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Philoumenos of Jacob's Well: The Birth of a Contemporary Ritual Murder Narrative

ABSTRACT

In 1979, the Orthodox monk Philoumenos Hasapis was violently murdered in Jacob's Well Church in Nablus. His death was described as a ritual murder performed by a fanatical Jewish-Israeli group. Philoumenos was later sanctified by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. The story gained publicity among Orthodox Christian communities around the world and was accredited by various NGOs and scholars. However, the factual basis of the event dismissed any ritualistic motives or collective accusations for the murder. The development patterns of the popular narrative are assessed against the backdrop of similar accusations levied against medieval Jewish communities in Europe, as well as contemporary framing of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in the media. The conclusions suggest reasons for the wide publicity that the narrative received, based on the cultural context of its target audience, the interests of the Orthodox Church, and the role of political actors involved.

INTRODUCTION

RITUAL MURDER ACCUSATIONS AGAINST JEWS HAVE SPREAD THROUGH Europe since the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. A prominent element in them was the allegation that Jews secretly performed religious rituals involving torture of innocent Christian victims, murder (sometimes by crucifixion), and use of their body parts. In the realm of the Orthodox Church—in Russia and the Ottoman Empire—ritual murder accusations were also widespread during the nineteenth century.¹ Nevertheless, in

modern times ritual murder libels were regarded mostly as superstitious by both religious and secular authorities.² The popular narrative that was developed after the death of Philoumenos Hasapis in 1979 appears to constitute a retreat to medieval ritual murder motifs. The account is widely accredited by the Orthodox Church, political NGOs, and even amongst the scholarly community today. The article traces the construction of this popular narrative, analyzes its distribution patterns, and aims to offer an explanation for its widespread publicity.

Philoumenos was murdered in the church of Jacob's Well, near the Palestinian city of Nablus. Since 1979, his veneration as a victim of a Jewish ritual murder gained popularity amongst Orthodox Christians. In 2009 he was canonized by the Greek Orthodox Church. The perception of Philoumenos' death as a ritual murder stands out in the accounts: Philoumenos was tortured, his eyes were gouged out, the fingers that he needed to perform the liturgy were deliberately amputated, he died after cross-form cuts were made on his body. According to these accounts, behind the murder was a conspiratory group of local Jews. The body was taken away by the Israeli authorities and returned only after several days. In the popular narrative, the Israeli authorities are portrayed as acting to conceal the identity of the killers or refusing to find them. The victim was said to perform miracles after his martyrdom that testify to his being a saint, similarly to martyrs who were believed to have been victims of Jewish ritual murders in the past.

The article explores the following questions: How does the popular narrative deviate from or match the factual basis of the events? How was the popular narrative of Philoumenos' martyrdom constructed? What factors contribute to its development and proliferation? It comprises four sections. The first provides biographical information about Philoumenos Hasapis and the timeline of his veneration. The second traces the development of the popular narrative. This section overviews the studied sources of the popular account; the analyzed samples in this paper were selected to provide an adequate representation of backgrounds (official religious sources, informal religious sources, general-orientation sources, and academic publications). The third section elaborates on the factual basis of the murder, and the criminal investigation that was conducted by the Israeli police. Our research identified gaps between the events that occurred vis-à-vis how these were presented in the popular narrative. Hence, the fourth section (the discussion) focuses on analysis of the patterns that are present in the popular narrative. We utilize the *framing theory* to establish the agenda of agents who contributed to the rephrasing of the popular materials.

The conclusion of this study is that the popular narrative was influenced by the perception of Jews that resonates with the medieval ritual murder accusations, as well as by the framing of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict among Western social movements. Additionally, current political interests of the Orthodox Church and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) might have contributed to the widespread proliferation of the popular narrative.

PHILOUMENOS, THE MARTYR OF JACOB'S WELL

The Greek Orthodox church of Jacob's Well is located on the outskirts of the Balata refugee camp in Nablus, Samaria (West Bank). The church is famous due to a well in its crypt that probably dates to the Roman period.³ The Samaritans believe that the well was purchased by Jacob the Patriarch, but Judaism does not attribute any religious significance to the site.⁴ The site is venerated today by Orthodox Christianity as the meeting place of Jesus with the Samaritan woman (John 4:5–7). The remains of the partially-built medieval church were restored in 1893 by the Greek Orthodox Church and a small monastery was added to the compound. According to a Palestinian source, recent renovations authorized by the PNA were conducted during the first decade of the present century.⁵

Philoumenos Hasapis originated from Orounta in Cyprus. At an early age he moved to the Holy Land. After he was admitted to the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre, he served in various positions in Greek Orthodox religious institutions. His last appointment was as archimandrite of Jacob's Well.⁶ In the afternoon of 29 November 1979, he was murdered by an outsider who infiltrated into the compound. Philoumenos was buried in Jerusalem in the Orthodox cemetery on Mt. Zion.

His violent death and the fact that circumstances of the murder remained unsolved for a long period gave Philoumenos, from the very start, the status of a church martyr and hence his titles of "Hiero-Martyr" (priest-martyr) and "Neo-Martyr" (new martyr).⁷ His hagiography (the written life of a saint) was composed in Cyprus by nuns of St. Nicholas Monastery.⁸ The quoted individuals from the Greek Orthodox Church of Jerusalem testified that four years after his burial, Philoumenos' remains were exhumed from the grave and were found by Patriarch Diodoros to be "producing a pleasant fragrance" and "the rest of the body was incorrupt".⁹ Thus began the veneration of the relics. Philoumenos has been the object of spontaneous prayers as well as special hymns. The Translation¹⁰ of his

relics to Jacob's Well was carried out during the inauguration ceremony of the renovated church on 30 August 2008.¹¹ The ceremony was performed under the auspices of the Jerusalem Patriarchate with an additional tribute to the PNA.¹²

In 2009, thirty years after his martyrdom, Philoumenos was sanctified by the Synod of Jerusalem's Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. The synodic decision describes the killer as a "heterodox fanatic visitor" and a "vile man", without referring to any ethnic or political identification.¹³ The Synod refers to the perpetrator as a single individual, who "with an axe, opened a deep cut across his forehead, cut off the fingers of his right hand, and upon escaping threw a grenade which ended the Father's life."¹⁴ Canonization added to Philoumenos' fame and led to the establishment of a Church feast that encouraged the veneration. His relics are used liturgically and also receive the honor of being sent to other locations. In May 2014 the Patriarchate of Jerusalem sent a relic to Cyprus, thus enabling more intensive worship in Philoumenos' homeland.¹⁵

Canonization and veneration enhanced the ties between Jerusalem's Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and the Cypriot Orthodox Church. In May 2014, a new church was inaugurated at the Holy Sepulcher Exarchy in Nicosia, after the prior Exarchy had become inactive forty years earlier. The new church was dedicated to Jesus' Ascension and to Saint Philoumenos. According to the official communiqué, "The entire work was completed with the approval of the Holy Archbishopric of Cyprus, in response to a relevant request by the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem."¹⁶ It also emphasized that the location of the Exarchy "lies at a short distance from the Holy Archbishopric of Cyprus". The inauguration ceremony was attended by high officials representing the Republic of Cyprus.¹⁷

THE POPULAR NARRATIVE OF PHILOUMENOS' MURDER

For visitors to the church in Nablus today, the figure of the saint takes a prime position next to the story of the Samaritan woman. A visitor is shown a *locus* where the remains of Saint Philoumenos are laid in a glass coffin. A big fresco depicts him in standing position, and another one, behind the coffin, shows a bearded man raising an axe above the reclining monk. The saint is also depicted in icons elsewhere in the church and in the crypt of the well where he was murdered. A brochure with the image of Philoumenos,

along with a description of his biography and martyrdom, is handed to the visitors at Jacob's Well (Fig. 1). The murder is attributed to "fanatic Jews who continue their attacks against the present Archimandrite, Fr. Ioustinus, and his Holy Shrine of pilgrimage."¹⁸ Similar icons and textile souvenirs are sold at the site.¹⁹

Cognate iconography is found in the Machairas Monastery in Cyprus. The painting depicts Philoumenos drawing water from the well while he is assaulted by an Ultra-Orthodox Jew who wears a typical hat, has *payot*, and a long beard (Fig. 2). The assaulter raises his axe to slay the monk. The visitor who discovered the painting in 2008, Daniela Schwartz, reported what she perceived to be an antisemitic representation to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs.²⁰ The Ministry was assured by Cypriot Church authorities that the painting will be altered and that the attributes of Jewish religious identification will be removed.²¹ However, during our visit on-site in October 2016, we witnessed the painting in its original location without any changes.²²

Panegyric liturgy dedicated to the new martyr was published in 2003.²³ The forty-five pages of prayers and hymns that glorify the saint are read on the eve and the day of the feast in honor of Philoumenos. The introduction to this liturgical booklet repeats the description of a murder committed by "Jewish Zionists".²⁴

The first account containing collective accusations can be traced shortly after the murder. In 1980, *Ma'ariv* reported a wave of hatred in Greece directed against Jews and Israel after the murder became known.²⁵ The widespread belief was that "radical Jews" tortured the monk and "even cut off the fingers of his hand" before committing the murder. An official in the Jerusalem Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, quoted in Greek newspapers, claimed that "the murder was carried out by radical religious Jews" because of "the way how he [Philoumenos] was murdered, the hatred, the passion, and the cruelty which accompanied the act." The official also added that a few months before the murder, Philoumenos was involved in an argument with radicals who claimed that "the well does not belong to Christians but to Jews". *Ma'ariv* reported that the Greek press published reports containing similar allegations.

