkimi słynących*, Kraków 1662, p. 184.

70 According to Piotr Pruszczy, the crime took place in 1626. Nevertheless, a researcher mentioned the year 1617; P. PRUSZCZ, *Forteca*, p. 184; Z. GULDON – J. WIJACZKA, *Procesy*, p. 87.

71 Apart from the accusations from 1698 and 1710, Żuchowski mentioned an alleged crime that supposedly took place in 1628. The Jews were suspected of murdering a boy. According to the author, after killing him, they chopped the body up and fed it to a dog, which they then poisoned; Stefan ŻUCHOWSKI, *Proces*, pp. 95–96.

72 Z. GULDON – J. WIJACZKA, *Procesy*, pp. 18–20.

73 The statement was accepted even though Katarzyna, her husband, and the domestic servants testified that they had witnessed Małgorzata's death in her own house; M. TETER, *Blood Libel*, p. 257.

74 Stefan ŻUCHOWSKI, *Ogłos procesów kryminalnych na Żydach o różne ekscesy, także morderstwo dzieci, osobliwie w Sandomierzu roku 1698, przeświadczone w prześwietnym trybunale Koronnym przywiedzonych*, [Kraków] 1700, f. 75v.

75 Alexander Berek was an elder of the Jewish community. He was also a leaseholder and a merchant. Berek was related to Jozwe, leaseholder of Opatów. According to Berek's testimony, he was there on the day of the crime; S. ŻUCHOWSKI, *Ogłos*, f. 75v, 76v.

76 *Ibidem*, f. 75v–77r.

as the body bled every time Alexander approached it.⁷⁷ Both Katarzyna and Alexander were sentenced to death.⁷⁸

The last role represented by Christian women should be considered as a positive one in the context of anti-Jewish literature. Specifically, female accusers had a no less crucial part to play in the legend of ritual murder. The most characteristic example is the accusation that took place in Husiatyń. This case is quite atypical because it was initiated by a complaint made by a Jew. It is directed against the noblewoman Halszka (Elżbieta) Kalinowska (de domo Struś) and her son Adam, who, in contravention of the law, imprisoned three Jewish leaseholders. The reason for their punishment was that they were suspected of murdering Christian children.⁷⁹ Although the Jews accused of the crime did not confess to the murder, they were burned at the stake because of Kalinowski's decision.⁸⁰ Although this case is very interesting, it deviates somewhat from the norm. Usually, it was the parents who would accuse Jews of killing their child, as seen, for example, in the trials in Kodeń (1698),⁸¹ Warszawa (1743),⁸² and Wojsławice (1761).⁸³ Moreover, the role of accusers was often linked to that of informants. Interestingly, these were mostly women who worked in the houses of Jewish families. Being employed by representatives of the Jewish faith could have been seen as an advantage in these circumstances. In this regard, the case of the alleged murder in Staszów is worth mentioning here. In 1610, a Jew abducted a child and then handed it to the Jews in Szydłów. They locked the boy in a basement, where he was tortured. According to the story written in the booklet, the crime was discovered by a Christian cook working in the house. She reported it to the authorities, but by the time they arrived the child was already dead.⁸⁴ Another example concerns an alleged ritual murder in Kopyś. In this case, a woman accused her employer of murdering a man. The crime is supposed to have taken

77 This way of identifying a murderer was also known thanks to descriptions of other crimes.

78 M. TETER, *Blood Libel*, p. 259.

79 *Prawem i lewem. Obyczaje na Rusi w pierwszej połowie XVII. Wieku przez Władysława Łozińskiego*, vol. 2: *Wojny prywatne*, Lwów 1904, p. 64.

80 *Ibidem*, p. 64.

81 The course of events also indicates parental neglect. Tymosz Łukasiewicz and Katarzyna Jachymowa went to take part in a religious procession. Their three-year-old son was home alone, and when he saw the procession, he left and never came back. His body was found in a meadow near the town; Jakub WALICKI, *Opisanie okrutnego przez Żydów kodeńskich zamordowania dziecięcia chrześcijańskiego*, in: Jan Fryderyk Sapieha, *Historia przeznaczonego obrazu kodeńskiego*, Toruń 1720, pp. 193–205.

82 The instigator (public prosecutor) and the mother of four-year-old Kasper Czubek brought a suit against four Jews; Z. GULDON – J. WIJACZKA, *Procesy*, p. 87.

