

Jürgen Schwiening

Die Wandlerin

Or

The Jew Bell of Wolfsberg



The Church of the Holy Blood in Wolfsberg, on the banks of the Lavant, built on the site of the old synagogue. In the foreground is the bridge over the river. It was in this church that the 'Wandlerin' was rung every day at 9 o'clock in the evening to commemorate the expulsion of the Jews from Wolfsberg in 1338. In 1889 the church had to make way for the new town hall.

Die Wandlerin

This is the story of a bell, a bell that once rang in a small Austrian church. It had been heard by the faithful for a long time, perhaps centuries: every evening at 9 o'clock it was rung for fifteen minutes, as 'eternal' reminder of an event that happened in their town over 600 years ago. It must have been something very important to have sustained such a long tradition. Like so much of the ritual and beliefs of the Catholic Church it had become part of everyday life in this small community. Now its voice is heard no more. What was meant to be 'eternal' turned out to be temporal after all. Why? Was it missed? And why was it rung in the first place and why was it eventually silenced? Who can remember it ringing, and who wants to remember the bell today and who would rather forget it? This story is an attempt at answering these questions. Little did I know how difficult this would be when I first read the name of the bell: *Die Wandlerin*.

Bells

The peal of bells is a familiar feature of public life in Austria and Germany, and indeed all over Europe. In towns and villages up and down the country bells ring at regular times for church services and celebrations. We measure the passing of time by them. There are few 'public' sounds that evoke more feeling. Their familiar sound is pleasing and reassuring. The unfamiliar peal can be unsettling, overwhelming, and even threatening. Bells were also rung from time to time to warn of imminent danger, at least in the days before sirens came in. Whatever the occasion, bells have a powerful voice. We say they 'are calling'. They still 'speak' to us with the authority that the Church once had over our lives.

I am reminded here of an old German ballad by Goethe¹

*“Es war einmal ein Kind, das wollte nie
Zur Kirche sich bequemen,
Und Sonntags fand es stets ein Wie,
Den Weg ins Feld zu nehmen.”*

in which a child, forgetful of his duty on a Sunday and preferring to play in the fields, is pursued by a bell, terrified by it, and eventually driven into church. A truly frightening poem that combines authoritarian ideas in education with the domination of our society by the Christian Church.

But bells are also rung to mark special occasions. While church bells, being 'consecrated' and serving religious purposes, can never be rung without proper ecclesiastical authority, they are frequently rung to mark particular events in the life of a nation. Events, which, we would like to think, are 'worthy' of being given this particular distinction by the Church. It may come as no surprise, however, to learn that in the case of Germany, the victories of the First World War as well as those under Hitler were suitably marked by nationwide joyful ringing of church bells, - of course on orders of the bishops. The

¹ 'Die wandelnde Glocke'. In this poem 'wandeln' means walking.

Anschluss of Austria in March 1938, the annexation of the Sudetenland in October, even Hitler's 50th birthday in April 39, and of course the German Blitzkrieg-victories over Poland in September 1939 and France in May 1940 were all celebrated in this way. No doubt German church bells would have celebrated a victory over Britain, – had it come about. The Church is always ready to serve — particularly those in power.

‘The happy expulsion of the Jews’ 1338/1938

Our story takes us to Austria which for 7 years, from 1938 to the end of the war in 1945, had been part of Germany. Austria, then called ‘*Ostmark*’, the ‘*Eastern Province*’, quickly became a very enthusiastic member of the Reich, certainly as far as the implementation of Nazi policies was concerned.

Already a day after German troops had marched into Austria (on 12 March 38) the Protestant Church in Austria issued a declaration of loyalty to Hitler and the Reich: ‘*We believe that this hour has God's blessing.*’² The Catholic episcopate was not far behind. On 18 March they published a statement praising German National Socialism and asking Catholics to vote ‘yes’ in the forthcoming plebiscite on the union with the Reich³. On the evening of 9 April, now called ‘*Day of the Greater German Reich*’, a mass rally in Vienna was addressed by Hitler, followed by ringing of all church bells in Germany and Austria as the ‘*overwhelming expression of confidence of the entire nation in the Führer and his work.*’ Plans for this event had been approved by Cardinal Bertram on behalf of the Catholic Church on 3 April.⁴

The Churches gave their blessing to this act of Nazi violence and Austrian ‘self-betrayal’⁵ while in Vienna more than 70 000 people were being arrested and the Jews of the city were subjected to ‘*orgies of humiliation and sadism*’ (Lewy, p. 212) on a scale exceeding anything Germany had so far witnessed.

We went to Austria, last year because, for a short three years, from the beginning of 1936 to the end of 1938, my wife and her family had lived in *Schassbach*, a very small village not far from the town which was home to the ‘Wandlerin’. The town is Wolfsberg, a ‘*Bezirkshauptstadt*’ in Carinthia, not far from Klagenfurt, in the southern part of Austria. *Kärnten*⁶ is frontier country, bordering on Italy and Slovenia. We enjoyed the hospitality and kindness of the people we met and made new friends. I must stress that we encountered no anti-Semitism at all but were given a warm welcome, particularly by the family who now own the farm that was once Ruth's home.

² Freie Stimmen, 15 March 1938, p. 3

³ Guenter Lewy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany*, Da Capo Press 2000, P. 212

⁴ Lewy, op. cit. p. 214

⁵ The Catholic historian Friedrich Heer, 6 times arrested by the Nazis, called this submissiveness of his church to the will of the Nazis a betrayal of both, his country and Christianity, as he understood it. (Quoted from Karl-Markus Gauss, *Ins unentdeckte Österreich*, Wien 2001)

⁶ Jörg Haider was *Bezirkshauptmann* (head of regional government) of Carinthia. His party was a member of the Austrian coalition government.