We found the earliest detailed published description of the event as an act of ritual murder in 1989, in *Orthodox America*, a periodical of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia. The author, Yeghia Yenovkian, presents himself as a monk in the Paradise Monastery (Ellisville, MS) who knew Philoumenos personally from the time they both were serving in monastic institutions in the Holy Land. However, Yenovkian did not



Σκήνωμα Ὀσίου Φιλομένου
(εορτάζει 29 Νοεμβρίου)
Ἀπολυτικίον
Ἦχος πλ.α'
Τὸν συνάναρχον

Ὁρμηθεὶς ἐκ τῆς Κύπρου Σιών κατέλαβες τοῦ Ἰακώβ θεῷ φρέατι ἐμαρτύρησας, ἐκκοπήν
δακτύλων κάρας τε δεξιάνου. Σοῦ δὲ τὸ σκῆνωμα Χριστὸς ἀφθαρτήσας, δωρεῶν πλουσίαν εἰδείξαι
φρέαρ καὶ λαμάτων ποικιλίαν, Ἱερομάρτυς Φιλομένε.

Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ ΙΕΡΟΜΑΡΤΥΡΣ ΦΙΛΟΥΜΕΝΟΣ

ΤΟΥ ΦΡΕΑΤΟΣ ΤΟΥ ἸΑΚΩΒ

Ο Ἅγιος Φιλομένος (κατὰ κόσμον Σοφοκλῆς) γεννήθηκε στὴ Λευκωσία, στὶς 15 Ὀκτωβρίου 1913. Γονεὶς του ἦταν οἱ εὐσεβεῖς Γεώργιος καὶ Μαγδαληνή. Ἦταν δίδυμος ἀδελφός μὲ τὸν π. Ἐλπίδιο (κατὰ κόσμον Ἀλέξανδρος) καὶ ἀπὸ μικροὶ ξεχωρίζαν γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη ποὺ ἔχαν πρὸς τὸν Θεὸ καὶ γι' αὐτὸ ἀπὸ πολὺ νωρὶς ἀναψε μέσα τους ἡ ἐπιθυμία γιὰ τὴ μοναχικὴ ζωὴ. Τὸ 1927, σὲ ἡλικία μόλις 14 ἐτῶν ἀνεχώρησαν καὶ οἱ δύο γιὰ τὴν Ἱερά Μονὴ Σταυροβουίου, ἀφοῦ πῆραν τὴν εὐχὴ τοῦ πνευματικοῦ τους, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν εὐλαβῶν γονέων τους. Ἐκεῖ ἔμειναν 6 περίπου χρόνια, ὅταν ὁ Ἐξαρχος τοῦ Παναγίου Τάφου τοὺς πῆρε γιὰ νὰ φοιτήσουν στὸ Γυμνάσιο τοῦ Πατριαρχείου στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα, ὅπου βρέθηκαν τὸ 1934, μαθητὲς στὴν Σχολὴ τῆς Ἁγίας Σιών.

Τὸ 1937 ἐκάρησαν μοναχοὶ παίρνοντας ὁ Σοφοκλῆς τὸ ὄνομα Φιλομένος καὶ ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος τὸ ὄνομα Ἐλπίδιος. Στις 5 Σεπτεμβρίου τοῦ ἰδίου χρόνου χειροτονήθηκαν διάκονοι καὶ τὸ 1939 ἀποφοίτησαν ἀπὸ τὸ Γυμνάσιο τοῦ Πατριαρχείου. Ὁ π. Ἐλπίδιος ἐφυγε ἀπὸ τὴν Ἁγία Γῆ, ὑπηρετώντας σὲ ἄλλους τόπους. Ὁ Ἅγιος Φιλομένος παρέμεινε στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα γιὰ 45 συνεχῆ χρόνια, μέχρι τὸ μαρτύριό του. Τὸ 1943 χειροτονήθηκε πρεσβύτερος καὶ ἀφοῦ πέρασε ἀπὸ διάφορες διακονίες μέσα στὸ Πατριαρχεῖο καὶ διορίστηκε σὲ διάφορες θέσεις ὑπηρετώντας πάντοτε μὲ εὐθύνῃ καὶ φόβῳ Θεοῦ καὶ μὲ πολλὴ ἀγάπη πρὸς τοὺς ἁγιοταφιτες πατέρες, στὶς 8 Μαΐου τοῦ 1979 μετατέθηκε στὸ Φρέαρ τοῦ Ἰακώβ, ὅπου ὑπηρέτησε μέχρι τὸ μαρτυρικὸ του θάνατο, στὶς 29 Νοεμβρίου τοῦ ἰδίου ἐτους. Ἐκεῖ ὅμως, ἀντιμέτωπος πολλὰ προβλήματα ἀπὸ φανατικούς Ἑβραίους ποὺ συνέχισαν τὸν ἀπειλοῦσαν διὰ τὸν ἔχειν ἐγκαταλεῖπει τὸ Φρέαρ καὶ πάρει τίς εἰκόνας καὶ τὸν Ἐσταυρωμένο νὰ φύγει, θὰ τὸν σκοτώσουν. Ἐκεῖνος ὅμως ἀπαντοῦσε διὰ τὸν Θεὸν ἐγκαταλεῖπει ποτέ τὸ προσκύνημα, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὴν ἔτοιμος ἀκόμα καὶ νὰ μαρτυρήσει, ὡς πιστὸς φύλακας αὐτοῦ. Τὸ ἀπόγευμα τῆς 29ης Νοεμβρίου τοῦ 1979, ἡμέρα τῆς μνήμης τοῦ Ἁγ. μάρτυρος Φιλομένου, φανατικοὶ Ἑβραῖοι μῆκαν στὸ χῶρο τοῦ Φρεάτος τοῦ Ἰακώβ καὶ ἐνῶ ὁ Ἅγιος τελοῦσε τὸν Ἑσπερινό, τοῦ ἐπέτεθηκαν μὲ τεσκούρι, τὸν κακοποίησαν καὶ τέλος τὸν σκότωσαν. Τὸ μαρτυριὸ του ἦταν φρικτὸ, γιατί οἱ δῆμιοὶ τοῦ τὸν χτύπησαν ἀλύπητα στὸ πρόσωπο καὶ τοῦ ἔκοψαν τὰ δάχτυλα τοῦ δεξιοῦ του χερσιοῦ. Στὴ συνέχεια βεβήλησαν τὴν Ἐκκλησία καὶ τὸ Σταυρὸ καὶ ἔριξαν μίαν χειροβομβίδα καταστρέφοντας τὸν χῶρο.

Εἶναι συγκλονιστικὴ ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ π. Σωφρονίου ποὺ παρέλαβε τὸ τιμὸ λείψανό τοῦ μάρτυρα γιὰ νὰ τὸ ντύσει καὶ νὰ τὸ ἐτοιμάσει γιὰ τὴν ταφή, διὰ παρέμεινε 5 μέρες μετὰ τὸ μαρτύριό του ζεστό καὶ εὐκαμπτο καὶ "βοήθησε" τὸ Γέροντα Σωφρόνιο γιὰ νὰ τὸν ντύσει. Συγκλονιστικὴ εἶναι ἐπίσης ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ κατὰ δάκρυ ἀδελφοῦ τοῦ π. Ἐλπίδιου, ποὺ ἂν καὶ μίλια μακριά, ἄκουσε τὴ φωνὴ τοῦ π. Φιλομένου νὰ τοῦ λέγει "Ἀδελφέ μου μὲ σκοτώνουν πρὸς δόξαν Θεοῦ. Σὲ παρακαλῶ μὴν ἀνακατήσεις".

Ἡ Ἐκκλησία τὸν τιμᾷ ὡς ἅγιο στὶς 29 Νοεμβρίου καὶ τὸ εὐωδιάζον καὶ θαυματουργὸ σκῆνωμά του βρίσκεται ἐντὸς τοῦ νέου τρισυποστατοῦ μεγαλοπρεποῦς ἱεροῦ ναοῦ ποὺ χτίστηκε στὸ Φρέαρ τοῦ Ἰακώβ, ἐπ' ὀνόματι τῆς Ἁγίας Φωτεινῆς τῆς Σαμαρειτίδος, τοῦ Ἁγίου Φιλομένου καὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἰουστίνου. Κτίτηρ τοῦ νέου αὐτοῦ ναοῦ εἶναι ὁ Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος π. Ἰουστίνος, στὸν ὅποιο ὁ Ἅγιος Φιλομένος ἐμφανίζεται συχνὰ καὶ τὸν προστατεύει ἀπὸ τίς ἐπιθέσεις τῶν φανατικῶν Ἑβραίων ποὺ συνεχίζονται ἐναντίον τοῦ π. Ἰουστίνου καὶ τοῦ Ἱεροῦ Προσκυνηματος. Χιλιάδες ὀρθόδοξοι καταφθάνουν κατ' ἔτος γιὰ νὰ προσκυνήσουν τὸ Ἱερὸ λείψανό του στὸ Φρέαρ τοῦ Ἰακώβ, στὴ Σαμαρεία.