83 The case of Mikołaj, the son of Marcin and Katarzyna Andrzejuki, became a reason for accusations against the whole Jewish community of Wojsławice; M. TETER, *Blood Libel*, pp. 346–347; Z. GULDON – J. WIJACZKA, *Procesy*, pp. 50–51.

84 Sebastian MICZYŃSKI, *Zwierciadło Korony Polskiej. Urazy ciężkie i utrapienia wszelkie, które ponosi od Żydów*, Kraków [post 1618], p. 18.

place two years earlier, when the wife of Iwko Kiedyszowy reported him missing, but the servant did not decide to disclose it until 1693.⁸⁵ The timing of the allegation made by Maryna Hłuszakowa is indirectly justified by the testimony of the accused Jew. Marchaś Jakubowicz confessed that she accused him because he had not paid her the full salary for one year of service because of the theft of some of his belongings.⁸⁶ According to this story, an accusation of ritual murder was also considered as a good way to take revenge and put an end to personal disagreements.

Regarding the role of female accusers, it is necessary to mention the figures of the neophyte women who often reported the crimes of their erstwhile co-religionists. Their allegations usually had a far greater social resonance, which more easily turned into hostility towards the Jews. Furthermore, accusations made by neophytes should be considered as an attempt to gain credibility among the members of their “new” community. According to other scholars, however, these and similar accusations had a different purpose; specifically, they could have been used for personal reasons – as a form of revenge or a means of gaining an advantage in a struggle for power.⁸⁷ The situation could have been similar in the case of Josek Bobowski. In this case, the leaseholder was found guilty as a result of the testimony of a neophyte girl employed in his inn.⁸⁸ Interestingly, in the booklets, one can also find similar accusations made by neophyte men, which were perceived in a similar way.⁸⁹ The most prominent instance is the case of Jan Serafinowicz, allegedly a former rabbi, who referred to the blood libel accusations in his work.⁹⁰

Regarding the issue of the blood libel and neophytes, the case of the Frankist movement is also worthy of note here. The connection between these two questions is particularly evident in the context of the Lwów Disputation (1759). Before the event, the Frankists formulated seven points for the debate. Importantly, the last point referred to the Talmud and its influence on alleged ritual murders.⁹¹ According to Frank’s supporters, the teachings

85 Jacek WIJACZKA, *Proces o mord rytualny w Kopysy w latach 1693–1694*, *Czasy Nowożytne* 2003, vol. 14, pp. 9–41, here pp. 13–14.

86 *Ibidem*, p. 18.

87 Blood libel accusations were not only used by neophytes against members of their former communities, but also by representatives of the Christian elite as a tool for the political and religious persecution of the Jews; P. MACIEJKO, *The Mixed Multitude*, p. 99.

88 Z. GULDON – J. WIJACZKA, *Procesy*, p. 39.

89 S. ŻUCHOWSKI, *Proces*, p. 99.

90 Although Serafinowicz’s work is not known today in its original version, it included groundbreaking theses. First and foremost, he pleaded guilty to four ritual murders. What is more, as a rabbi, Serafinowicz gave credibility to his knowledge of Jewish laws and other rules which allegedly concerned ritual murders; P. MACIEJKO, *The Mixed Multitude*, p. 101.

91 In the polemics of the 18th century, Frankists were also known as contra-Talmudists. To convince the public of the truth of their claims, they often misinterpreted the Talmud, cited it out of context, or mistranslated it; P. MACIEJKO, *The Mixed Multitude*, p. 112.

of the Talmud obliged Jews to use Christian blood, and thus any Jew recognising the Talmud was a potential murderer.⁹² In addition, the Frankists taking part in the debate confirmed that they had been taught to use Christian blood; however, because of the request for baptism, they stated that they had been convinced by the teachings of the Church to abandon this practice.⁹³ Therefore, they followed the example of Serafinowicz. Even though the Church authorities did not make a final decision on the truth of the accusations of ritual murder, the Frankist movement and the thesis of its representatives echoed across the state, giving rise to similar accusations, which could also have inspired neophyte women to bring new prosecutions against their former co-religionists.

