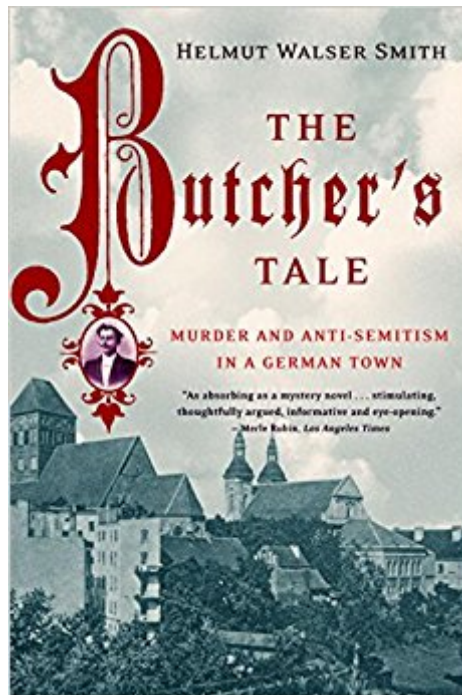




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# The Butcher's Tale: Murder And Anti-Semitism In A German Town



## Synopsis

One of the most dramatic explorations of a German town in the grip of anti-Semitic passion ever written. In 1900, in a small Prussian town, a young boy was found murdered, his body dismembered, the blood drained from his limbs. The Christians of the town quickly rose up in violent riots to accuse the Jews of ritual murder – the infamous blood-libel charge that has haunted Jews for centuries. In an absorbing narrative, Helmut Walser Smith reconstructs the murder and the ensuing storm of anti-Semitism that engulfed this otherwise peaceful town. Offering an instructive examination of hatred, bigotry, and mass hysteria, *The Butcher's Tale* is a modern parable that will be a classic for years to come. Winner of the Fraenkel Award and a Los Angeles Times Best Book of 2002. 4 pages of illustrations

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Two residents out for a stroll in Konitz, Germany, in March 1900, discovered a carefully tied package in a nearby lake. Its contents, the upper torso of a missing youth, set off a chain of events that brought national attention to an unremarkable village on the eastern edge of the Austro-Prussian empire. After weeks in which no suspect or motive was offered, the vacuum began to fill with rumor; the flames were fanned by the arrival on the scene of anti-Semitic journalists, and soon most of Konitz was convinced that the death was a Jewish ritual murder. A police inspector from Berlin suspected the town's Christian butcher; he and his allies in turn accused the Jewish butcher. Mobs began a series of violent acts against Konitz's Jews, and the Prussian army was called in to quell the violence. Smith, who teaches German history at Vanderbilt, does a masterful

job exploring the history of the blood libel (the charge that Jews commit ritual murder of Christian children), as well as of community and how people band together to bring about great good or in the case of Konitz genuine evil. Yet, Smith argues that Konitz should be seen as a case study of "process," of how different forces came together to make "latent anti-Semitism manifest," causing peaceful townspeople to turn on their neighbors. Drawing on a remarkably detailed documentary record, Smith analyzes social, class and other factors in the violence the role of the middle vs. working classes, Protestants vs. Catholics and in an original piece of analysis, shows how the townspeople's response was itself a form of ritual murder. Although classed by the publisher as history/Judaica, this powerful volume will also appeal to true-crime readers and anyone interested in the dynamics that can turn a peaceful community into a place of hatred and violence. Map, illus. not seen by PW. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The invocation of the term ritual murder seems an echo of a distant, barbaric past, the stuff of superstition and wild fancy. Yet in eastern Germany, at a time characterized by industrialization and scientific advancement, such barbaric echoes resounded all too often. In this book, Smith (*German Nationalism and Religious Conflict: Culture, Ideology, Politics, 1870-1914*) explores the murder of young Ernst Winter in the West Prussian town of Konitz on March 11, 1900. Though the authorities suspected the Christian butcher, Gustav Hoffmann, the Christian townspeople suspected a Jewish conspiracy to kill Winter and acquire his Christian blood for their Passover matzo. It is remarkable in this pre-Hitlerian Germany that the government actually protected Konitz's Jews from the angry rioters and refused to entertain the absurd idea of ritual murder. Smith has painstakingly explored the motives of all key actors in this drama. Text and bibliography are both copiously annotated. Imbued with an appropriately eerie atmosphere, this is a murder mystery with no solution, a striking re-creation of a gruesome and sad episode. Recommended for public and academic libraries. Michael F. Russo, Louisiana State Univ. Lib., Baton Rouge Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Provides an in-depth review of anti-semitism in the late 1800s - early 1900s, along with a good review of anti-semitism throughout Europe over the last thousand years or so, along with how anti-semitism has changed and likely causes of those changes. Much of this book does not deal directly with the specific murder, but the atmosphere of that area in that era which impeded the investigation.