Ἐλλογία π. Φιλομένου Κοσμαδάκη

Fig. 1: Informative brochure on St. Philoumenos that visitors receive at Jacob's Well Church.



Fig. 2: Machairas Monastery (Cyprus), a painting of Philoumenos' martyrdom as photographed in 2008. Above in Greek reads: "Jacob's Well St. Philoumenos," at the bottom reads: "The Martyrdom of St. Philoumenos of Cyprus."

Courtesy of Daniela Schwarz, Tel-Aviv

witness the murder, as he was already in the US.²⁶ According to his account, the murder was committed by "Jewish terrorists" (or "fanatical Zionists"), "satanically-inspired tormentors" who tortured their victim. The following exert describes the martyrdom:

The week before, a group of fanatical Zionists came to the monastery at Jacob's Well, claiming it as a Jewish holy place and demanding that all crosses and icons be removed. Of course, our father pointed out that the floor upon which they were standing had been built by Emperor Constantine before 331 A.D. and had served as an Orthodox Christian holy place for sixteen centuries before the Israeli State was created, and had been in Samaritan hands eight centuries before that. (The rest of the original church had been destroyed by the invasion of the Shah Khosran Parvis in the seventh century, at which time the Jews had massacred all the Christians of Jerusalem). The group left with threats, insults and obscenities of the kind which local Christians suffer

regularly. After a few days, on November 16/29, during a torrential downpour, a group broke into the monastery; the saint had already put on his epitrachelion for Vespers. The piecemeal chopping of the three fingers with which he made the Sign of the Cross showed that he was tortured in an attempt to make him deny his Orthodox Christian Faith. His face was cloven in the form of the Cross. The church and holy things were all defiled. No one was ever arrested.²⁷

Yenovkian speculated that the Jerusalem Greek Orthodox Patriarchate refrained from canonizing Philoumenos, presuming that such an act would “provoke further violence”. He urged the Church of Cyprus “to begin public glorification of its son until such time as pressures are removed from the Patriarchate of Jerusalem.”²⁸

To all appearances, Yenovkian’s account became the basis for later variations of the popular narrative in the Orthodox realm. For instance, *The Church Messenger*, the periodical of the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese, reprinted portions of Yenovkian’s account in an article by Rev. Fr. Edward Pehanich in 2008.²⁹ Although this source cites Yenovkian on Philoumenos’ early life, the details of his martyrdom are published as Pehanich’s own sermon. His narration mentions prior confrontations over custody of the holy site, and continues by blaming “fanatical Zionists” for the murder, who made the cross-form cuts and deliberately amputated the victim’s sign of the cross fingers. The article also states that no one was arrested. Evidently, it is a shortened version of Yenovkian’s description.

It seems that the canonization of Philoumenos in 2009 brought his martyrdom into the limelight of the Orthodox Church worldwide. Notes on his martyrdom have been published frequently by sources connected to the Church. We established that the basis for these descriptions is Yenovkian’s account, which was enriched by additional details, usually of an unidentified origin. For example, a formulation almost identical to Yenovkian’s was published by the Orthodox Metropolitanate of Singapore and South Asia as well as on a website of the Vatopaidi Monastery of Mt. Athos.³⁰ A new motif appears in these descriptions: the body of the victim was handed back to the Orthodox community six days after the murder. No information is provided as to what happened to the body during those six days. On the other hand, the accusation that no suspect was arrested is omitted in this account. The Metropolitanate refers to a Cypriot church magazine from 2012 as its source.³¹ The Russian Orthodox website “Pravoslaviie”, employing a very similar formulation, stated that Philoumenos was murdered by “two Jews”.³²

Further developments of the popular narrative are traced in Orthodox-Wiki—a web-based comprehensive encyclopedia of Orthodox Christianity administrated by individuals affiliated with the Orthodox Church.³³ OrthodoxWiki collectively accuses “extremist Jewish Zionists” and “fanatical Zionists”. This description seems to be an enhancement of Yenovkian’s account, though no reference is provided to Yenovkian in the paragraphs describing the martyrdom. A “dead-link” to the former website “All Saints of North America Russian Orthodox Church” is cited as a source for this entry.

*They burst into the monastery and with a hatchet butchered Archimandrite Philoumenos in the form of a cross. With one vertical stroke they clove his face, with another horizontal stroke they cut his cheeks as far as his ears. His eyes were plucked out. The fingers of his right hand were cut into pieces and its thumb was hacked off. These were the fingers with which he made the sign of the Cross. The murderers were not content with the butchering of the innocent monk, but proceeded to desecrate the church as well. A crucifix was destroyed, the sacred vessels were scattered and defiled, and the church was in general subjected to sacrilege of the most appalling type.*³⁴

Furthermore, some sources outwardly describe Philoumenos’ martyrdom as an example of a continuous custom of Jews to commit ritual murders of Christians. A Belorussian Orthodox website in the Russian language, “Odigitria”, provides a narration that fits this context. Its formulation uses the anti-Semitic derogatory term “Zhids” (Жи́ды) for the Jews when making the collective accusation. This description is based on Yenovkian’s account with several supplements. Even though this source states that the murderer was found to be insane, the epilogue of the narrative includes a statement of classic anti-Semitic nature:

We remind that the Russian Orthodox Church has two saints, venerated as “martyred by the Zhids”: the monk martyr Evstratiy of Kiev-Pechersk and the infant Gabriel of Belostok. The martyr Evstratiy lived in the eleventh century in Kiev. When in 1096 the Cumans attacked and ravaged Pechersky Monastery in Kiev, exterminating many of the monks, the monk Evstratiy was captured, and with thirty monastic workers and twenty habitants of Kiev was sold into slavery to a Jew, who crucified him on a cross. The holy infant Gabriel was ritually murdered by Jews on 20 April 1690. His body side was pierced to discharge the blood, then the infant martyr was crucified.³⁵

Influence of the popular narrative was also found in the official synodic decision of the Russian Orthodox Church.³⁶ After hearing a report and examining the canonization by the Jerusalem Patriarchate, Moscow's Synod resolved to reiterate the canonization of Philoumenos. However, Moscow's decision has an additional detail that does not appear in the Jerusalem synodic text: collective accusation of "fanatics of other faith" for the murder. This difference can be explained if Moscow's Synod was influenced by unofficial sources that narrate the popular narrative.

The popular narrative is not confined to religious sources. Descriptions that are consistent with the popular narrative appear in many general-orientation sources. For instance, Wikipedia's entry "Jacob's Well" contained similar collective accusations until it was altered in January 2012. The event was presented as an outcome of the geopolitical situation in the West Bank:

Since the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Jacob's Well has been a site of contention between Christians and Jews. In November 1979, a week after a Zionist group came to the monastery claiming it as a Jewish holy place and demanding that all religious iconography be removed, the custodian of the well, Archimandrite Philoumenos, was found hatched to death inside the crypt housing the well. No one was ever arrested for the murder.³⁷

Similar accusations were found in Wikipedia's entry "Philoumenos (Hasapis) of Jacob's Well":

Over a couple of weeks the local Jewish settlers had been coming to pray there and demanded that Christian symbols be removed. Philoumenos complied. Despite this, the settlers threatened him. After his guard left home, Philoumenos was hacked to death with axes by Jewish Zionists, while serving Vespers on November 29, 1979. A grenade was also thrown into the church, which was ransacked. The police confirmed the cause of the death, but declined to seek the perpetrators.³⁸

As its source, this Wikipedia entry cites Pehanich's article and a Reuters report dated to 2006.³⁹ Previously altered earlier versions of the entry contained references to Yenovkian's account. To a newer version, it was added that "according to Rupert Shortt, a religion editor of the Times Literary Supplement, Philoumenos eyes were gouged out, and the fingers of his right hand were hacked off."⁴⁰

The geopolitical situation in the West Bank, as well as accusations against settlers in the popular narrative, contributed to construction of a link between the murder and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. A Christian community in Syria website reported that Philoumenos was killed by “a mob of Jewish Israeli extremists”.⁴¹ Furthermore, it emphasized that Philoumenos’ Saint Day, 29 November, is “coinciding with UN International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.”⁴² In another source, Maria Khoury, a Christian Orthodox resident of Taibeh in the West Bank, stressed that Philoumenos “was tortured by Israeli settlers” in her essay that criticizes the Israeli security restrictions.⁴³

