

The Manipulated Past

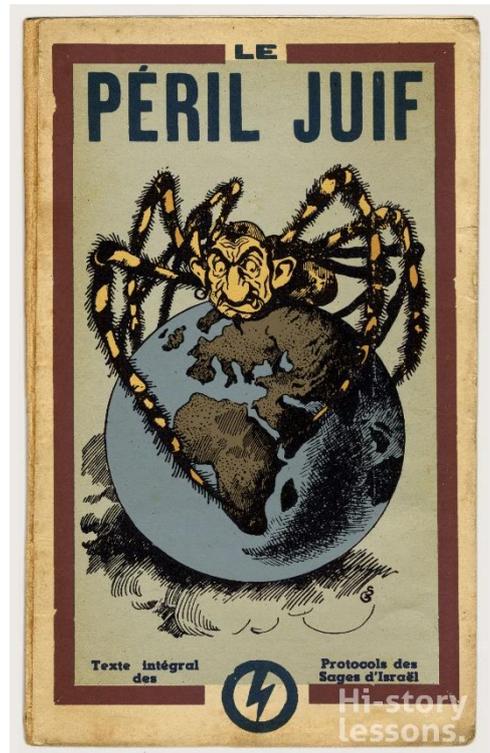
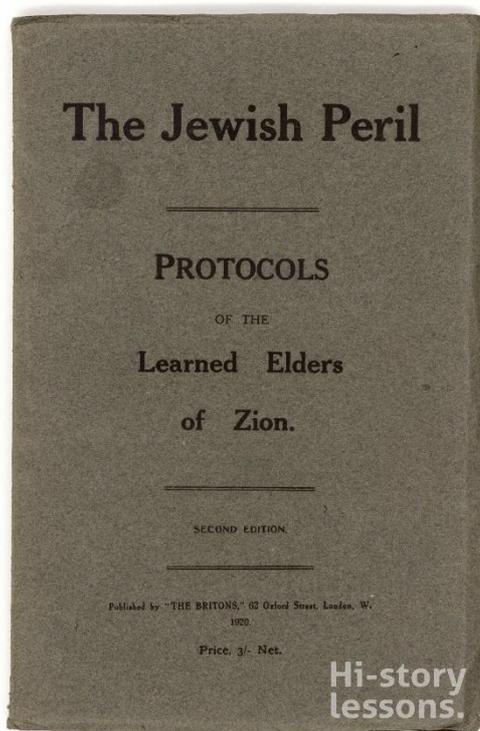
Andrzej Krajewski, PhD

When many people strongly believe in a falsehood, the fraud starts to take on a life on its own, and there is a real danger that it will not only change the way the past is seen but also shape the future.

On 13 March 1881, Ignacy Hryniewiecki, a Pole associated with the Russian anarchist organization Narodnaya Volya (People's Will), threw a bomb that killed Alexander II. The investigation carried out after the assassination of the tsar showed that among the conspirators was a Jewish woman Hesia Helfman. At the time, a rumour spread like wildfire across the empire that it was the Jews who had killed the ruler. With the permission of the authorities, there were about 250 pogroms (acts of cruelty and killings aimed at a large group of people, mainly the Jews, because of their race or religion) in the western governorates. A decade later Nicholas II ascended the throne and revolutionary turmoil began to grow in Russia. According to the French ambassador to St Petersburg, Maurice Paléologue, Nicholas II's secret police (*Okhrana*) constantly warned him 'about the conspiracies being set up in the darkness of the ghettos'. All that was missing were documents confirming these reports of Jewish plots.

The conquest of the world by the Jews

The Russians were informed about the rise of the Jewish conspiracy in a series of articles in the newspaper *Russkoye Znamia*. In August 1903 it began to publish records from the secret – as it was claimed – part of the proceedings of the First Zionist Congress, which took place in Basel in 1897. The documents were presented in instalments under the title of the 'Jewish programme for the conquest of the world'. **They gained their true firepower after being collected into one brochure entitled *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.** The book intensified the new wave of anti-Semitism that had been growing in Russia since April 1903.