While we were in Schassbach, a friend of the family⁷, herself very interested in this part of her town's and Church's history, gave us a photocopy of a book⁸ in which, after we had returned home, I found the name of this bell and the story connected with it. According to the author it was still rung regularly every night at nine o'clock at the time the book was published, which was 1980. It was rung, so the author said, to commemorate the 'happy expulsion of the Jews from Wolfsberg'⁹ in 1338! I could not believe my eyes when I read this. Why had nobody mentioned the bell to us while we were there? After our return I obtained the second edition of this book¹⁰, published in 1996. In it the author simply leaves out any mention of the bell and just repeats the legend of the 'Judenstein', the Jew Stone. We don't unfortunately know why the author has decided to leave out the Wandlerin¹¹. Whereas the first and shorter edition devotes 7 pages to the circumstances surrounding the alleged desecration of the host, the so-called blood miracle, and the Jew-Stone, in the second, much enlarged edition, he merely mentions the events of 1338 as a legend and on less than 1 page, without any comment. A whole chunk of history has been suppressed without explanation. History has been sanitized. Did he realize that he had made a mistake about the continued ringing of the bell but could not find the courage to admit it? Did he feel by this time (16 years later) that the events of 1338, the legends surrounding it and the bell-ringing custom had become an embarrassment or something just too awkward to handle?

⁷ She is a devout Catholic and very much aware of her church's involvement in Anti-Semitism.

⁸ E. Schober, *Das Lavanttal in den Stürmen der Zeit*, Klagenfurt 1980

⁹ Schober, p.42

¹⁰ E. Schober, *Das Lavanttal*, 2nd and enlarged edition, Wolfsberg 1996

¹¹ My 2 letters to him, of 13/02/02 and 03/03/02 have to date not been answered.

Perhaps, but the bell had certainly been rung for a very long time, been mentioned in many books¹² and was part of the town's history. It was part of the legend of the Jew Stone. In a substantial book on the history of the area the expulsion of the Jews in 1338, the accusation of the desecration of the host, the legends connected with it, the relevance of the Jew Stone and of the pictures in the Dreifaltigkeitskirche, and the ringing of the bell should all have been discussed. Instead the author chooses to ignore part of Wolfsberg's past and present. Schober appears to take the same line as the town administration, and presumably, the Wolfsberg establishment.

My inquiries with the mayor and the cultural department revealed that in their opinion the bell had not been rung *'for decades'*. They added that the custom had now *'rightly been forgotten'*. My comment, that 'forgetting' was not the right reaction to such an important part of Wolfsberg's history brought no response from the 'Kulturamt'. Later the mayor's office told me that, as far as they knew, the bell fell silent when all bell-ringing was stopped after the air raids had started, and that the bell had probably been melted down. Since Wolfsberg only suffered one air-attack in December 1944, i.e. on a prisoner-of-war camp¹³ it must have been after that raid, if indeed this information is correct...

An older resident of Wolfsberg¹⁴ who is very interested in local history, pointed out to me that the bell-ringing (at 9 o'clock in the evening from the Dreifaltigkeitskirche) was mentioned in a building-chronicle of Wolfsberg written in 1912¹⁵. He himself remembers that the Wandlerin was rung regularly well into the nineteen forties. He wrote to me: *'It is certain that the Wandlerin was still rang in the early forties. I can remember it well. As children we used to wait for the ringing.'* He could not remember, however, when exactly it stopped ringing. A few days later, he suddenly changed his mind. This turn-about happened after I had pointed out to him the anti-Semitic nature of this custom. It surprised me because he had been so enthusiastic in answering my inquiries and had sent me several old photos. In his last e-mail he said that he had spoken to an old man who had lived next to the church and who knows nothing about the bell or its ringing and that he himself is in the same position. Mysteriously, he added that he does not believe it to be just a fairy-tale. He concluded this last message with the words *'With that I have ceased to be interested in the Wandlerin.'* I replied that I would of course respect his wish to terminate our correspondence but that I just wanted him to know that my wife and her family suffered the same fate almost exactly 600 years after the first expulsion of Jews that the bell commemorated. To this there was no response, and I have not heard from him since.

In a recent book on walks and legends in the Lavanttal,¹⁶ published only last year, the readers are, to my great surprise, again told that this bell is still rung every day to remind

¹² I discovered that 10 different local authors mention the bell and the reasons for its ringing. No doubt there are more.

¹³ STALAG XVIII A

¹⁴ Werner Presser of Wolfsberg, a former headmaster, gave me this information.

¹⁵ Dr.Fritz Wittmann, Häuserchronik von Wolfsberg, 1912. Manuscript in the possession of W. Presser.

¹⁶ D. Wabnig, Sagenhaftes Lavanttal, Wolfsberg 2001. The author has now admitted that she simply took over the information from Schober's 1980 book. Unfortunately he too was wrong and had not found it necessary to check the facts.

the people of the expulsion of the Jews in the Middle Ages. The author of this well-presented publication is not a historian but the Public Health Officer of Wolfsberg, as such certainly a member of the establishment. Earlier in our correspondence Herr Presser, the retired headmaster who had first been very keen to supply me with information and pictures and then suddenly decided that he was no longer interested, had mentioned to me that he knows her very well...I had corresponded with the author of 'Sagenhaftes Lavanttal' for several days, and she had promised to make inquiries with the main pastor of the town, the Stadtpfarrer, about the Wandlerin. However, suddenly and without explanation, her correspondence stopped and none of my subsequent letters was answered.

If it is true that the bell was still rung after 1945, was it also to remind people of the other 'happy expulsion' almost exactly 600 years later, of which the Auerbachs were victims?

