

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Birkbeck, University of London
Unit of Assessment: 27
Title of case study: Blood and Money: Contested Cultural Histories
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2003 to date
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 5 November 2015 – February 2020
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N
<p>1. Summary of the impact:</p> <p><i>Blood: Uniting & Dividing</i> and <i>Jews, Money, Myth</i> are two major exhibitions hosted by the Jewish Museum London in 2015/16 and 2019. Both exhibitions attracted prominent collectors to open their collections and loan items.</p> <p><i>Blood</i> generated unprecedented critical acclaim, attracting over 11,000 people, selling over 600 exhibition books, and generating thousands of pounds in revenue. It toured to the Galicia Jewish Museum, Krakow, and the world-renowned POLIN Museum for the History of Polish Jews, Warsaw. It had a profound impact in Krakow where, in order to host the exhibition, staff needed to develop new skills that hugely improved the capacity of the Museum. It was the most successful travelling exhibition they had ever hosted, with more than 30,000 visitors. At POLIN <i>Blood</i> attracted 45,000 people (nearly double the museum's target number) making it the most popular temporary exhibition in POLIN's history.</p> <p><i>Jews, Money, Myth</i> reached 290 million people through press and media, won the prestigious Museums Association 'Museums Change Lives' award 2019 and had a profound but positive impact on the approximately 22,000 thousand visitors at a time of rising antisemitism. It inspired follow-up learning (including an educational programme delivered directly to members of the Labour Party and via the TUC to its members).</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research:</p> <p>Bale's research has explored Christian ideas about Jews and Judaism, initially in his monograph study of late medieval English culture, <i>The Jew in the Medieval Book: English Antisemitisms 1350-1500</i>¹, which was awarded a Koret Foundation Jewish Studies Publications Program award and the 2006/7 Ronald Tress Prize.</p> <p>Later research by Bale, much of which was undertaken as a Frankel Fellow at the Frankel Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies (University of Michigan Ann Arbor) interrogated violence and imagined persecution in late medieval European representations of Judaism. The resulting monograph <i>Feeling Persecuted: Christians, Jews and Images of Violence</i>² was awarded the 2011 Beatrice White Prize from the English Association.</p> <p>Bale's work with the Jewish Museum London also drew on his work on the post-medieval public commemoration of the medieval Anglo-Jewish community³. Bale received a Philip Leverhulme Prize in 2011 to support his ongoing research on medieval popular religion, and his 2016 Leverhulme Artist in Residence grant with animation director Shay Hamias on medieval manuscripts, developed his own curatorial skills⁵.</p> <p>The <i>Blood</i> exhibition investigated literary and historical perspectives on the blood libel and Jewish-Christian relations. Bale was invited to act as one of two academic advisors for this exhibition, specifically contributing his expertise on the medieval blood libel and ritual murder, circumcision, Shakespeare's <i>Merchant of Venice</i>, medieval popular religion, and theories of antisemitism. The second academic advisor on <i>Blood</i> was Professor David Feldman, Director of the Pears Institute for the Study of Antisemitism at Birkbeck.</p> <p>The research also drew on Feldman's research, for example his article on the Damascus blood libel affair of 1840: David Feldman 'The Damascus Affair and the Debate on Ritual Murder in Early Victorian Britain' in Sander Gilman (ed). <i>Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Conflict and Collaboration in the Age of the Diaspora</i>, Hong-Kong University Press, November 2014 Chapter 7</p>

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This research is further elaborated in the exhibition booklet *Blood: Reflections on What Unites and Divides Us* (London, 2015) edited, with an introduction, by Bale and Feldman⁴. Bale also contributed a short piece on 'Shylock's Blood' to this booklet.

Following on from the success of the *Blood* exhibition, Bale and Feldman were once again asked to collaborate with the Jewish Museum London on *Jews, Money, Myth*, together with Marc Volovici, also of the Pears Institute at Birkbeck. *Jews, Money, Myth* likewise drew specifically on Bale's expertise in the medieval representation of Jews, the history of Judas Iscariot, and the role of the Anglo-Jewish community in finance. Bale also contributed a 'talking head' video about Jews in medieval English society, that was integral to the exhibition. Bale and Feldman contributed to the accompanying book, edited by Volovici⁶.

Curator Jo Rosenthal confirmed Bale and Feldman were "fundamental to the success of both projects" and "provided essential input into every stage of the exhibition's development – the concept, themes, structure, narrative, display material. The publications that resulted from both exhibitions were largely the result of Birkbeck's work" and "These are tremendously important elements of the exhibition's legacy" (item 5, section 5)