The presence of so many diverse female figures in early modern anti-Jewish literature is intrinsically connected with the phenomenon of this kind of literature in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. While in the West this social phenomenon was slowly dying out, in Poland it was just beginning to intensify. Thus, it took on a particular character. Furthermore, it is important to highlight the fact that the situation was influenced by the special status accorded to Jews in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In this regard, it is important to take into consideration not only the number of Jewish settlers in the lands under Polish rule, but, above all, their legal status, which distinguished them from other inhabitants, as well as from Jews in other European states. As for the role of women, it is essential to bear in mind that the authors of the brochures and pamphlets were men, which undeniably affected the way in which women were portrayed. There is no doubt that misogyny was no rarity in Polish society. There was a fear not only of witches and women of high social status, but also of those of average standing who, in the footsteps of the biblical Eve,⁹⁴ were thought to lead men to perdition. Furthermore, the image of women was still influenced by elements of medieval culture that appeared not only in the polemics of the Church but also elsewhere. Nevertheless, the authors often referred to the ecclesiastical polemic that directly authenticated the stories presented in the brochures.

Moreover, the way in which women were perceived in early modern Polish society also contributed to the use of another correlation. The authors, as the term anti-Jewish literature suggests, often referred to negative feelings and emotions, especially fear and anxiety. Interestingly, though, because of their nature, they could combine. The combination of all these issues therefore contributed to the perception of women not only as supernatural

92 P. MACIEJKO, *The Mixed Multitude*, p. 108.

93 *Ibidem*.

94 In general, polemical religious, historical, and biological motifs often complemented each other, as in this case. Identifying all women with the figure of the biblical Eve meant that they were perceived as imperfect, gullible, impulsive, and vulnerable, especially to superstition. Thus, sex usually became a sufficient argument to accuse a woman of witchcraft, contacts with demons/the devil, or an association with the Jews; J. TOKARSKA-BAKIR, *Ganz Andere?*, p. 116.

creatures or the helpers of enemies, to name just two of the roles assigned to them, but also as strangers. The problem should be considered as a form of marginalisation, because of which women were not perceived as a coherent part of Polish society. Interestingly, these conclusions evoke clear associations with the anthropological theory of purity and danger presented by Mary Douglas. Her research was based on an idea of “dirt” and “cleanness” considered from a secular and, above all, a sacral/ritual perspective. In this regard, dirt can be described as a fact that does not fit into existing, well-known patterns.⁹⁵ It is an anomaly which disrupts the established order. The activities of women presented in the legends were certainly not the behaviours that society required of them. As an incomplete being or a kind of imperfect man, a woman was to be subordinated to men,⁹⁶ and the situation when a woman found employment in a Jewish home and earned her own living was undoubtedly contrary to this idea and to the concept that a man should be the sole breadwinner. For a long time, there was also the belief that a woman should be a perfect wife and, above all, mother,⁹⁷ which is in contrast to the behaviour of mothers depicted by the authors of the anti-Jewish brochures.

This definition of dirt is also close to the concept of the “other”/“stranger”, who, by their very presence, disturbs the functioning of society. As in this case, also in relation to a thing or person seen as “unclean”, members of the community can take different attitudes. When it comes to negative attitudes, one has the choice to ignore them, not recognise them, or condemn them. Importantly, in the last instance the anomaly can be perceived as dangerous and lead to individuals feeling a sense of fear or anxiety when confronted with it.⁹⁸ As for positive reactions, often, when a deliberate confrontation with a factor seen as unclean takes place, new patterns are created as a result.⁹⁹ In the case of women, the question depends on the role ascribed to them. In the first, negative case, they were condemned and perceived in a similar way to Jews – the others whose otherness was often pushed beyond the limits of acceptability. When it comes to positive roles, on the other hand, there was an attempt to adapt the anomaly to the patterns accepted in society. Additionally, attention should be paid to the fact that in both cases the authors deliberately created such an image of women in order to achieve their intended goals.

To conclude, the roles of female figures described here also helped the authors take advantage of disagreeable social situations and then shape people’s imaginations by

95 Mary DOUGLAS, *Purity and Danger. An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo*, New York 2001, p. 39.

96 Simone DE BEAUVOIR, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley, London 1956, p. 121.

97 Ibidem.

98 M. DOUGLAS, *Purity and Danger*, p. 40.

99 Ibidem, p. 39.

attributing real events to completely different causes. Above all, anti-Jewish literature took the form of a specific sort of manipulation that used fear and anxiety to create a social reality and shape attitudes not only about Jews, but also about women of other faiths, including Christian women.

Mgr. Emilia Hruszowiec

Historical Institute, Faculty of Historical and Pedagogical Sciences,

University of Wrocław

emilia.hruszowiec@uwr.edu.pl

ORCID: 0000-0002-1535-8369