Does anybody in Wolfsberg now want to remember the *Wandlerin*, the reason why it was rung, and what happened to the 'Jew Bell' and its familiar peal? The author of the latest publication on Wolfsberg and its history¹⁷ expresses what is also my impression:

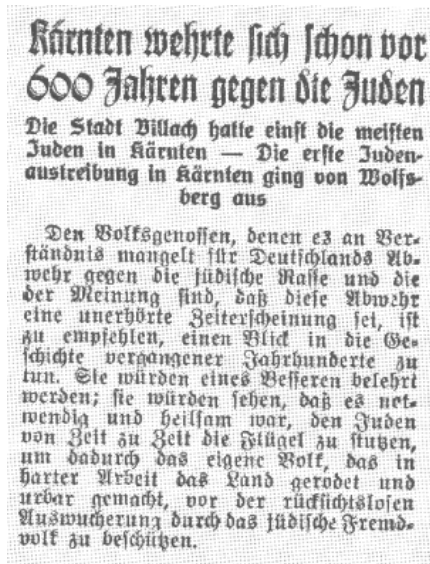
"Modern citizens would like to see this legend expunged; that, however, is impossible since works of art and memorial stones remind us of it."

The works of art include, among others, a large 5-part painting telling the story of the desecration of the host which was originally in the Heiligblutkirche and is now in the Dreifaltigkeitskirche and the 'Blood-Monstrance' with 2 lunulae allegedly containing the hosts that were 'defiled' by the Jews in 1338. The stone he mentions, is the *Judenstein* on the river Lavant. Does the author mean that it would be all right to forget this story if it were not for the fact that there is visible evidence of it? Is it not vitally important to remember the long, long history of vilification and persecution of Jews by Christians and their institutions if we want to understand how the Holocaust came about and, this is most

important, if we want to lay bare those parts of our heritage which are inimical to a tolerant and humane society?

So far the demise of the Wandlerin, the Jew Bell, is shrouded in mystery. The '*Pfarramt*'¹⁸ in Wolfsberg replied very briefly (Not to me but to the town administration who had asked the vicar's office for information.) that they can find no mention of the bell and passed my letter on to the diocesan archive in Klagenfurt. Their reply was that the bell had indeed been in the *Heiligblutkirche* until its demolition in 1889 but that they didn't know what had happened to the bell after that.

The original church had to make room for a new town hall, and most of the content of the old church was transferred to another church, the



¹⁷ Robert Gratzner, Wolfsberg, Wolfsberg 2001, p. 33

¹⁸ My 4 letters to Herrn Leyrer, the Stadtpfarrer of Wolfsberg, of 3/1/02, 18/1/02, 26/02/02, and 1/5/02 have so far not been answered.

Dreifaltigkeitskirche, which is now in the ownership of the town. The administration's view on the question of the ringing of the Wandlerin I have already reported as '*rightly forgotten*'...

While the bell-ringing is now 'forgotten', the event which it commemorated was well remembered by the Nazis in 1938 when the people of Carinthia were reminded by the press that there was nothing new in the measures against Jews in 1938. A newspaper article¹⁹ was headed: "*Carinthia fought off the Jews, already 600 years ago.*" The article went on to say:

"Villach once had the biggest Jewish population in Carinthia. The first expulsion of Jews started in Wolfsberg. Those fellow-citizens who lack an understanding for Germany's defensive measures against the Jewish race and who are of the opinion that this defence is an unheard-of thing of our time are well advised to take a look at the history of past centuries. They would be taught a lesson; they would see that it was necessary and salutary to clip the wings of the Jews from time to time in order to protect our own people, who through their hard work have cleared the land and made it fertile, from the reckless exploitation by the alien Jewish race."

By implication this article admits that there must have been some criticism of the anti-Jewish measures and that it was felt necessary to point out the 'defensive' nature of them, and, above all, to remind the people of Wolfsberg of an event in their own history when the expulsion (and killing) of Jews was authorised by the highest authority, namely the Church. We should also note the use of a euphemism like 'clipping the wings' which stands for intimidation, arrests, humiliation, expropriation, and expulsion. The 'hard-working' people are reminded that they are being recklessly exploited by an alien race.

There can be no doubt that without centuries of conditioning of this kind it would not have been possible for the new Nazi administration to push through their anti-Jewish measures with such efficiency and in such a short time. It was indeed nothing new. The continued ringing of the bell was the symbolic expression of this underlying attitude: Jews are an alien body in our *Volk*. Their presence and activities are injurious to our well-being. To curtail their rights and to remove them from our communities are acts of self-defence and therefore justified.

'His blood be on us and on our children.'

So why was this bell called 'Wandlerin' and what is the story behind it? Those who know some German will realise that '*wandeln*' can mean to walk leisurely or to change. It is the latter meaning that applies here. The change is 'transubstantiation'. So, our bell is the transubstantiation bell!

The idea that the consecrated bread or wafer actually changes into flesh, namely the body of Christ, and wine into his blood, had not always been the official view of the Church.

¹⁹ Reproduced in W. Wadl, A. Ogris, *Das Jahr 1938 in Kärnten und seine Vorgeschichte*, Klagenfurt 1997, p.243

But the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 had made the cult of the Eucharist into a dogma. So that henceforth all Catholics have to believe this 'transubstantiation' to be literally true. A tall order since it is incompatible with our actual experience, and even the most basic scientific knowledge. To back up this dogma and to make it stick, the feast of Corpus Christi (Fronleichnam) was created by the Church in 1264. A shrewd move! Who does not welcome an extra holiday, even if it means having to go to church?

But why was this particular bell called the transubstantiation bell, and what is its connection with the already mentioned expulsion of Jews from Wolfsberg in 1338? To understand that we must remember that the Christian Church had always, and from the very beginning, considered the Jews the murderers of Christ, i.e., of their God-Son, not just those Jews who demanded Jesus' death at the time but all their descendants, and forever. Already Matthew has 'the people' say: "*His blood be on us and on our children.*"²⁰ Later the Church fathers, among them 'Saints' Augustine ('*The Jew is the slave of the Christian.*') and Thomas Aquinas, had developed the doctrine of the '*perpetual servitude*' of the Jews for their crimes, a doctrine which was incorporated into canon law. The already-mentioned Fourth Lateran Council under Innocent III codified this *Servitus Judaeorum*. The various regulations regarding the Jews read like the Nuremberg Laws and other Nazi anti-Semitic measures: Strict segregation (ghettos) of Jews and Christians to avoid contamination, prohibition of sexual relations, compulsory wearing of distinguishing dress (hat or badge), exclusion from positions of authority, special Jew Tax at Easter, etc. I should add here, in case someone thinks all this is ancient history, that much of this, such as strict ghettoization (8 cities in the Vatican State had ghettos) was practised right into the 19th century by the Catholic Church in the only state where they had the power to do so, the Vatican State.

