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Review of The Butcher's Tale: Murder and Anti-semitism in a German Town

Michael F. Russo

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College, mrusso1@lsu.edu

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LJ Review Cover Sheet and Survey

Your name: Michael F. Russo

Your affiliation: Louisiana State University Libraries—Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Phone: (225) 578-6823

E-mail address: mrusso1@lsu.edu

Title of the book: *The Butcher's Tale: Murder and Anti-Semitism in a German Town*

Author or editor of the book: Helmut Walser Smith

This book is recommended for: public & academic libraries

Comments for your editor:

Review

Author: Helmut Walser Smith

Title: *The Butcher's Tale: Murder and Anti-Semitism in a German Town*

Publisher: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

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For a world struggling toward civilization, the invocation of “ritual murder” seems an echo of a distant, barbaric past, the stuff of ancient 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 acquire Christian blood for the Passover matzo. Remarkable in this pre-Hitlerian Germany is the fact that the government actually protected Konitz's Jews from the angry rioters and refused to entertain the absurd idea of ritual murder.

Painstakingly, Smith has 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 both public and academic libraries.

Michael F. Russo

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