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Title: **“The Blood-Libel and the Leper-Libel: Ancient Anti-Semitism?”**

Panel: Ancient History

Was there a *Judenfrage* in antiquity? Were Jews perceived as distasteful, objectionable, or dangerous? A brief study cannot possibly profess to resolve the larger problem of whether or how far anti-semitism played a role in the perceptions of Jews by Greeks and Romans. It takes only a small step in that direction, but a not insignificant one. This paper looks at perhaps the most celebrated or notorious slanders perpetrated by pagans on the Jews and seeks to deconstruct their implications and their reverberations. The first is the so-called “blood-libel,” the allegation that Jews indulged in the practice of sacrificing human victims to their god, even engaging in cannibalism. That accusation, ostensibly initiated in antiquity, proceeded to haunt Jews as a hostile smear through much of the Middle Ages and beyond. The second is what one might call the “leper-libel.” It refers to the notion that the origins of the nation did not derive from a bold exodus from Egypt by heroic rebels who thwarted the Egyptian oppressors but from ignominious flight by a bunch of wretched lepers and purveyors of disease who were expelled from Egypt as a scourge and proceeded to ravage and rapine wherever they could. That defamatory story, in various versions, found echoes in a number of narratives found in Egyptian, Greek, or Roman writers. This paper argues that such slanders may not have had the toxic character that we usually ascribe to them, nor did they rise to the level of what we would normally characterize as anti-semitism.