In a similar context, this popular narrative seems to be utilized in public anti-Israeli campaigns led by foreign groups of activists. For instance, the newsletter of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions published detailed coverage of the solidarity visit of the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) delegation to the West Bank in 2011. Philoumenos’ murder is presented as an attempt of “Zionist settlers” to “cleanse” the Christian presence from the region:

The church is spectacular with exquisite iconography. I noticed it had a tomb for a martyr—Archimandrite Philoumenos Hasapis. I asked which century he had been martyred in. “This one” was the short answer. He had been murdered with an axe in a “ritualistic” manner on 16 November 1979 by Zionist settlers who wanted to cleanse the area of any trace of Christianity. Murdered whilst performing vespers, his eyes were plucked out and three of his fingers were cut off—the ones with which he made the sign of the Cross. The attacker was believed to be an American. He was not arrested but merely deported back to America.⁴⁴

Blame was put on the Israeli authorities in Philoumenos’ hagiography, which was composed in Cyprus. In that document, the Israelis are said to have attempted to attack the church with “Jewish tanks” in 2005, but the shells landed without exploding thanks to the intervention of the saint.⁴⁵

The events of the geopolitical situation in the West Bank, supplemented by anti-globalization themes, created an ethos which praises Philoumenos as a heroic symbol of struggle by Greek and Cypriot nationalist movements. The website named after him (www.filoumenos.com) advocates various conspiracy theories relating to Israel and the US, and urges establishment of a “new order”. It is also a homepage for diverse anti-Semitic posts.⁴⁶ The website’s design contains a drawing of the martyr in the upper part of

each page, and an explanation that Philoumenos was ritually murdered by Zionists.⁴⁷

We identified instances of the popular narrative in at least two scholarly publications. The first is *Encyclopedia of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*.⁴⁸ Its editorial advisory board consists of academics from the US and Israel. The entry “Holy Sites in Palestine” includes a collective accusation in the murder (“radical rabbi settler and his followers”). The style and the content of the passage reveal similarities to Yenovkian’s account, including the same chronological storyline, similar content of a dispute between Philoumenos and the alleged attackers, as well as the usage of few identical formulations originating from Yenovkian’s article (emphasis added):

In November 1979 a priest and caretaker of the site, the Archimandrite Father Philoumenos, was murdered in the well chamber. Earlier that month, a radical rabbi settler and his followers came to the monastery and demanded that *the crosses and icons* be taken down, claiming the site belonged to the Jews. They shouted *threats* and blasphemies, but Philoumenos explained that the church had for many years been a sacred Orthodox place. A week later the extremists came back and tortured and killed the priest and desecrated the church. *No one was ever arrested* or tried for the crimes.⁴⁹

The author of the entry failed to approach the discussion with the neutrality required of academic research.⁵⁰

Another instance of uncritical usage of the popular narrative in a scholarly work was found in the monograph on contemporary anti-Christian movements by Rupert Shortt. The author regards it as the authentic description of the 1979 events:

Settlers are violent towards Christians and others from time to time . . . In November 1979, as yet unidentified fanatics murdered Fr Philoumenos Hasapis, an Orthodox monk, at St Photini’s Monastery beside Jacob’s Well at Nablus . . . The killers had already warned Fr Philoumenos to remove Christian symbols from the well, claiming that their presence made it impossible for Jews to pray there. When he refused, they gouged his eyes out and hacked off the fingers of this right hand—the one he used to make the sign of the cross—before ending his life. The current custodian, a veteran of several attacks already, has prepared his tomb for what he senses may be a sudden death.⁵¹

FACTUAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF PHILOUMENOS' DEATH

We established the factual basis of the events based on classified Police files to which we were granted limited access in the course of our research.⁵² In addition, we studied Israeli daily newspapers that reported the investigation between 1979 and 1982. The importance of the daily press for our analysis is that these reports constitute a source that was available to the public during the initial stage, when the popular narrative was being developed.

The Israeli authorities launched a serious investigation immediately after the murder. On 4 December 1979, *Ha'aretz* reported that the police arrested eighteen suspects, and eight were still kept in remand.⁵³ It also noted that an analysis performed by the Abu-Kabir Forensic Institute concluded that the victim was murdered, that he was struck with a dark-colored artifact, and was stabbed in different parts of his body. A hand-grenade was also found at the scene.

According to the daily press, a major development in the investigation occurred only in 1982, when an individual, who was arrested by the Israeli police, confessed to committing the murder.⁵⁴ *Ma'ariv* informed that the individual is Asher Raby, aged 37, a resident of Tel-Aviv and not of the West Bank.⁵⁵ A biographic profile of Raby, which can be assembled from descriptions in the press, indicates a mentally ill person: he wore worn-out clothes, neglected his personal hygiene, and whispered passages from the Scriptures in a weird way.⁵⁶ He acted alone, and had never been a member of any religious institution or group. He was arrested on 17 November 1982, when he once again tried to climb over the external fence of the Jacob's Well compound.⁵⁷ Raby claimed that he was ordered by Divine decree to expel the evil from a Jewish holy site.⁵⁸ The court sent him to a psychiatric clinic for observation.⁵⁹

According to the press, Raby admitted committing other murders and murder attempts.⁶⁰ As a serial killer, he employed comparable techniques to attack his victims: the assaults were carried out with an axe, he used hand-grenades that he stole from the IDF. In March 1979, Raby murdered a Jewish gynecologist in Tel-Aviv. The next month, he murdered the family of a clairvoyant woman at the Israeli town of Lod.⁶¹ He also assaulted a nun at Jacob's Well in April 1982. Raby provided the detectives with accurate data of his criminal acts. These details correlated with the findings at the scene of the murder.⁶²

The information recorded in the police files confirms the above details. The police launched an investigation immediately after the murder. Amongst the questioned individuals were the Palestinian guard of the

church (a resident of Balata refugee camp), officials in the Greek Orthodox Church of the Holy Land, and an Israeli Arab who witnessed an argument between the monk and “an observant Jewish person” a short time before the murder. Police detectives concluded that the destruction in the church was caused by the explosion of a hand-grenade that also devastated the holy artifacts. After throwing a hand-grenade and seeing Philoumenos fleeing the church alive, the perpetrator attacked the monk with an axe, causing his death. A single finger of each of the victim's hands was found detached from the body. The investigation concluded that the monk tried to protect his face with his hands and thus the fingers were cut off. This is confirmed by several photographs taken at the scene of the murder that are deposited in the files.

Police records confirm that the identity of the murderer was established only in 1982.⁶³ In both attacks at Jacob's Well (1979 and 1982) he used hand-grenades, acted alone, and had no contact with any organization or political group. During his questioning, the murderer gave a detailed description of the unnatural experiences he had “seen” and “heard”, probably hallucinations that stimulated his actions. A psychiatrist determined that he was suffering from a mental disorder, concurrent with family members' testimonies as recorded in the police investigation interviews. He was found mentally incompetent to stand trial, and was hospitalized in a psychiatric hospital in late 1982.⁶⁴ We obtained an official statement from the Investigation Department of the Israeli police (Fig. 3).

DISCUSSION

The popular narrative that gained publicity differs significantly from the factual basis of the events. In the following part, we will first explore the gaps between the factual circumstances of Philoumenos' death vis-à-vis their narration in popular sources. Then we will analyze the major factors that contributed to the existence of such differences, and the reason for them.

PATTERNS OF A RITUAL MURDER ACCUSATION IN THE POPULAR NARRATIVES

We discovered contradictions when comparing various Orthodox popular narrations, which are found in unofficial⁶⁵ and semi-official sources,⁶⁶ with the official synodic decision of the Jerusalem Patriarchate⁶⁷ that canonized Philoumenos. The Patriarchate's publication is short and is careful not to identify the attacker with a particular ethnic or religious group. The attacker

1



משטרת ישראל
האגף לחקירות ולמודיעין
חטיבת החקירות

27 דצמבר, 2011
סימוכין: פר/104/104763811

הגב' יסכה הרני

הנדון: פנייתך לר"ח"ט חקירות בעניין סוגית פרסום מידע מתיק חקירה

1. בפנייתך לר"ח"ט חקירות מתבקשת עמדתנו לשאלת אפשרות פרסום של פרטים מתיק החקירה בעניין רצח הניזר פילומנוס הסאפיס בכנסיית באר יעקב בשכם.
2. לאחר עיון בבקשתך ובאתר הויקיפדיה, מצאנו כי קיים אינטרס ציבורי לאומי בפרסום פרטים מתיק החקירה, על מנת לתקן את המידע המסולף שמופיע באתרים חיצוניים שיש בו כדי לעודד פרסומים אנטי יהודיים ברחבי העולם.
3. עינתי ברשימת הנושאים שהנך מבקשת להתייחס אליהם בפרסום ומצאתי לנכון להציע לך לעשות שימוש בנוסח כדלקמן, על מנת למצוא את האיוון המתאים שבין האינטרס הלאומי בפרסום לבין האינטרסים המשטרתיים העומדים מגד:

"הניזר המנוח פילומנוס הסאפיס אכן מצא את מותו בנסיבות טרגיות ואכזריות בידי של רוצח אשר פרץ לכנסיית "באר יעקב". בעקבות חקירה מסועפת ומאומצת, בניגוד לפרסומים - נלכד הרוצח והחקירה העלתה כי הרוצח פעל לבד ולא השתייך לשום קבוצה אידיולוגית שעמדה מאחורי פעילותו הפלילית.