True, the Jews were not to be killed; that is what the mob did, - often lead by priests! But they were to remain 'wanderers' on the earth until they acknowledged their crime – and accepted Christ. Conversion by way of 'forced sermons' was sought, a job in which Franciscans and Dominicans specialised. It was a Franciscan who played his part in the 'desecration-of-the-host' story that is the origin of our bell. This compulsory attendance of conversion sermons, in which Jews were forced to listen to denunciations of their faith by Christian priests was also continued in the Vatican state until the middle of the 19th century.

The widespread and frequent accusations of desecrations of the host by Jews during the 13th century and later in many parts of Europe have to be seen in this light. Since Jews collectively were held responsible for the death of Christ, their continued defilement of the host was therefore portrayed as a logical extension. But this tampering with consecrated wafers, in itself a most serious crime deserving of the most severe punishment, was in effect a very useful device in order to convince the doubters of the 'truth' of transubstantiation, as we shall see when I relate the story of the Wolfsberg host-desecration in 1338.

I found this story, with some variations, in several, some very recent, books²¹ on the history of Wolfsberg and the Lavanttal: In 1338 a Franciscan monk, very assiduous in his

²⁰ Matthew 27,25

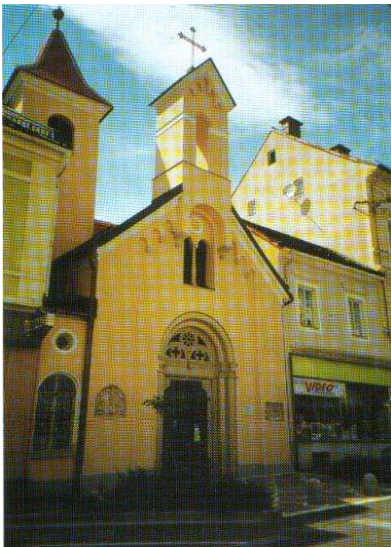
²¹ Apart from the above-mentioned publications also in A. Glawan, Wolfsberg, kirchliche Kunstdenkmäler, 1962. and in a book of old legends.



attempts to convert the Jews to Christianity, was persuaded to let the Jews have three consecrated wafers, on the understanding that they would let themselves be converted if their careful examination should come to the conclusion that they were indeed flesh and blood. I am sure the Jews did not think they were running any risk of having to forsake the faith of Abraham, whereas the monk must have thought that he had hit on a fail-safe way of increasing his conversion tally. (This thought is my own interpolation, by the way.)

Part of the five-part picture telling the story of the 'Desecration of the Host'. This was originally in the 'Heiligblutkirche', it is now in the 'Dreifaltigkeitskirche'. In 1999 it was restored with the help of government funds.

So the Jews took the wafers away to the synagogue and started to examine them. They poked at them with sharp knives and, ...lo and behold, blood spurt out of them! The terrified Israelites (Can you imagine their horror? Their world must have collapsed before their eyes! My interpolation.) then tossed a wafer into the fire, no doubt hoping they could destroy the evidence, but the wafer would not burn, but floated up heavenwards. Disposal of the other 2 into the Lavant, the river that flows through Wolfsberg, was equally unsuccessful. A 'Judenstein' in the Lavant reminds the people to this day of the place in the river where the Jews threw the hosts into the water. A hole in the stone is



supposed to have been caused by the hosts passing through it! The stone is today surmounted by an iron cross.

Needless to say, the Jews did not keep their part of the bargain, which only went to prove that one cannot trust a Jew! They had their just desserts however, seventy of them were executed and the rest chased out of town. This action was thus a great success in more than one way: First of all it proved that the Jews were still repeating their original crime by attacking the host, secondly, transubstantiation was shown to be true by, so to speak, independent scrutiny, thirdly the Jews demonstrated that they could not be trusted to keep their word and fourthly, Wolfsberg was now rid of its Jews: 'judenrein'.

The Dreifaltigkeitskirche in the Wiener Strasse where, until the end of the war, the 'Jew Bell' was rung every day at 9 o'clock

In place of the synagogue where the Jews had ‘violated’ the host, a Christian church was built, the Heiligblutkirche, where, until its demolition in 1889, a bell was rung every evening at 9 o’clock for 15 minutes as a reminder of the expulsion of the Jews in 1338. The legend says that the bell-ringing had been the signal for the people to fall upon the unsuspecting Jews. This was ‘*die Wandlerin*’, the bell that was also rung during mass to indicate transubstantiation. It was later also called ‘*Judenglocke*’. The bell then found a new home in the Dreifaltigkeitskirche where it presumably did its sacred duty right to the end of the Second World War. Here we are, however, in an area of uncertainty. While, as we have seen above, some claim that it was still rung until recently, others maintain that the war put an end to the ringing, and that it was melted down, no doubt to supply

the German armaments industry with raw material. What a fitting end! For centuries this bell had rung as a witness to intolerance and inhumanity, as a reminder how the Christian Church had demonised, excluded, humiliated and persecuted the Jews for centuries and thus prepared the ground for the Holocaust. Now its substance was used up to sustain Hitler’s final assault on civilisation. Its end came, if indeed it did come in this way, not because the Church realised the offensive nature of this custom, not because it had a



change of heart about the moral rightness of this and the many other expulsions of Jews, not because it saw the evil nature of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism but because the Nazi government needed the metal! After the war, the Church had to make no decision. There was no bell to ring. How fortunate! The matter could quietly be forgotten, well, no quite.