↑ ↗ The covers of the book titled *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, its 1920 English-language version and a 1938 French one published as *Le Péril Juif* (French for 'The Jewish Threat').

It brought pogroms to 660 towns and villages, in which 1,622 people, mostly Jews, died. Throughout the 20th century, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* incited hatred towards Jews in many countries. In the United States, in 1920, the 'father of the automobile industry' Henry Ford paid to have them published. Shortly afterwards, they became a bestseller in the Weimar Republic as one of Adolf Hitler's favourite weapons in his arsenal of propaganda. They also enjoyed considerable popularity in Poland in the 1930s. It is significant that when in the early 1970s the president of the KGB, Yuri Andropov, was planning an operation to incite a feud between Arab countries and Israel, he had *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* translated into Arabic. In 1973 it was one of the most read books in the Middle East. **Its ominous power did not wane, despite Britain's newspaper *The Times* publishing documents and analyses as early as 1921 which unequivocally proved that it was a cunning forgery, initiated by the tsar's secret police.** At the end of the 19th century, Piotr Raczkowski, the head of the *Okhrana's* foreign offices, commissioned a counterfeiter

who lived in France to create an anti-Semitic libel. He turned to the brochure published in 1864 by Maurice Joly, entitled *The Dialogue in Hell between Machiavelli and Montesquieu*. Joly described a conspiracy, which he believed was generated by Charles-Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, later known as Napoleon III, in order to overthrow the Second Republic in France. The forger replaced Bonaparte's followers with Jews and adapted the content a little bit to the requirements of his Russian chief, unaware of the fact that his work would influence the course of history.

Evolution from scratch

Falsification is most common when there is a great demand for evidence to support a theory that everyone is excited about. At the beginning of the 20th century, there was widespread enthusiasm for the work of Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*.

The naturalist argued that all species developed through evolution and even man was no exception. There were many indications that humans had the same ancestor as primates, including apes. Darwin's theories undermined the revealed truths, contained in the *Book of Genesis*. According to the Bible, the natural world has remained unchanged since the day of creation, and only some species died out during the Flood. Darwin's claims turned biblical stories into mere myths. Heated disputes over the origins of human beings were accompanied by a search for the remains of the direct ancestor of the species *Homo sapiens*, or modern humans.

Finally, in the spring of 1912, the curator of the natural history department of the British Museum, Arthur S. Woodward, received a letter sent by Charles Dawson, the head of a law firm in Uckfield, East Sussex. The lawyer described how miners working in the nearby Piltdown gravel pits, knowing his weakness for natural curiosities, had given him fragments of a human skull found there unexpectedly. **As many scientific breakthroughs were made by chance, the excited Woodward invited Dawson to London. The lawyer brought the skull fragments to the British Museum and, after seeing them, Woodward came to the conclusion that the bones displayed both human and ape features. Although his expertise was in fish fossils, he clung to**

Dawson's suggestion as he believed it gave the opportunity to discover the 'lost link of evolution'.

Woodward's British Museum colleagues also succumbed to the same temptation. A group of experts led by professor of anatomy Grafton E. Smith reconstructed a skull that had the characteristics of both humans and primate apes. Its age was estimated at around 500,000 years. Then proof of the existence of *Eoanthropus dawsoni* (the first part of the name means 'man of the dawn') was presented to the world as an intermediate link between *Homo sapiens* and hominids. The discovery aroused so much enthusiasm among the supporters of Darwin's theory that scientists who doubted its truthfulness were castigated by both the scientific and popular press. In 1924 King George V knighted Woodward. It was only when the 'discoverer' died that the scientists dared to examine the skull again.



The geologist Kenneth Oakley (left) and L.E. Parsons examining part of the mandible of the Piltdown Man (*Eoanthropus dawsoni*), London 1949.