ממצאי הזירה העלו כי האופן שבו המנוח נרצח היה ברוטאלי, ומותו נגרם ממכות גרון שגרמו לפגיעות רביות בחלקי גופו השונים. אולם, חשוב להדגיש, כי המידע מתיק החקירה עצמו מפריך את הפרסומים בדבר סממנים אנטי נוצריים שיוחסו לאופן ביצוע הרצח, כגון: עקירת עיניים, מכות גרון בצורת צלב בפניו של המנוח וקטיעת האצבעות המסמלות את תנועת הברכה הנוצרית.

ביהמ"ש המחוזי שדן בתיק קבע כי הרוצח אינו כשיר לעמוד לדין פלילי עקב מצבו הנפשי ותנן בעניינו של הרוצח צו אישפוז במוסד לחולי נפש. "
4. נשמח לעמוד לרשותך לשאלות ובירורים נוספים.

בברכה,

רפ"ק יעל אהרונוביץ, עייד
קצינת מדור חקירות

העתקים:
ר"ח"ט חקירות
רמ"ד חקירות (3177)
רעני"ח מחוז ש"י

Fig. 3: Israeli Police statement to the authors on Philomenos' case dated 27 December 2011.

is described as an individual having a malicious nature (“vile man”, etc.). In fact, there is no hint in that document at any group of people. By contrast, the popular material is detailed, elaborates on the methods of torturing the victim, and, moreover, puts the blame on an identified collective—Jews or Zionists—said to be religious fanatics. In the popular narrative, a group planned and executed the murder; collective blaming is its salient motif. Accusation of Jews participating as a group, either in the alleged killing ritual or the cover-up, was a primary theme in medieval blood libels.⁶⁸

The brutality of the actual murder was not enough to delineate a ritual murder for some of the popular sources. Therefore, the popular narrative was enhanced in various ways in an attempt by its narrators to emphasize its desired message. One example is the claim that the three fingers of the victim's right hand were deliberately chopped off. The fact that a priest blesses his community with these three fingers is obvious to an Orthodox Christian believer, but is completely foreign to Jews. The photographs of the body taken at the scene of the crime show that “only” a single finger of each hand was missing. The popular narrative assumes that the alleged murderers were so well acquainted with Orthodox Christian practices that their real motive was to put an end to Christian worship in the most physical manner. Similarly, the cross-shape cuts are an embellishment added in the popular narrative aimed at emphasizing the torturing of the victim and putting the blame on allegedly Jewish religious customs. The fact that the body was taken away by the police for forensic examination for several days might have encouraged the rumors about ritual practices performed on the victim's flesh.

The worldwide proliferation of the popular narrative can partially be explained by Jacob's Well serving as a pilgrimage destination, which attracts Christian Orthodox pilgrims from distant countries. It is the many pilgrims that uncritically accept the popular story. Christian Orthodox groups from around the world are experiencing this New Testament site with its contemporary added value; martyrdom in the Christian tradition is synonymous with saintliness. The explanations for both the biblical memory and recent history are provided by the site's present authorities. In addition to the printed material (e.g., Fig. 1), the on-site oral interpretation may vary according to each tour guide, but in many cases those describe the death of Philoumenos as a ritual murder performed by a group of settlers (for instance, as was recorded by the NIPSA visit).

An important element in the Orthodox Christian experience is the belief in miracles, and his/her desire to hear the genre. It is a deep-rooted belief that a martyr's death makes a man holy.⁶⁹ Furthermore, his holiness

may be enhanced through his ability to work miracles. The reliability of the popular narrative seems to correspond with the following words of the article “Martyr” in the *Dictionary of Greek Orthodoxy* by Rev. Patrinos (emphasis added): “They [the martyrs’ stories] were often elaborated by legends of the invention of their pious biographers”.⁷⁰ The above observation, composed by an Orthodox clergyman, provides means to assess the credibility of the portrayed testimonies.

The miracles attributed to Philoumenos as a saint extend from the time he was still alive to right after his death. It was narrated that during his lifetime he had cured Athenian pilgrims in 1978.⁷¹ Among the posthumous miracles are the form of stigmata left by Philoumenos’ blood at the site of martyrdom,⁷² diffusion of a wonderful fragrance from his relics, the incorruption of his body, the movement of his limbs while the body was dressed for burial, his appearing in dreams, warning instructions to his believers, healing, and so on.⁷³ The miracle stories become part and parcel of a worshipper’s experience in Jacob’s Well. Moreover, a repeated theme in ritual murder allegations in the past was the appearance of miracles through the body of the Christian victim, its relics, or near its tomb. A frequent wonder of this type was the diffusion of fragrance from the, sometimes miraculously incorrupt, body of the victim.⁷⁴ The narratives were disseminated through folk fables and songs, explanatory sheets, theological literature, art, and the act of pilgrimage. In medieval times, rumors constituted the prime factor to the widely spread common belief that Jews practiced ritual murder.⁷⁵ We observed the same patterns in the publicity relating to Philoumenos’ martyrdom.

The popular narrative contains apparent anti-Semitic themes. The inflated number of perpetrators implies that “the Jews” conspire in groups, and then torture and kill their victims together. The damage inflicted upon the church is perceived as an indication of the war waged by “the Jews” against what is considered holy. In such a way, Jews are collectively associated with the evil that acts against Christendom. Yenovkian refers to the attackers as “satanically-inspired tormentors”. Associating Jews with an evil force was a frequent theme in the ritual murder allegations and in blood libels.⁷⁶

The claim that religious Jews demanded custody over the site contradicts the fact that the site was never visited by Jews. Even in contemporary politics, no Israeli group has claimed ownership of the site. This accusation aims to emphasize the martyr’s role—to defend Christendom from the evil of “the Jews”.⁷⁷ An unequivocal instance of this motif in the

popular narrative is the saint's intervention to miraculously counter "Jewish tanks", thus preventing harm to the church at Jacob's Well. St. Philoumenos miraculously countered the powerful military of "Jews" that aimed to harm the Christian shrine. In the Christian Orthodox view, the intervention of a saint changes the unfair balance between the forces in the world—it leads to the victory of the weak righteousness over the powerful evil.

By emphasizing the alleged claim of the deceased that Jacob's Well was a Christian site "before the Israeli State was created", Yenovkian defined the two antagonists—Christians versus Jewish Israelis. The confrontation is presented as a religious conflict between Jews and non-Jews. Such a view allows the attribution of Philoumenos' death to the ritual murders that were perceived to constitute practices of Judaism. Perhaps, the fact that most of the Israeli population in this region is observant contributed to associating the anti-Semitic libels with the murder.

In the Middle Ages, it was not uncommon that a shrine which hosted the body of a purported ritual murder victim became a pilgrimage destination.⁷⁸ The relics were frequently reported to produce miracles. The local rulers often used such sites to increase their political power or even strengthen their religious authority. In a similar way, the contemporary publicity given to Philoumenos' martyrdom narrative helps the authorities of Jacob's Well to gain increased influence. The declaration of a new saint-martyr brought bigger masses of pilgrims to the site as the narrative rapidly gained interest amongst Orthodox Christians worldwide. The pilgrimage resulted in greater financial support and donations.

The fact that the incumbent custodian Fr. Ioustinos has established a splendid burial plot for himself within the Jacob's Well compound, which is decorated with a mosaic of his face, to prepare "for what he senses may be a sudden death" from the same alleged Jewish attackers,⁷⁹ is manifestation of the story's widespread publicity.

Moreover, the contemporary geopolitical situation and the desire of the Church to ensure its position within it serve as a backdrop to Philoumenos' narrative. In the words of D. Weinstein and R. Bell: "Whenever Christianity encountered a frontier, it had a need of martyrs."⁸⁰ Therefore, spreading the narrative of Philoumenos' martyrdom is not only a manifestation of its religious significance, but was also motivated by political interests of the ecclesiastical authorities wishing to advance the Church with regional and international players. It is possible that these factors also motivated the decision to canonize Philoumenos in 2009.

FRAMING THE POPULAR NARRATIVE

Another factor underlying the proliferation of the narrative is the environment of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The manner in which that conflict is “framed” by the two sides and in the media plays a significant role in the increasing popularity of the narrative.

In relation to ongoing conflicts, *frames* are used to denote how antagonists relate to the unfolding events and construct their perceptions of reality accordingly. In their study on social movements, Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow define *collective action frames* as “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities” of activist groups.⁸¹ Such frames are constructed as part of a “shared understanding of some problematic condition or situation they define as in need of change”, and “make attributions regarding who or what is to blame”. Similar aspects of *framing theory* are applied in communication studies, where frames denote “the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality” by news agents, and “assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation” of the reported events.⁸² In relation to the media coverage of conflicts, the process of framing activates “schemas that encourage target audiences to think, feel, and decide in a particular way.”⁸³ In our opinion, analysis of the framing explains some of the motifs that are found in the popular narration of Philoumenos’ story.