While the ringing of the Wandlerin bell is still something of a mystery, long on legend but short on facts, now curiously suppressed in people’s memory, yet popping up everywhere in the literature, the Blood Monstrance is an artefact that makes it impossible to ignore the story. This silver ostensorium was created in 1772 when the memory of the ‘host-defilement’ was clearly still alive. As one can see, it contains 2 round receptacles, the lunulae, which accommodate the consecrated wafers.

The silver Blood-Monstrance, dated 1772, incorporating 2 lunulae which allegedly contained the consecrated wafers that were, according to legend, desecrated by the Jews. It is now in the Dreifaltigkeitskirche but has been ‘re-built’, presumably to remove any reference to the ‘desecrated’ wafers.

The monstrance dates from the same time as the 5-part picture that tells, in words and pictorially, the story of the defilement of the host. This ‘modern’ ostensorium must have replaced an older one. The author Franz Hann²² reports that during an official visit to

²² Quoted in Gratzner, ob.cit. p. 36 f

Wolfsberg in 1627 the abbot of St. Paul observed that an ostensorium with 2 hosts was exhibited publicly and carried in procession on the Sunday after Corpus Christi like a sanctissimum. It was also displayed from the chancel on two other holy days. 'The people', he wrote, 'revered these so-called Blood Hosts as miracle-working.' Apparently an epidemic had been stopped in 1628 after the faithful made a pilgrimage to the church of the Holy

Blood in Wolfsberg. The Church authorities were however suspicious of the authenticity of the wafers and ordered an official investigation. The investigators found no trace of bread, merely dust. The dean of Wolfsberg was therefore ordered to remove the monstrance since its veneration would amount to idol-worship. The faithful, having been reared on miracles, found it hard to accept this harsh decision of their Church and protested. After all, the Blood Miracle had put Wolfsberg on the map! So, 9 years later, a second commission was sent to Wolfsberg. This time, opinions were divided, although the abbot still maintained that there was no trace of bread or flesh or blood. However, the good people of Wolfsberg were allowed to keep their monstrance and even display it near the high altar in a 'convenient' place, show it on several holy days, but not to adore it as a miracle-working holy object.

That the Blood Host was in fact still an object of consequence is demonstrated by the fact that the above-mentioned monstrance and the large picture were commissioned. Even the Pope, at that time Pius VI, took the Blood Host in Wolfsberg seriously enough to issue a breve in 1777 and grant indulgence for a 9-day devotion in Wolfsberg which the dean decided should start on 10 August.

This way the Church had it both ways: Officially, a fraud, perhaps one that was too obvious, was removed, and critics of too many miracles were satisfied, but at the same time the people were allowed to continue, in the way they had been accustomed to.

What are we to make of the fact that at least two local authors (even if they are amateur historians) who have published well-presented books, that are no doubt bought by many interested locals as well as tourists, state that a bell is still rung regularly in a particular church to commemorate the expulsion of Jews from the town in the Middle Ages when in fact (let us assume that is the case) the ringing was discontinued decades ago? Have they simply made a mistake? A serious mistake, I should say, since the question of a centuries-old custom, when and why it began and when and why it ended, connected with an event in the town's history that affected one of the holiest objects in the Church, namely the consecrated host, and which brought about the sudden and violent death of 70 and the expulsion of many more of its inhabitants, is no trifling matter. The fact that this is part of the history of Christian-Jewish relations should have rung the alarm bells (!) and caused anyone writing about it to ask questions and to check the evidence.

These authors obviously did not expect that such an old custom, in the safe hands of the Church, could have ended. Nor did they find it offensive. One can only assume that they would be happy to hear the bell rung today. They repeated what was for them part of the fabric of their life, an old tradition, something they expected to go on and on. Old traditions are part of our identity, so many people say, and must be cherished. That it was directed against Jews fitted well into this background. It may be worth adding, that according to the town administration, there are today no more Jews in Wolfsberg.

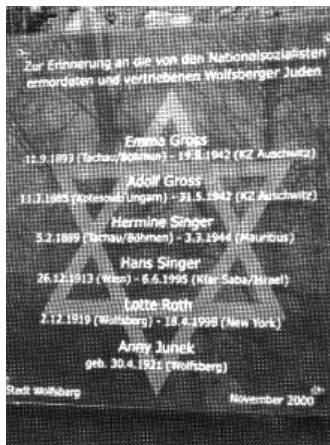
The only things that now remind the visitor to Wolfsberg of her former Jewish inhabitants are three²³ plaques, two of them put up in 2000: one by the Judenstein²⁴ on the banks of the Lavant, and the other on the old town wall near the town hall listing the names of Jewish families who had been expelled from the town in 1938. The former reads:

Gedenktafel "Judenstein"

In den Jahren 1338 und 1348/49 kam es in Wolfsberg zu blutigen Judenverfolgungen. Auslöser der Pogrome und Ursache der Massenhysterie waren Gerüchte über jüdische Hostienschändungen. Dieser "Judenstein soll an das schändliche Unrecht erinnern, das unseren jüdischen Mitbürgern von Christen zugefügt wurde. Der "Judenstein" soll ein Zeichen der Versöhnung mit jenem Volke sein, aus dem für uns Christen der Erlöser geboren wurde.

During the years of 1338 and 1348/49 bloody persecutions of Jews occurred in Wolfsberg. These pogroms as well as the mass-hysteria were caused by rumours of desecrations of the host by Jews. This 'Jew Stone' is meant to commemorate the shameful injustice inflicted by Christians on their Jewish fellow-citizens. May this 'Jew Stone' be a symbol of reconciliation with the people who brought us Christians the Saviour.

This inscription contains a significant misrepresentation. Until the emancipation of Jews following the French Revolution (an emancipation that was strongly resisted by the Catholic Church) Jews had never been regarded as 'fellow-citizens'. They were at best tolerated as guests and treated as outsiders in a Christian society. According to Church dogma they were the 'enemies of Christ' and 'servants' of the Christians.