3. References to the research

1. *The Jew in the Medieval Book: English Antisemitisms 1350-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)
2. *Feeling Persecuted: Jews, Christians, and Images of Violence* (London: Reaktion, 2009)
3. 'The memory of atrocity', in ed. Sethina Watson and Sarah Rees-Jones, *The York Massacre of 1190 in Context* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2012), 294-304
4. Exhibition booklet: *Blood: Reflections on What Unites and Divides Us*, eds. Anthony Bale and David Feldman, London: Bloomsbury Shire, November 2015
5. *Capsule: Inside the Medieval Book*, exhibition at Peltz Gallery, London, 26 June – 30 July, curated by Anthony Bale and Shay Hamias, with two pieces of co-produced animation art, [The Matter of Jerusalem](#) and [Time is Alive](#)
6. *Jews, Money, Myth*, eds. Joanne Rosenthal and Marc Volovici (London: Jewish Museum, 2019)

Grants: Animating the Medieval Book; 2017; Leverhulme Trust; £13375; 2016-AIR-095; Philip Leverhulme Prize; 2011; Leverhulme Trust; £70,000; ISSF-funded research seminar series, *Fluid Physicalities*; 2017; £2500; SEE PER seed corn funding *exhibition costs & booklet*; 2017; £2500

4. Details of the impact:

The Jewish Museum London is recognised by the Arts Council as an important museum 'of strategic significance nationally'¹.

In 2013, Bale and Feldman were approached by the museum to provide advice and expertise on ideas for exhibitions to tackle antisemitism, exploring its history and contemporary prevalence, and to transform public debate about 21st century Jewish culture. Two universal themes were selected, blood and money, resulting in the hugely successful exhibitions *Blood: Uniting & Dividing* (between 05/11/ 2015 and 28/02/2016)³ and the award-winning *Jews, Money, Myth* - originally scheduled between 19/03/2019 and 17/07/2019, but extended to 17/10/2019 'due to popular demand'⁴.

Blood and *Jews, Money, Myth* stand apart in the museum's programmes as thought piece exhibitions which dealt bravely with complex and uncomfortable subjects, both developed for adult audiences, and both framed around big ideas.

The ambition behind *Blood* led to significant rewards for the Jewish Museum London. It generated unprecedented critical acclaim with extensive positive coverage in national and international media including *The New Statesman*, *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *Financial Times*, *The Lancet*, *Jewish News*, the Italian magazine *Cultura* and Danish newspaper *Kristeligt Dagblad* (which featured an interview with Bale). It inspired discussions on Radio 3's *Free Thinking* programme, and Radio 4's *Saturday Review* programme.^{6a} David Aaronovitch, in a double-page review in *The Times*, focused on the deep truth the exhibition offered to our society, that ultimately 'all of us have much the same

blood and that very little actually divides us biologically or deterministically from each other. ... It's not often an exhibition in a smallish museum makes such a big point.'^{6b}. *Blood* attracted over 11,000 people and sold over 600 exhibition booklets, generating thousands of pounds in revenue for the museum^{6c}. In a highly innovative approach to public engagement, the NHS used the exhibition to attract new blood donors; a task of critical importance with donors having fallen by 40 per cent in the previous decade. This was the first time the NHS had set up a mobile unit as part of a museum exhibition^{6d} and was a huge success with up to 60 people registering as donors^{6e}. The NHS now has a website where organisations can request a blood donation point at their event - [Blood donor events - NHS Blood Donation](#).

The success of the exhibition led to its adaptation for the Galicia Jewish Museum, Krakow (exhibited between 15/05/18 and 31/10/18) and POLIN Museum for the History of Polish Jews, European Museum of the Year in 2016, where it ran between 12/10/17 and 29/01/18.

For POLIN, the exhibition was a new departure, being its first devoted to a subject that is universal and simultaneously deeply rooted in Jewish tradition and rituals. As in London, the exhibition at POLIN was hugely successful, seen by almost 45,000 people (smashing the target of 25,000), making it the most popular temporary exhibition in the Museum's history and attracting almost twice as many visitors as the second-most popular show in the period 2016-18. More than 3,800 people took part in concerts, film screenings, workshops for children and adults, lectures and 250 tours guided by curators. It was covered in 628 media pieces, with the advertising value equivalent of this reporting calculated to be ~£1.1 million (or GBP1,000,000)^{7b}. The Jewish Museum London and POLIN commissioned new work from prominent contemporary artists, Tom Piper and Alan Farlie, Bogna Burska, Dorota Buczkowska and Eliza Proszczuk, creating work and increasing exposure for both museums and artists. The POLIN exhibition featured the first showing of Anish Kapoor's work in Poland^{7c}. Bale spoke about his work with the Jewish Museum London at a conference for museum professionals, "Museums and their Publics at Sites of Conflicted History", held at POLIN before the exhibition ([Museums and Their Publics at Sites of Conflicted History](#)).

