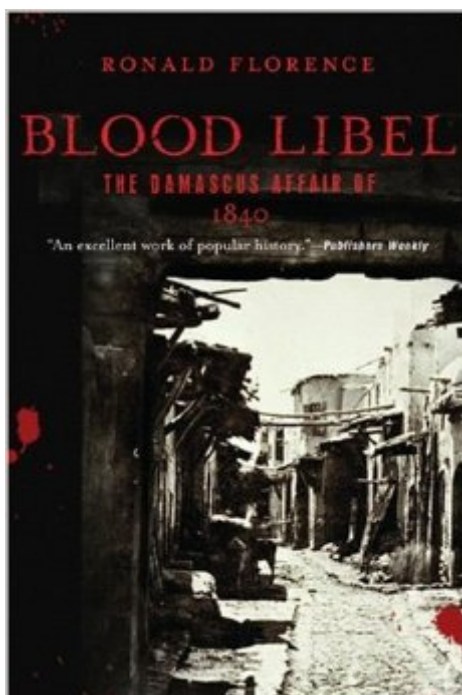


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Blood Libel: The Damascus Affair Of 1840



Synopsis

"This is great material, and Florence handles it with dramatic flair. An excellent work of popular history." Publishers Weekly, February 18, 2006. A Capuchin monk and his servant disappear without a trace. By the end of the day, rumors point to the Jewish community, a tiny minority in the city's rich but delicate balance of religions and ethnicities. Within weeks, the rumors turn to accusations of ritual murder, the infamous "blood libel." Fiendish tortures in the pasha's dungeons, coerced confessions, manufactured evidence, and the fury of the crowds are enough to convict the accused Jews. By the time the rest of the world learns of the events in Damascus, the entire leadership of the Jewish community is awaiting execution. Narrating with a novelist's skill, Ronald Florence recounts the unexpected twists of the story and the strange alliances forged by mutual fears and misperceptions as the Damascus affair became a worldwide cause; the Moslem majority were not the accusers of the Jews; the French consul, representative of the nation that had first recognized Jews as citizens, was the chief prosecutor; the Sultan defended the accused Jews; the liberal London Times considered whether the accusations might be true. The legacies of the growing rift among the minorities, the dominant Arab society, and the outside world are the divisions in the Middle East today and the myths that continue to feed and sustain anti-Semitism. Blood Libel is a gripping historical narrative that explores the fragile social fabric of a society as it stretches and ultimately rips into shreds of hatred and fear.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

On Thursday, February 6, 1840, Capuchin Father Thomas and his servant were reported missing to

the French consulate in Damascus, Syria. Immediate rumor was that Father Thomas was last seen in the Jewish quarter. Crowds chanted "The Jews sacrificed the Father." Within two days, the Chief of Police and a detachment of soldiers and police informed the Jews they were under suspicion, searched and ransacked the Jewish quarter, and dug-up graves. A Muslim prisoner, Sa'id-Muhammad-al-Talli was released on condition he help the authorities find the missing monk. The next day, al-Talli, with soldiers and police, arrested four Jews. Sherif Pasha, Governor of Syria, and adopted son of Muhammad Ali, Viceroy of Egypt, summoned the chief Rabbi, telling him "It is obvious to me that you killed him [Father Thomas] to take his blood and that's your custom." To the contrary, a Jewish witness, Isaac Yavo, claimed he saw the Father and his servant exit the city at the same time he was alleged to have disappeared in the Jewish section. The French consul Ratti-Menton took special interest in the case because Father Thomas was a French protégé. When Jewish leaders came to the Consulate to negotiate, Ratti-Menton decided to interrogate one of the delegates, Solomon al-Hollag. After three days without a "confession," Ratti-Menton turned al-Hollag over to local authorities "who undoubtedly can employ more numerous and decisive methods of investigation than any foreign agent." After being tortured, al-Hollag "confessed" he saw the Father killed and his blood collected, at the house of David Harari. More arrests were made. Isaac Yavo, the witness who saw the monk leave the city, was next interrogated. When he didn't confess after three days, he was flogged until he did.

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