The other plaque is on the town wall near the Rathaus. It lists the families that were expelled from Wolfsberg 600 later. The Auerbachs and Gerhard Gadiel, their farm worker and apprentice, are however missing. The reason is that in 1938 Schassbach, where the Auerbachs lived, belonged to St. Andrä, a neighbouring town, not to Wolfsberg. Today, however, it is part of Wolfsberg. Anny Junek by the way (the last name on the plaque), now lives in Jerusalem. She remembers having visited the Auerbachs in Schassbach. Until 1938 her father had a shop in the Sporergasse.

²³ There is an information plaque in the Sporergasse, now pedestrianised, which says that 'Until 1338, the year of the expulsion of Jews from Wolfsberg, this was called 'Judengasse' (Jew Street). Later this street was given the name "Black Quarter". The renaming of the Judengasse is also reported in Gratzner, p.626: "Until 1338, the year of the Jew pogrom in Wolfsberg and the subsequent expulsion of the flourishing Jewish community of Wolfsberg with almost 100 dead, it was called 'Judengasse'.

²⁴ The Jew stone was originally in the river. The flood water of 1824 moved the stone to the side of the river.

To help us appreciate the general climate in which these ‘stories of old’ are told, read and passed on even today it is worth pointing out that the *Lavanttal*, the area around Wolfsberg is replete with legends. Wabnig, in her slim volume, that is actually a rambler’s guide (127 pages in all), lists and recounts no fewer than 134 legends in this small area. They are mostly of a religious nature, including miraculous healings, rewards for the pious and punishment of the wicked. Numbers 78 and 79 are the legends of the Jew-stone, the church of the holy blood, and the expulsion of the Jews.

‘The mischievous enemies of Christ’

Let us now take a look at the language used in some of the books already referred to. When describing the reaction of the Jews to conversion the adjective ‘*verstockt*’²⁵ turns up several times. The word can mean unrepenting, obstinate or obdurate. It has a negative connotation and calls forth the image of a wrongdoer who is unrepenting or of a stubborn child. In the Book of Old Legends²⁶ we read, that a monk tried very hard (‘*gab sich viel Mühe*’) to convert the Jews but they remained obstinate (*Aber sie blieben verstockt...*).²⁷ The monk’s efforts, on the other hand, are portrayed in a positive way. How ungrateful and unreasonable of the Jews not to accept the truth! Further, the Jews are given the by-word ‘enemies of Christ’²⁸ or indeed ‘mischievous enemies of Christ’. The German adjective is ‘verschmitzt’ which is again rather negative. In another version of the expulsion story one author speaks of the ‘insubordination’ of the Jews. The German word ‘Unbotmässigkeit’ can also mean ‘unruliness’. The context in which the term is appears is also interesting. Schober²⁹ writes:

“Around the middle of the 14th century the number of Jews had risen alarmingly, so that their insubordination towards the Christians increased from day to day.”

The Jews then considered driving the Christians out of town in order to gain control over it! In order to forestall this the Christians took the initiative, so their action is seen as self-defence. The own misdeed is thus transferred to the victim. Another author³⁰ also sees the expulsion of the Jews as ‘*Selbsthilfe*’. Here the self-defence is, however, in response to the high interests charged by ‘*this group of traders*’, i.e. the Jews.

²⁵ Franz Hann, p.8ff (quoted in Gratzner, p.33). Schober, 1996, p. 130

²⁶ Altes Sagenbuch, p. 71

²⁷ This attitude towards the Jews was of course not confined to the Catholic variety of Christianity. Later in life Martin Luther turned into an aggressive anti-Semite as evidenced in his diatribe ‘Concerning the Jews and their Lies’ of 1543, in which he wrote inter alia, ‘The Jews, being foreigners, should possess nothing, and what they do possess should be ours.’ He called them ‘an insufferable devilish burden’ whose synagogues should be burnt and their houses destroyed. (Cohn-Sherbok, ob.cit. p. 72f). Had the ‘*Stürmer*’, the fiercely anti-Semitic Nazi paper, existed at the time, I’m sure they would have been pleased to print it!

²⁸ Schober, 1996, p. 130. Hann, p. 8ff

²⁹ Schober 1980, p. 41

³⁰ K. Forster, J. Barth, Wolfsberg, Geschichte und Kulturdenkmäler, Wolfsberg, probably 1980, p. 12

Commenting on the persecution of Jews particularly during the crusades, Schober³¹ observes quite correctly:

“So war den Christen jeder Anlass erwünscht, die geistlich ohnehin verfluchten Ungläubigen loszuwerden.” “So the Christians welcomed any opportunity to get rid of the infidel who was in any case spiritually condemned.”

The same author quotes the Christian chronicler, a certain Johann von Viktring, who recorded the desecration of the host, the ‘blood-miracle’ and the expulsion of Jews in 1338. He calls him an ‘*anti-semitischen Eiferer*’, an anti-Semitic zealot. He also adds that during the Middle Ages the majority of princes in Austria were anti-Semitic.

It is important not to give this term a ‘post-holocaust’ interpretation, and to conclude that the author wants to express disapprobation of the kind the term ‘anti-Semitic’ implies today. This is so for two reasons. Firstly, right up to the Holocaust, anti-Semitic attitudes in German and Austrian society were ‘respectable’, particularly so in the 19th century. In patriotic-conservative-Christian circles anti-Semitism was ‘normal’. Secondly, the Catholic Church had firmly built anti-Judaism into its dogma. Officially the church distinguished between a legitimate ‘Christian’ anti-Judaism/anti-Semitism and an illegitimate one that was to be condemned. This distinction however was more theoretical and apologetical than real. L'Osservatore Romano, the semi-official organ of the Holy See, wrote on 1.7.1892³²: “True anti-Semitism is and can in its substance be nothing but Christianity, perfected in Catholicism.” The author went on to say that non-Christian anti-Semitism was threatening to discredit true Christian anti-Semitism.