Blood similarly achieved critical success for the Galicia Jewish Museum and significantly enhanced the museum's international reputation. In order to host the exhibition, staff developed essential new skills that hugely improved the capacity of the Museum. It was the first time they had taken on an exhibition featuring items over several hundred years and with such an international spread. This required cooperation with individuals and institutions across Poland and Europe, a logistical and financial challenge.. 'We needed to learn a lot about displaying, taking care of, transporting and generally handling rare historical items.' The exhibition 'was important in terms of proving that we can handle complex, object-based exhibitions.' It was the most successful travelling exhibition they had ever hosted, with very positive reactions from the more than 30,000 visitors. It resulted in an increase in social media engagement, and enhanced their technique, experience, network and reputation.⁸

Blood's tour in Poland was an important outcome for the Jewish Museum London, 'garnering attention from the international Jewish museum community and generating confidence from funders and stakeholders'⁵. Its success was consolidated with *Jews, Money, Myth*, deemed by the Jewish Museum's director, Abigail Morris, as the exhibition which 'best exemplified' the museum's 'philosophy'². This also featured an ambitious artwork programme, with new commissioned pieces by Doug Fishbone and Turner-prize winner Jeremy Deller, installations by Roe Rosen and Ryan Gander, alongside loans from Israel, Europe and North America and a rare appearance of Rembrandt's first masterpiece *Judas Returning the Thirty Pieces of Silver* (1629), lent from a private collection.

Jews, Money, Myth attracted approximately 22,000 people and was of sufficient importance to be covered in major global publications including the *New York Times*, *New York Review of Books*, *Die Welt*, and *The Times of Israel*, in addition to national media such as *The Times* and *The Guardian* and in specialist press (e.g. *The Art Review*)^{9a}. It 'reached 290 million people through press and media'² and numerous comments in the visitor book attest to its international appeal Daniel Finkelstein praised the expert job it performed in 'weaving together modern political attacks with ancient prejudices, showing how the latter give rise to the former', helping make sense of the simultaneous existence of antisemitism on both the

far right and the far left. 'Over the past year I have had many friends asking me to explain to them the origins of antisemitic prejudice and, in particular, how it could have spread to the left. The next time I'm asked I will recommend a visit to *Jews, Money, Myth*'^{9c}. There is interest in the London show from museums in Brussels, Amsterdam, New York, Krakow, Warsaw and Sydney. Described by the judges as 'brave, fascinating and timely', it won the prestigious Museums Association Museums Change Lives award 2019.

At the point when these two exhibitions were initially planned, no-one could have anticipated the renewed contemporary relevance that the issue of antisemitism would have by the time they were shown. Whilst the timing was completely serendipitous, both *Blood* and *Jews, Money, Myth* had a profound but positive impact on the tens of thousands of visitors at a time of rising antisemitism.

On the basis of the responses to these exhibitions, Birkbeck developed an educational short course on identifying and tackling anti-Semitism, 'Facing Antisemitism: Politics, History Culture'. The Labour Party was the first major institution to sign up. The TUC also enrolled select staff on the course, The TUC, with support from Birkbeck, has developed its own materials informed by the course which it will roll out to members.¹⁰ Furthermore, Bale and Feldman were invited to contribute to the Runnymede Trust's *Our Migration Story* project, with Bale contributing a piece about the poetry and life of a medieval Jewish poet, Meir of Norwich. *Our Migration Story* won The Royal Historical Society Public History Prize for Online Resources in 2018 and The Guardian University Award 2019 for Research Impact^{11a}, and then informed discussions in Parliament^{11b}. Bale was also invited to contribute to an episode of Channel 4's hugely successful "Britain's Most Historic Towns" which considered medieval antisemitism in Lincoln (recorded 03/20; shown 11/20)^{11c}.

Overall, for Morris, 'We have transformed the Museum and have become recognised for our outstanding, award-winning exhibitions and education programmes'¹.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Article in the Jewish Chronicle, by Rosa Doherty, 11 February 2020.
2. Article in the Jewish Chronicle by Abigail Morris, 21 May 2020.
3. Exhibition website <https://jewishmuseum.org.uk/exhibitions/blood-uniting-and-dividing/>
4. Exhibition website <https://jewishmuseum.org.uk/exhibitions/jews-money-myth/>
5. Written statement.
- 6a. Media coverage in the outlets listed.
- 6b. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/thicker-than-water-a-bloody-good-show>
- 6c. Wellcome/ISSF funding application for Fluid Physicalities.
- 6d. <https://www.ft.com/content>
- 6e. Written statement.
- 6f. Visitor book comments.
- 7a. Blood curator interview (Dr Małgorzata Stolarska-Fronia) <http://www.polin.pl/en/news/>
- 7b. Email AVE was PLN5,166,000, based on an exchange rate of 1:4.7 on 20/10/17.
- 7c. <https://www.polin.pl/en/event/blood-uniting-dividing-a-temporary-exhibition>
8. Written statement,.
- 9a. Media coverage in the outlets listed.
- 9b. Visitor book comments.
- 9c. [Next time I'm asked how antisemitism started, I'll say 'go to this exhibition'](#)
- 9d. [museums-change-lives-awards-2019](#)
10. Birkbeck records; course information at [Facing Antisemitism: Politics, Culture, History](#).
- 11a. <https://www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk/about/credits-and-awards.html>
- 11b. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-06-8/debates/HistoryCurriculumMigration>
- 11c. [Britain's Most Historic Towns - On Demand - All 4 \(channel4.com\)](#)