In 1948 when Professor Joseph Weiner was looking at the teeth fixed in the mandible under a very powerful microscope, he noticed that they were filed down in such a way so they did not resemble those of monkeys. The geologist Kenneth Oakley, who assisted him, determined the age of the finding to be 620 years through chemical tests. To age the teeth, they were soaked in potassium dichromate. As it turned out, the fragments came from several 'donors'. It was only in 1953, after those revelations were published in *The Bulletin of the British Museum*,

that everyone became interested in the man who had delivered the skull fragments to the British Museum. It was then discovered that Charles Dawson was a rich lawyer who liked to make fake documents, ancient statues and even dinosaur bones in his spare time.

Lining one's own pockets

In addition to politics, the desire to attain fame or to convince others that one is right, one of the most common reasons for falsification is financial gain. On 25 April 1983 the German weekly magazine *Stern* announced the sensational news of the discovery of Adolf Hitler's private diaries.

Some of the 62 notebooks that the Third Reich's leader supposedly had filled with his own inscriptions were presented at a press conference. Even before that, the largest foreign press titles were discreetly notified about the find, among them were *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Paris Match* and *El País*. They made offers to the publisher of *Stern* to purchase the reprint rights. The magazine's editors justified the authenticity of the discovery with graphology (analysis of handwriting) and the opinions of respected historians, including the American Gerhard Weinberg and the British biographer of Hitler, Hugh Trevor-Roper. The magazine editors refused to reveal from whom they had obtained the diaries. **The madness lasted for a fortnight until experts from the Federal Criminal Police of Germany issued a statement. They had subjected the paper of the notebook and the ink used to write the notes to standard tests, discovering that the paper had been produced in 1954 and the ink in 1982. The forgery itself was called 'crude'.** A huge scandal broke out. The editor-in-chief of *Stern*, Peter Koch, had to resign, and the police and journalists began to investigate who had really written Hitler's diaries. **As it turned out, the editorial office of *Stern* was led astray by Konrad Kujau, a fugitive from the German Democratic Republic (GDR) living in Stuttgart. For years, he had traded in memorabilia from the Third Reich, and since the demand for them was enormous, he learnt the lucrative art of forgery.** Among other things, he was able to forge Hitler's paintings, his signature and, in time, his letters. It turned out then that he was the author of most of the

drawings and paintings in an album published in West Germany titled *Adolf Hitler: The Unknown Artist*.



↑ A press conference in April 1983. One of the panel sitting at the table is the editor-in-chief of *Stern*, Peter Koch, who resigned once the forgery had been disclosed. In the background is the weekly's cover (visible also in the photograph on the right) with the sensational title *Hitlers Tagebücher entdeckt* (German for 'Hitler's diaries discovered').

After years of practice, Kujau finally wrote the führer's private diaries. He offered his first notebook to a regular client, the collector Fritz Steifel who, convinced that he had the discovery of the century in hand, contacted the journalist Gerd Heidemann of *Stern*. Kujau then came up with the story that the diaries were evacuated from Berlin on an aeroplane that fell near Dresden on 21 April 1945. After the war, they remained in the hands of a general from the GDR, who finally decided to cash them in. Kujau himself pretended to be an intermediary with extensive contacts in the GDR. After several rounds of negotiations, the head of *Stern* paid as much as 9.3 million marks for the diaries. The money was handed over after graphologists had compared the handwriting in the diaries with one of Hitler's letters. It later turned out that the sample letter they had received was one of Kujau's numerous 'works'. The forger and the journalist Heidemann were tried, and both were sentenced to four and a half years in prison in 1984. It was proved that Heidemann had cheated his home editorial

office and had seized part of the fee that Kujau was supposed to receive. However, the entire amount paid by *Stern* was never found. The content of Hitler's alleged diaries was very disappointing. They are full of banal remarks about nothing of consequence, and whole paragraphs are excerpts from the official speeches of the führer, which Konrad Kujau had simply transcribed. Fortunately, unlike *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, this forgery only harmed a few people blinded by greed.

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