This ‘true’ anti-Semitism, based on the New Testament itself, developed by the Church Fathers, codified by the Fourth Lateran Council, practiced and preached by the Church throughout the centuries right into modern times, was indeed fundamental to Christianity. From this source it had been infused into secular society and thinking. It was a constituent of the cultural lees of our society. When racial theories became all the rage in the 19th century, existing Christian anti-Judaism easily amalgamated with the new racial anti-Semitism and became a bundle where the two elements were in practice indistinguishable. The Vatican’s ‘Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews’ finally reported in 1998, 11 years after John Paul II had asked them to investigate the Church’s responsibility for the Holocaust. The report tried to exculpate the Church by reviving the distinction between Christian anti-Judaism and 19th century racial anti-Semitism,³³ thus minimising the involvement of the Church. History however suggests that the Church, her agents and those inspired or encouraged by her, are deeply implicated, both dogmatically and in practice.

By condemning and demonising the Jews spiritually and marginalizing them socially the Church had given the all-clear to the people to engage in humiliations, harassment, pogroms and expulsions. This road inevitably led to murder and eventually made the Holocaust possible.

It is as well to remember that the first victims of the Crusades that raged on and off for more than two hundred years, were not the ‘infidel’ Muslims in ‘the Holy Land’ but the

³¹ Schober, 1980. p.32

³² David I. Kertzer, *Unholy War*, Macmillan 2001, p. 148

³³ Kertzer, ob. cit., p.4

‘infidel’ Jews of Europe. They were massacred under the same Banner of the Cross and with the same battle-cry: *‘Deus lo volt!’ God’s will!*

Many centuries later, the Catholic Hitler also saw himself as doing the work of the Lord. In ‘Mein Kampf’³⁴, written in 1923, he summed up what must have been the credo of Christian Anti-Judaism throughout the ages:

“So glaube ich heute im Sinne des allmächtigen Schöpfers zu handeln: Indem ich mich des Juden erwehre kämpfe ich für das Werk des Herrn.”

“I believe to act today in accordance with the Almighty Creator: By fending off the Jew I fight for the work of the Lord.”

Postscript

The story of the Wandlerin is not yet complete. My investigations are still continuing. The archivist of the Gurk Diocese in Klagenfurt, Peter Tropper, has himself taken an interest in the matter and promised to search for more information. The historian Andrea Lauritsch of Klagenfurt University, who we met while we were in Austria and who we have been in touch with since, is planning to make inquiries through a Wolfsberg town councillor³⁵ who is a member of the Green Party. She has suggested that the subject and my material may be of interest to a new left-liberal newspaper to be published in the area. The existing catholic/conservative papers are in her view unlikely to be interested.

So far no documentary **primary** evidence of the ringing of this bell has come to light. Neither the church in Wolfsberg, nor the diocesan archive in Klagenfurt nor the Wolfsberg Town Council, who are the owners of the Dreifaltigkeitskirche, nor any of the authors I have contacted have been able to find any mention of the bell or the regular ringing at 9 pm in original official documents.

All we have up to now are suppositions by individuals and statements in the secondary literature.

Ten different authors or publications/manuscripts (there are probably more) have so far come to light in which the regular ringing of such a bell is mentioned:

1. **Tangl** in an unpublished manuscript of 1830. This is now in the Kärntner Landesarchiv under “Geschichtsverein Hs. 8/68.” He writes that the bell is rung from the steeple of the main town church, the Stadtpfarrkirche.
2. F.G. **Hann** in “Carinthia” I, 1898. He quotes Tangl.
3. Fritz **Wittmann** in a manuscript called “Häuserchronik von Wolfsberg” of 1912. This manuscript is now with W. Presser. He claims that the bell is rung from the Dreifaltigkeitskirche.

³⁴ Mein Kampf, München, 1942, p. 70

³⁵ His name is Habsburg-Lothringen. His wife is the only (converted) Jew in Wolfsberg.

4. Georg **Graber**, Sagen aus Kärnten, 1979, Vol.1, p. 336. He also says that the bell is rung from the Dreifaltigkeitskirche.
5. A. **Glawan**, Wolfsberg, kirchliche Kunstdenkmäler, 1962. He speaks of the 'Wandlungsglocke'. His information is also based on Tangl.
6. E. **Schober**, Das Lavanttal, 1980. He calls the bell 'Wandlerin' and maintains that it was still rung at the time of publication.
7. B. **Streiner**, Kirchliche Denkmäler in Wolfsberg, 1927. He speaks of 'Wandlungsglocke' and 'Judenglocke'.
8. **Franz Pehr**, Kärntner Sagen, 2nd ed., Wolfsberg (date of publication about 1920) p. 73. The bell is called 'Judenglocke'. This book went through several editions. Whereas the first 4 editions list '74' legends, including the one of the 'Jew Stone', the fifth edition of 1960 contains only '73'. The Jew Stone legend has been eliminated without comment.
9. Matthias **Maierburger**, Kärntner Sagenbuch, 1971.
10. D. **Wabnig**, Sagenhaftes Lavanttal, 2001. She copied from Schober 1980.

In some of this literature authors have taken over statements from other writers. This is so in the case of D. Wabnig who repeated a statement made by E. Schober. Schober himself was wrong when he wrote in the 1980 edition of his book that the bell was still rung. Hann acknowledges Tangl as his source, and so does Glawan. Other authors may have repeated what earlier books said about the bell without admitting it. The main source appears to be Tangl, 1830. I have yet to see and examine the Tangl manuscript myself.

That Streiner (No.7), who was himself Stadtpfarrer and Dechant in Wolfsberg and therefore responsible for all the churches in the town, could have been mistaken about one of his own bells is almost unthinkable. The archivist of the Diocese, P. Tropper, is therefore convinced that the bell was rung at least until 1927.

On the other hand the author of 'Wolfsberg', Robert Gratzner, takes the view that the regular ringing of a church bell at 9 in the evening is most unlikely and that the ringing of the Wandlerin or Jew bell may be a myth.