Helmut Walser Smith's *The Butcher's Tale* analyzes a town's (Konitz Germany) involvement in anti-Semitic activity in 1900. At the turn of the century Germany is experiencing great progress in the arts, sciences, and they are considered the most literate in the world. Although the education system is the envy of other modern nations during the period, the government unfortunately continues to see the nation's minorities as a problem. Although the Jewish minority has been fully emancipated since Napoleon's invasion, anti-Semitism is still prevalent in Germany. Anti-Semitic sentiments have made their lives difficult, nevertheless, the Jewish community has been able to assimilate themselves into German society and have a voice in larger cities such as Berlin. However in Konitz on March 13, 1900 body parts of a murdered young man are found strewn throughout town. Immediately the Jewish community is suspected and anti-Semitic events take place. Walser Smith in *The Butcher's Tale* investigates the murder of the young man and how it tore the community of Konitz apart. Furthermore, Walser Smith illustrates to his readers the history of anti-Semitism, the place of anti-Semitism in Germany during 1900, and how anti-Semitic sentiments would evolve in Germany's future (particularly under the Third Reich). The book is written extremely well which makes it an easy read (it sucks you into the historical plot much like a novel). In addition, for anyone looking to gain knowledge of how anti-Semitism evolved in Germany or the roots of anti-Semitism this is an excellent opportunity.

This was a really good story that had a good perspective on anti-semitism. It was a very engaging story and was something better to read than your average text book on the same topic.

For historical non fiction crime book? Pretty great. However, it simply isn't my taste. This book was assigned for a 19th cent. European history class along with *Hard Times* and *Dark Heart* & I enjoyed reading this much more than the others. (Just a heads up if you considering this book for a class make sure you warn your students that Smith pulls no punches in describing things) But uh yea I would recommend this to someone I thought might be interested in a book of this nature. Its actually one of the better books I've been assigned to read for class. Its not a hard read at all. Especially given the subject matter Smith is able to make this seem like a mystery novel.

A great way to research anti-semitism in Germany prior to the forming of the Weimar Republic. Gives a German history while investigating and coming to your own conclusion as to who is the killer? Murder mystery combined with accurate historical information.

It starts with a murder, a lie, and a coverup to keep the lie real. The Butcher's tale reminded me of the lies, and finger pointings, believed by the masses of witches in their midst. It brings up, and out of the lighted shadow, 'blood libel', and ritualistic murder. Hatred, and untruths of Christian children, being hung upside down, their throats cut, to catch their blood, a pail, and the blood used as an ingredient to cook Passover matzoh. Long ago prejudice, and anti-Semitism rears its ugly head, as friend turns against friend, and family member against family member, as the townspeople rush the investigation of a butchered corpse, whose body parts are found up and down the town's river.

This book is very interesting, and the book seems very new although it is a second-hand book. Go ahead

It's OK. Moved slowly. The "documentation" left me unimpressed and unconvinced of the accuracy of the book. I would not recommend it as there are just too many better reads out there.

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