In his study of the First Intifada, Gadi Wolfsfeld identified two distinct frames in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, through which the antagonists themselves and the global media examined events.⁸⁴ The first, the “*law and order*” frame, tends to present the conflict as a matter of civil disorder: Palestinians taking part in riots are mostly presented as outlaws, and the need to prevent violence and to restore the law is emphasized. As such, the “law and order” frame, conceived as supporting Israeli positions, is common among the Israeli public. The second, the “*injustice and defiance*” frame, which is adopted by the Palestinian sources, perceives Israeli control of the West Bank to be an act of injustice (“occupation”). In this frame, Israel is mostly depicted as a brutal oppressor while the Palestinians are portrayed as weak victims fighting to prevent the loss of their land and the denial of their rights.

We suggest that Wolfsfeld’s “injustice and defiance” frame shapes the descriptions in the popular narrative of the Philoumenos incident. Firstly, the collective accusations (“radical Zionists”, “extremist Jewish Zionists”, etc.) point a blaming finger at Israeli citizens in the West Bank (i.e., “settlers”), whose presence in the area is framed as an act of oppression.

The Irish NIPSA report and Khoury's article are adequate examples of sources that blame settlers in the most direct way. Yenovkian claims that the attacking group left Jacob's Well hurling "insults and obscenities of the kind which local Christians suffer regularly". Thus, he constructs a parallel between the Orthodox Christians and the Palestinian population, hence both are perceived as being weak victims who suffer from Israeli oppression.

Furthermore, the equation of Orthodox Christians with Palestinians is bolstered by the argument that the Orthodox Church existed much "before the Israeli State was created"⁸⁵: The Christians are depicted as an indigenous population, in contrast to the Israelis who are presented as a new entity in this region. The murder is viewed as part of a much bigger conflict, in which Israelis are accused of doing injustice to the non-Jewish locals. Comparable to the Palestinians, who are portrayed in the "injustice and defiance" frame as struggling against dispossession, Philoumenos is presented as struggling against confiscation of Christian holy sites. The popular narrative even employs similar visual language. Among the most well-known visual symbols of the "injustice and defiance" frame is a young Palestinian boy throwing stones at an Israeli tank. Hence, Philoumenos also confronts "Jewish tanks" that were said to attack the church.

The fact that Philoumenos' saint's day is celebrated on 29 November, the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People established by the UN GA, constructs a link between the martyrdom and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The murder is not regarded solely as a criminal act, but is framed as another milestone in what the narrators regard as Israeli oppression of the Palestinians, and the continuous injustice caused to the local population as an outcome of Israeli rule. Moreover, the popular narrative holds the Israeli authorities responsible for the death of the monk or, at best, the alleged "covering up" of the murder. While Yenovkian's account states that no suspect was ever arrested, NIPSA's rapporteur claimed that the attacker was not arrested but deported, and the contributors to Wikipedia resolved that Israeli authorities refused to search for the attacker.⁸⁶ These position the Philoumenos affair within the "injustice and defiance" frame, in which Israelis are perceived as powerful oppressors who abuse their force to violate the rights of weak Palestinians.

The factual basis rules out any linkage of the criminal act to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. However, the prominent themes integrated into the popular narrative (whom to blame, what is the cause, etc.) perfectly match the "injustice and defiance" frame of the conflict. This is explained by the narrative being a product of a message. The narrative fits the shared agenda of many social movements, political NGOs, and media agents who relate to

the Israeli–Palestinian conflict through the above frame. This contributed to the increased popularity of the Christian saint story in non-religious sources.

Noteworthy are the apparent differences in the terminology used to describe the alleged attackers in different versions of the popular narrative. Orthodox Christian-oriented sources adopt terms from the religious, ethnic, and political realms, such as “Jews”,⁸⁷ “fanatical Jews”,⁸⁸ “Jewish terrorists”,⁸⁹ “extremist Jewish Zionists”,⁹⁰ “Zionist Jews”,⁹¹ “fanatical Zionists”,⁹² and “a mob of Jewish Israeli Extremists”.⁹³ On the other hand, sources of general orientation almost exclusively use terminology from the political realm, such as “settlers”,⁹⁴ “Zionist settlers”,⁹⁵ “Jewish settlers”,⁹⁶ “Israeli settlers”,⁹⁷ “a radical rabbi settler and his followers”,⁹⁸ “Jewish Zionists”,⁹⁹ and a “Zionist group”.¹⁰⁰ While the religious sources apply language emphasizing racial and religious definitions, the general-orientation sources always emphasize contemporary political definitions. This demonstrates an adaptation of the narrative from the Orthodox Christian target audience to the realm of non-Orthodox politically motivated audiences. Despite the change in terminology, the basic points of the account do not differ significantly.

Finally, it seems that the PNA might have utilized the popular narrative in its public relations efforts. Accusations that Zionists allegedly perform ritual murders are common amongst public figures in the modern Arab world and frequently found in the Palestinian sources.¹⁰¹ Moreover, Palestinian media and officials have postulated that Israel keeps the bodies of “Palestinian martyrs” for the alleged purpose of harvesting their organs.¹⁰² The leaders of the PLO and the PNA repeatedly declared that Jesus was a Palestinian who was crucified by Jews.¹⁰³ Such discourse constructs a link between the Christian medieval perception of Jews (as the ultimate evil who assaults Christendom) to Israeli-Jewish rule of the West Bank (as the perceived oppressor of the contemporary Palestinians). While it is questionable whether a planned public relations campaign existed in the PNA until 2005,¹⁰⁴ it is plausible that certain enterprises were supported by its authorities with the purpose of emphasizing the desired message. The Jacob’s Well Church stood in neglect for almost a century. It was remarkably renovated during the Second Intifada. The sudden renovation, which was authorized by the PNA, points to a relation between the increasing publicity of Philoumenos’ story with the fact that its message assists the PNA’s public relations goals.

On the other hand, the Greek Orthodox Church mobilizes the saint to advance its own interests within the PNA political systems. According

to Robert S. Wistrich, in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire native Christians also introduced ritual murder accusations as an “attempt at integrating themselves in a Muslim world at times as hostile to Christians as it was to Jews.”¹⁰⁵ A similar contemporary motivation could have caused the proliferation of the popular narrative in the case of Philoumenos. Therefore, the common interests of the PNA and the Greek Orthodox Church are conjoined in promoting the popular version of Philoumenos’ murder.

CONCLUSION

This article analyzed the popular narrative of the martyrdom of St. Philoumenos of Jacob’s Well. After the murder, the Israeli police immediately launched and conducted a thorough investigation. The killer was apprehended only in 1982. This individual had committed other murders of both Jews and non-Jews who were killed in a similar method. He was an observant Jew from Tel-Aviv, suffering from hallucinations, and acting alone without any connection to a religious or political entity. He was found mentally deranged and hospitalized by a decree of the Israeli District Court. It is evident that the Synod of the Jerusalem Greek Orthodox Patriarchate was in possession of the murderer’s background. Accordingly, the Synod refrained from a collective accusation in its official decision on Philoumenos’ canonization in 2009. However, anti-Semitic sentiments inspired rumors of a Jewish ritual murder.

The initial occurrences of such rumors were documented in Greece and in the Holy Land shortly after the murder. Rumormongering intensified as a product of the geopolitical situation in the West Bank, as much as from the growing interest of the global media and political NGOs in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. To sum up, the medieval-style Christian fear of Jews together with international attention to the ongoing conflict resulted in the emergence of the popular narrative, which differs significantly from the factual basis of what happened in 1979.

The popular narrative and the patterns of its proliferation resonate medieval ritual murder libels. Furthermore, the application of Wolfsfeld’s “injustice and defiance” frame to Philoumenos’ story constructed the parallel between the Orthodox Christians in the West Bank and the Palestinians in these sources. Some academic studies failed to recognize the pattern of allegations that produced the narrative, and treated it as an authentic credible description.¹⁰⁶

In his study on contemporary antisemitism as a social phenomenon, David Hirsh suggested that each instance of antisemitism in history left traces in the “cultural reservoir ready to be drawn upon and reinvigorated”.¹⁰⁷ One of the two motifs in the cultural reservoir that Hirsh accounts for is “the blood libel, which charges Jews with ethnically motivated crimes of cruelty, often against children, often involving the consumption or use of blood or body parts.” He further resolves that “naturally enough, campaigning against Israeli human rights abuses often seeks to engender feelings of compassion for and identification with Israel’s Palestinian victims and concomitant feelings of anger toward Israel and Israelis. Sometimes, Anti-Semitic themes and images are put to work to help this process.”¹⁰⁸ In other words, medieval Christian hatred of the Jews, which is residually present in the cultural reservoir of Western society, tends to be invoked in contemporary campaigns against the Jewish state. The present study reveals how such motifs are invoked in the case of Philoumenos. Unlike other known cases in history, where ritual murder allegations were solely an expression of classical antisemitism, intertwined in the narration of Philoumenos murder are both religious hatred of the Jews and motives of delegitimization of Israel. Therefore, this case is a prominent example of contemporary antisemitism (or “New Antisemitism”).