As already mentioned, the town administration believe, the bell was rung until air-raids started during the Second World War, i.e. 1944 or 45 and that the bell itself was melted down.

It is worth repeating that one of the older residents of Wolfsberg, W. Presser, a former headmaster, told me first of all that he could remember the regular ringing of the bell at 9 o'clock but later, when he terminated our correspondence, appeared to retract by saying that neither he nor someone who actually lived right next to the church knew anything at all about this bell.

In the absence of primary sources, i.e. hard evidence³⁶, and given the fact that several authors have copied from others and that the oldest source gives as the church from which the bell was allegedly rung not the Dreifaltigkeitskirche but the main church in Wolfsberg, the Stadtkirche, also considering that religious myths are very much part of the cultural heritage of the Catholic Church in general and this rural area of Austria in

³⁶ I must now also consider the possibility that evidence for the bell-ringing is being concealed or has been removed from archives.

particular, I have to consider the possibility that this 'tradition' is indeed a myth. It may be that the ringing of *a* Wandlerin, namely a bell rung during the Eucharist, was given special significance within this context of host desecration by Jews and the expulsion of Jews in 1338. The church herself may have connived in creating tangible, i.e. in this case 'audible' evidence and a tradition that would strengthen and keep alive the memory of militant Christianity, in this case anti-Judaism. Now, that the Church is forced to abandon this stance, pride in a cherished old tradition has turned into embarrassment. Thus the desire to forget and the unwillingness to discuss the issue, be it myth **or** fact.

A new reality has been created in which a myth that served as an 'Ersatz' reality is now denied official sanction and expunged from history, as if it had never happened. History has been re-written, sanitised, in order to bring it in line with the ideological needs of the present.

I am still trying to establish:

1. *Has there ever been any regular daily ringing of a bell at 9 pm in commemoration of the murder and expulsion of the Jews from Wolfsberg in 1338, and if so, when did this practice start and in which church?*
2. *When did the ringing stop? Was it on orders of the Church? Was any reason given?*
3. *Was there ever a special bell called 'Wandlerin' or 'Judenglocke'?*

In 2002 I wrote the following letter to 3 different regional/local papers, namely the 'Kleine Zeitung', the 'Unterkärntner Nachrichten' and the 'Neue Kärntner Tageszeitung' which are all read in Wolfsberg. The latter published my letter on 29 May 2002 and the Unterkärntner Nachrichten on 5 June 2002. I had hoped that it would produce some reactions from readers who might be able to throw light on the strange disappearance of the bell. However, no replies have been published.

"Die Wandlerin

Im Oktober letzten Jahres verbrachten meine Frau und ich eine schöne Woche in Wolfsberg und Umgebung. Wir waren auf 'Spurensuche'. Für mich war es der erste Besuch in Kärnten, für meine Frau eine Rückkehr. Vor vielen Jahren hat sie mit ihrer Familie einmal im Lavanttal gewohnt, leider nur für kurze Zeit. Im November 1938 wurde ihr Vater ins Konzentrationslager Dachau deportiert und wenige Wochen danach die Familie ausgewiesen, 600 Jahre nach der ersten Vertreibung von Juden. Während unseres Besuchs haben wir neue Bekanntschaften angeknüpft, und die Freundlichkeit der Menschen und Schönheit der Landschaft genossen. Bei diesem Besuch hörten wir von einem Buch, in dem die Geschichte über die 'Hostienschändung' 1338 erwähnt wird, mit der Bemerkung, dass in der Dreifaltigkeitskirche noch jetzt (1980) jeden Abend eine Glocke geläutet wird zum Andenken an die 'glückliche Vertreibung der Juden aus Wolfsberg'.

Mir wurde dann aber gesagt, dass dieser alte Brauch schon 'seit Jahrzehnten' nicht mehr geübt wird. Leider konnte mir bisher niemand genau sagen, wann dieser Brauch ein Ende fand oder wann er begann.

Später wurde mir dann ein gerade erst erschienenenes kleines Büchlein geschickt, in dem die gleiche Geschichte erwähnt wird, und zwar wieder mit der Feststellung, dass die

Glocke auch heute noch geläutet wird, und zwar um neun Uhr in der Dreifaltigkeitskirche. Kann sich jemand an dies Glockenläuten erinnern?

Ganz abgesehen von der religiösen Bedeutung ist doch Glockenläuten ein wichtiger Bestandteil des täglichen Lebens in einer Stadt. Ein Brauch, der jahrhundertlang geübt wurde, kann nicht so einfach von der Bildfläche verschwinden.

Oder ist es so wie ich in einem kürzlich erschienenen Buch über Wolfsberg lesen konnte: 'Moderne Bürger möchten diese Legende gern abgeschafft wissen' ?

Jürgen Schwiening, Market Bosworth, England"

Acknowledgments

Since my research has been done from England mainly by e-mail, but also by ordinary post and fax I owe a great deal to my 'contacts' in Austria. In fact, I could not have done this work without their willing help. They have looked through books and documents for me and supplied the facts that make up this, still incomplete, jig-saw, sent me many photocopies and suggested new sources.

Rosemarie Vallant from Wolfsberg put me on to the trail of the 'Wandlerin' in the first place by giving me a copy of Schober's 1980 book. I would like to say a special 'thank you' to her for taking such a lively interest in the subject.

The state and the diocesan archives in Klagenfurt have supplied much information and are continuing to take an interest in the mysterious Wandlerin. I am particularly indebted to Dr. Peter Tropper who is still pursuing the matter.

The historian Andrea Lauritsch, who has herself researched the history of the Jews in Wolfsberg, has stayed in contact with me and made many useful suggestions.

I have also benefited from the advice and encouragement of the author Robert Gratzner, now in Istanbul. He too has put me on to several new sources of information. I hope our e-mail correspondence will continue beyond the Wandlerin.

Last not least I owe thanks to Dr. Markus Wenninger of Klagenfurt University who took an active interest in the Wandlerin story through his critical comments and additional detail.

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Illustrations

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