NOTES

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1. Jacob Barnai, “‘Blood Libels’ in the Ottoman Empire of the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries,” in *Antisemitism through the Ages*, ed. Shmuel Almog (Oxford and New York, 1988), 189–94; Yehuda Slutsky, “Blood Libel in Russia,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 16 vols. (Jerusalem, 1971), 4:1128–31.

2. Hillel J. Kieval, “Ritual Murder (Modern),” in *Antisemitism: a Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution*, ed. Richard S. Levy, 2 vols. (Santa Barbara, CA, 2005), 2:605–8.

3. Yitzhak Magen, *Flavia Neapolis: Shechem in the Roman Period, vol. I.* (Jerusalem, 2009), 32.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Mariam Shahin and George B. Azar, *Palestine: A Guide* (Northampton, MA, 2006), 220.

6. “Archimandrite” denotes a member of the monastic clergy in the contemporary Orthodox Church.

7. The term “Neo-martyr” is primarily ascribed to martyrs of Greek Orthodox Church who were killed in ethno-religious conflicts the Ottoman era.

8. Hiera Monē Hagiou Nikolaou, *Ho Hagios Hieromartyr Philoumenos ho Kyprios: Bios- Martyrio-Thaumata meta Paraklētikou Kanonos* (Orounta, 2013) [Greek].

9. *Ibid.*, 124.

10. The term “Translation” denotes the transference of holy relics from their burial site to a shrine.

11. In the YouTube recording of the inauguration ceremony, the sign at the entrance to the Jacob's Well compound bears the date 30 August 2008. See, time 0:00:50 on Megasfilippos, “Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ ΦΙΛΟΥΜΕΝΟΣ Ο ΑΓΙΟΤΑΦΙΤΗΣ,” *YouTube* video, 1:23:55, 8 March 2011. http://youtu.be/6PIVzBpiY_I.

12. The image of Yasser Arafat appeared on the sign inviting the public to participate in the inauguration ceremony. See *ibid.*

13. Jerusalem Patriarchate, “Synodic Decision: Classification to the Hagiologion of the New Hieromartyr Filoumenos,” last modified 11 September 2009, <http://www.jp-newsgate.net/en/2009/09/11/624> (accessed 25 April 2015).

14. *Ibid.*

15. Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, personal communication with the authors, 8 June 2014.

16. Jerusalem Patriarchate, “Inauguration of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher Exarchy in Cyprus.” Last modified 10 May 2014, accessed 25 April 2015. <http://www.jp-newsgate.net/en/2014/05/10/6808>.

17. Jerusalem Patriarchate, “Inauguration Ceremony for the Church of the Exarchy of the Holy Sepulcher in Cyprus.” Last modified 3 May 2014, accessed 25 April 2015. <http://www.jp-newsgate.net/en/2014/05/03/6671>; *idem.*, “His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem in Cyprus for the Inauguration of Holy Sepulcher Exarchy.” Last modified 9 May 2014, accessed 25 April 2015. <http://www.jp-newsgate.net/en/2014/05/09/6771>.

18. “Τίς ἐπιθέσει τῶν φανατικῶν Ἑβραίων πού συνεχίζονται ἐναντίον τοῦ π. Ἰουστίνου καὶ τοῦ Ἱεροῦ Προσκυῆ” (see Fig. 1).

19. The information was collected during an on-site visit by the authors in November 2011.

20. Dana Segev, “What Does a Single Antisemitic Painting Reveal?” last modified 20 March 2008, accessed 3 December 2016. <http://www.asimon.co.il/ArticlePage.aspx?AID=5412&AcatID=81>. [Hebrew].

21. *Ibid.*

22. The painting is located in the vault of the narthex at the monastery's main church. According to a local monk, the paintings of the narthex were made by Russian artists after 2004.

23. Ch. Mpousias, *Akolouthia tou Hagiou Neou Hieromartyros Philoumenou tou Kypriou* (Orounta, 2003) [Greek].

24. *Ibid.*, 14.

25. M. Maor, "Following the Murder of the Priest of Cypriot Origin in Jerusalem," *Ma'ariv* 10 March 1980, 7 [Hebrew]. Maor relied solely on information from sources in Greece. This explains fundamental inaccuracies (i.e., the site is named "Avraham's Well in Jerusalem").

26. Our investigation in the archives of Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem did not produce any results to establish the background of Yeghia Yenovkian.

27. Yeghia Yenovkian, "Tribute to a New Martyr: Our Holy Father Philoumenos of the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre," *Orthodox America* 10.4 (#94) (1989): 9.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Edward Pehanich, "Lives of the Saints: Father Philoumenos of Jacobs Well 1913–1979," *The Church Messenger* 64.7 (2008): 7. Accessed 30 March 2015. http://www.acrod.org/assets/files/PDFS/Messenger/CM%20-%201-08_Web.pdf.

30. Orthodox Metropolitanate of Singapore and South Asia, "Saint Philoumenos the New Hieromartyr of Jacob's Well." Last modified 12 December 2012, accessed 30 March 2015. <http://www.omsgsa.org/?p=1143>; Pemptousia, "Saint Philoumenos the New Hieromartyr of Jacob's Well." Last modified 2 December 2012, accessed 30 March 2015. <http://pemptousia.com/2012/12/saint-philoumenos-the-new-hieromartyr-of-jacobs-well>.

31. The source contains a reference to a magazine, *By the Lake* (Παρά την Λίμνη), 11, published by St. Demetrios' Church of Paralimni, Cyprus, November 2012. This publication could not be consulted by the authors.

32. Pravoslavie, "The Holy Martyr Philoumenos of the Holy Sepulchre." Last modified 29 November 2012, accessed 30 March 2015. <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/orthodoxchurches/57769.htm> [Russian].

33. While OrthodoxWiki is maintained by administrators affiliated with the Orthodox Church, the website does not aim to be an official voice of the Orthodox Church authorities. See http://orthodoxwiki.org/OrthodoxWiki:Frequently_Asked_Questions. Accessed 17 May 2014.

34. Emphasis added to indicate details that are not present in Yenovkian's account. See 25 January 2014, [http://orthodoxwiki.org/index.php?title=Philoumenos_\(Hasapis\)_of_Jacob%27s_Well&oldid=118113](http://orthodoxwiki.org/index.php?title=Philoumenos_(Hasapis)_of_Jacob%27s_Well&oldid=118113).

35. Odigitria, "In Memoriam of Philoumenos of the Holy Sepulchre, Fatally Tortured by Jews in 1979." Last modified 29 November 2011, accessed 30 March 2015. <http://www.odigitria.by/2011/11/29/pamyat-filumena-svyatogrobca-v-1979-godu-iudeyami-umuchennogo> [Russian]. Translated by the authors.

36. Moscow Patriarchate, "Record 18: Records of the Council of the Holy Synod of March 5, 2010." Last modified 5 March 2010, accessed 30 March 2015. <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1106470.html> [Russian].

37. Wikipedia Contributors, "Jacob's Well," *Wikipedia*, version 23 December 2011, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Jacob%27s_Well&oldid=467324402. Accessed 30 March 2015.

38. Wikipedia Contributors, "Philoumenos (Hasapis) of Jacob's Well," *Wikipedia*,

version 26 January 2014, [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Philoumenos_\(Hasapis\)_of_Jacob%27s_Well&oldid=592433374](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Philoumenos_(Hasapis)_of_Jacob%27s_Well&oldid=592433374). Accessed 30 March 2015.

39. This report was unavailable on Reuters' website during the composition of the present paper.

40. Wikipedia Contributors, "Philoumenos (Hasapis) of Jacob's Well," *Wikipedia*, version 22 August 2014, [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Philoumenos_\(Hasapis\)_of_Jacob%27s_Well&oldid=622393330](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Philoumenos_(Hasapis)_of_Jacob%27s_Well&oldid=622393330). Accessed 30 March 2015. For a discussion on Shortt's work, see below.

41. Orontes Syria, "Pope Calls for 'a Just and Lasting Solution' to the War in Syria and Respect for Religious Freedom in the Middle East." Last modified 30 November 2013, accessed 30 March 2015. <http://orontes.jimdo.com/2013/11/30/pope-calls-for-a-just-and-lasting-solution-to-the-war-in-syria-and-respect-for-religious-freedom-in-the-middle-east>.

42. *Ibid.* On 29 November 1947 the UN General Assembly (GA) adopted its Resolution 181(II), also known as "the partition plan". In 1977, the UN GA adopted Resolution 32/40B that established "the annual observance of 29 November as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People."

43. Maria C. Khoury, "Honoring the Mother of God," undated, http://www.saintgeorgetaybeh.org/maria_khourys_page/maria_khourys_archive/mk_article_Aug10.html. Accessed 30 March 2015.

44. Michael Robinson, *Welcome to the Country that Doesn't Exist* (2011), 16–7. http://www.sadaka.ie/Articles/OtherReports/OTHER-Global_Solidarity_Palestine.pdf. Accessed 30 March 2015.

45. Hiera Monē, *Ho Hagios*, 148.

46. Notable examples of antisemitic posts on the website: The Dominique, "The Jews and the Financial Disaster in Greece." Last modified 10 March 2010, accessed 30 March 2015. <http://www.filoumenos.com/anthellinismos/ellada-israil/662-oi-ebraioi-kai-i-oikonomiki-katastrofi-tis-elladas.html> [Greek]; The Philoumenos, "Not One Greek Politician—All Are of Jewish Origin." Last modified 12 March 2012, accessed 23 May 2014. <http://www.filoumenos.com/anthellinismos/ellada-israil/12212-oyte-enas-ellinas-politikos-oloi-toys-einai-evraikis-katagogis.html> [Greek].

47. Translated by the authors: "In Memoriam of the Saint and Neo Martyr Who Was Ritually Slaughtered by Zionists while Celebrating the Office of Vespers in Jacob's Well on 16/29 November 1979".

48. Cheryl Rubenberg (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 3 vols. (Boulder, CO, 2010).

49. Pamela Olson, "Holy Sites in Palestine," in *Encyclopedia of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, ed. Cheryl Rubenberg (Boulder, CO, 2010), 1:563–6.

50. The author of this encyclopedic entry seems to impose her political agenda onto the description, as is demonstrated in the following quotes [emphasis added]: "Jews from all over the world are given free access to worship at the Western Wall, *but* only a small percentage of the 4 million Palestinians living in the West Bank

and Gaza are allowed to pray at the Muslim compound above it," *ibid.*, 564; "The Israeli army rarely curbs the behaviour of the settlers and often aids them in their attempts to take over more Hebron real estate," *ibid.*, 565.

51. Rupert Shortt, *Christianophobia: A Faith under Attack* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2013), 227.

52. The police file is marked "תחנת שכם—2253/79 פא." Additional files that are expected to be declassified in forthcoming years: 11-ל, 10-ל, 3186/9-ל.

53. Asher Kayzer, "First Check: The Greek Orthodox Priest Was Murdered," *Ha'aretz* 4 December 1979, 2 [Hebrew].

54. Yosef Zalter and Amos Levav, "The Police Reinvestigates Unsolved Murder Cases that were Conducted Using an Axe," *Ma'ariv* 2 December 1982, 3; Yitzhak Ben-Horin, "In the Nights He Weeps over Destruction of The Temple," *Ma'ariv* 3 December 1982, 3; Aya Ornstein, "The Under-indictment of Monk's Murder—to Psychiatric Observation," *Ma'ariv* 17 December 1982, 5 [all in Hebrew].

55. Hebrew: "אשר רבי"; in a few sources his name is given as Asher Rabo (אשר רבו).

56. According to his neighbors, Raby became religiously observant a few years prior to the murder. He was seen crying at night after reading religious texts. He refused to marry until the restoration of the Temple. In the years before the murder, he quit his job as a truck driver, sold his property, and donated his money. See: Ben-Horin, "In the Nights He Weeps."

57. Zalter and Levav, "The Police Reinvestigates."

58. Ornstein, "The Under-indictment of Monk's Murder."

59. *Ibid.*

60. Zalter and Levav, "The Police Reinvestigates."

61. Reuven Shapiro, "Blackout Was Imposed on the Murder in Lod," *Davar* 12 April, 10. The police immediately suspected that the murderer was mentally unstable. Shortly after, the suspect's profile sketch was released; see *idem.*, "Extended Searches for the Murderer of the Family in Lod," *Davar* 22 April 1979, 4 [both in Hebrew].

62. Zalter and Levav, "The Police Reinvestigates."

63. The authors refrain from publishing the full name of the murderer as it is recorded in police files due to privacy protection regulations.

64. Tel-Aviv District Court, file 1286182. Information about the fate of an individual after his/her hospitalization is restricted due to privacy protection regulations.

65. Yenovkian, "Tribute to a New Martyr"; Pravoslavie, "The Holy Martyr Philoumenos of the Holy Sepulchre"; Odigitria, "In Memoriam of Philoumenos of the Holy Sepulchre"; OrthodoxWiki, "Philoumenos (Hasapis)".

66. Church officials quoted in the information brochure (Fig. 1); Maor, "Following the Murder"; Pehanich, "Lives of the Saints"; Metropolitanate of Singapore, "Saint Philoumenos"; Pemptousia, "Saint Philoumenos the new Hieromartyr"; Hieria Monē, *Ho Hagios*, 148.

67. Jerusalem Patriarchate, "Synodic Decision."
68. Emily Rose, "Ritual Murder (Medieval)," in *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution*, ed. Richard S. Levy, 2 vols. (Santa Barbara, CA, 2005), 2:603.
69. Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000–1700* (Chicago, 1982), 160.
70. Nicon D. Patrinos, *A Dictionary of Greek Orthodoxy: Lexicon Hellenikes Orthodoxias* (New York, 1984), 245.
71. Hiera Monē, *Ho Hagios*, 164.
72. Jerusalem Patriarchate, "Synodic Decision."
73. Hiera Monē, *Ho Hagios*, 123, 125, 128, 151, 153, 155, 166–83.
74. Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven, 1988), 14–41.
75. Rose, "Ritual Murder (Medieval)," 603.
76. Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and its Relation to Modern Antisemitism* (Philadelphia, 1983 [1943]), 155; Rose, "Ritual Murder (Medieval)," 603–4.
77. "Saint Philoumenos encourages Father Ioustinous when often-times the fanatic Jews attack him and the site" (translated by the authors, see Fig. 1).
78. Rose, "Ritual Murder (Medieval)," 604.
79. Shortt, *Christianophobia*, 227.
80. Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, 160.
81. Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26.1 (2000): 611–5.
82. Robert M. Entman, "Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power," *Journal of Communication* 57.1 (2007): 164.
83. *Ibid.*
84. Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Media and Political Conflict: News from the Middle East* (Cambridge, 1997), 141, 144–9.
85. For example Yenovkian, "Tribute to a New Martyr."
86. Wikipedia, "Philoumenos (Hasapis)," version 26 January 2014.
87. Hiera Monē, *Ho Hagios*, 106–7; Odigitria, "In Memoriam of Philoumenos of the Holy Sepulchre"; Pravoslavie, "The Holy Martyr Philoumenos of the Holy Sepulchre."
88. Hiera Monē, *Ho Hagios*, 106, 109; the information brochure on St. Philoumenos that visitors receive at Jacob's Well Church (see Fig. 1).
89. Yenovkian, "Tribute to a New Martyr."
90. OrthodoxWiki, "Philoumenos (Hasapis)."
91. Orthodox Metropolitanate of Singapore and South Asia, "Saint Philoumenos the New Hieromartyr of Jacob's Well"; Pemptousia, "Saint Philoumenos the New Hieromartyr."
92. Pemptousia, "Saint Philoumenos the New Hieromartyr"; Pehanich, "Lives

of the Saints”; Orthodox Metropolitanate of Singapore and South Asia, “Saint Philoumenos the New Hieromartyr of Jacob’s Well”; OrthodoxWiki, “Philoumenos (Hasapis)”; Yenovkian, “Tribute to a New Martyr.”

93. Orontes Syria, “Pope Calls for ‘a Just and Lasting Solution.’”
94. Shortt, *Christianophobia*, 227.
95. Robinson, *Welcome to the Country that Doesn’t Exist*, 17.
96. Wikipedia, “Philoumenos (Hasapis),” version 26 January 2014.
97. Khoury, “Honoring the Mother of God.”
98. Olson, “Holy Sites in Palestine,” 565–6.
99. Wikipedia, “Philoumenos (Hasapis),” version 26 January 2014.
100. Wikipedia, “Jacob’s Well,” version 23 December 2011.
101. See pp. 59–60 in Robert S. Wistrich, “The Old-New Anti-Semitism,” *The National Interest* 72 (2003): 59–70; *A Lethal Obsession: Anti-Semitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad* (New York, 2010), 721, 791–2, 806–10.
102. Itamar Marcus and Nan J. Zilberdik, *Deception: Betraying the Peace Process*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem, 2011), 128–31.
103. Wistrich, *Lethal Obsession*, 709–10.
104. Nashat A. Aqtash, “Palestinian National Authority’s Public Relations Policies Relating to Israel: Current Attitudes among Palestinian Officials and Media Experts,” *Public Relations Review* 31 (2005): 376–80.
105. Wistrich, *Lethal Obsession*, 787.
106. e.g., Olson, “Holy Sites in Palestine”; Shortt, *Christianophobia*.
107. David Hirsh, “Hostility to Israel and Antisemitism: Toward a Sociological Approach,” *Journal for the Study of Antisemitism* 5 (2013): 1415.
108. *Ibid.*

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