

Toledot Yeshu
(“The Life Story of Jesus”)
Revisited

Edited by
PETER SCHÄFER
MICHAEL MEERSON
YAACOV DEUTSCH

*Texts and Studies in
Ancient Judaism*
143

Mohr Siebeck

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A Princeton Conference

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Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson,
and Yaacov Deutsch

Mohr Siebeck

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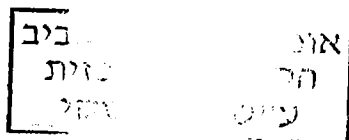
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Acknowledgments

The essays published in this volume are the fruit of a seminar and conference on *Toledot Yeshu* conducted at Princeton University. The seminar, directed by John Gager, Michael Meerson, and Peter Schäfer, took place in the fall term of 2009, culminating in an international conference on November 15–17, 2009, organized by Yaacov Deutsch, Michael Meerson, and Peter Schäfer. Both the seminar and the conference are related to the Princeton University *Toledot Yeshu* project, funded by the Mellon Foundation, which is now in the last stages of preparing an edition and translation with brief commentary of all the available recensions of *Toledot Yeshu*. All the essays are revised versions of the conference papers, with the exception of Sarit Kattan Gribetz's essay, which was presented at the seminar.

First and foremost, we thank the participants of the seminar and conference for their contributions to what we believe marks a new stage in *Toledot Yeshu* research and for allowing us to publish them in this volume. Aaron Kachuck, graduate student in the Department of Classics, helped us in editing the articles. Princeton University's Department of Religion and Program in Judaic Studies extended, as always, Princeton's legendary hospitality and made the conference an enjoyable and memorable event for all the participants. The Mellon Foundation generously funded the conference, and Mohr Siebeck took care of the publication in their customary smooth, fast and professional way. To all of them we express our deep gratitude.

Princeton, Berlin, Jerusalem, May 2011

Peter Schäfer
Michael Meerson
Yaacov Deutsch

Introduction

Peter Schäfer

Modern research on *Toledot Yeschu* – that enigmatic late antique-medieval tract whose origins are shrouded in history’s mists – began with Samuel Krauss’ monograph *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen*, published more than a century ago.¹ Krauss’ analysis of the manuscripts available to him at the time, of the text’s history, and of its main motifs, has had a lasting influence to this day; almost all scholars writing about *Toledot Yeschu* still take him as their point of departure, and humbly add further details rather than attempt to fundamentally change the picture drawn by him. It was almost seventy years later when the next step was taken with William Horbury’s 1970 Cambridge dissertation *A Critical Examination of the Toledoth Yeschu*, which was, however, unfortunately never published.² The dissertation soon became the much sought-after insider tip of *Toledot Yeschu* research, jealously guarded by the lucky ones who succeeded in obtaining a copy and all the more eagerly searched for by the unlucky ones

¹ Berlin: S. Calvary, 1902; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1977, 2006. Krauss supplemented his monograph with an impressive array of articles, published between 1904 and 1939. See “Jesus in Jewish Legend,” *EncJud* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1907), 7: 170–73; “Fragments araméens du Toldot Yéschou,” *REJ* 62 (1911): 28–37; “Neuere Ansichten über ‘Toldoth Jeschu,’” *MGWJ* 76 (1932): 586–603 and 77 (1933): 44–61; “Une nouvelle recension hébraïque du Toldot Yêšû,” *REJ* 103 (1938): 65–90; “The Mount of Olives in Toldot Yeschu,” *Zion* 4 (1939): 170–76 (in Hebrew).

² Luckily, Horbury did publish an important series of articles; see his “The Trial of Jesus in Jewish Tradition,” in *The Trial of Jesus: Cambridge Studies in Honor of C. F. D. Moule* (ed. Ernst Bammel; Naperville: Allenson, 1970), 103–21; “Tertullian on the Jews in the Light of *de spec.* xxx. 13,” *JTS* 23 (1972): 455–59, reprinted in *idem, Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), 176–79; “The Revision of Shem Tov ibn Shaprut’s *Eben Bohan*,” *Sefarad* 43 (1983): 221–37; reprinted in *Jews and Christians*, 261–75; “Christ as Brigand in Ancient Anti-Christian Polemic,” in *Jesus and the Politics of His Day* (eds. Ernst Bammel and Charles F. D. Moule, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 183–95; reprinted in *Jews and Christians*, 162–75; “Jews and Christians on the Bible: Demarcation and Convergence (325–451),” in *Christliche Exegese zwischen Nicaea und Chalcedon* (eds. Johannes van Oort and Ulrich Wickert; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992), 72–103, reprinted in *Jews and Christians*, 200–25; “The Depiction of Judaeo-Christians in the Toledot Yeschu,” in *The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature* (eds. Peter J. Tomson and Doris Lambers-Petry, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 280–86; “Rabbinic Perceptions of Christianity and the History of Roman Palestine,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 165 (2010): 353–76 = *Rabbinic Texts and the History of Late-Roman Palestine* (eds. Martin Goodman and Philip Alexander, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 353–76.

who were less successful. Professor Horbury has finally decided to put an end to this and is working now on a revised edition of his dissertation for publication. And the third decisive step was reached when Riccardo Di Segni published his groundbreaking article “La tradizione testuale delle Toledoth Jeshu: Manoscritti, edizioni a stampa, classificazione,”³ soon to be followed by the monograph *Il vangelo del ghetto*.⁴ Di Segni, with his meticulous evaluation of many manuscripts and their classification according to different groups (the Pilate, Helena and Herod recensions) in particular, put the research into the *Toledot Yeshu* manuscript tradition and the transmission of its various versions on a completely new level.⁵

Twenty five years after Di Segni, the time has finally come to take stock and to provide the scholarly world with a full picture of the *Toledot Yeshu* evidence, that is, to lay the foundations for a more informed study of *Toledot Yeshu* by preparing an edition of all the available manuscripts and further clarifying the text's complicated history.⁶ This ambitious task has been tackled by the Princeton University *Toledot Yeshu* project: we have collected, transcribed, and translated all the available manuscripts and are now in the process of preparing a sophisticated database that will help us to unravel the secrets of *Toledot Yeshu*'s origins and reception history and ultimately lead to the publication of a synoptic edition supplemented by an electronic database on a CD. In order to place this project in the context of current *Toledot Yeshu* research, we decided to convene an international conference with those scholars who have been working on *Toledot Yeshu* recently or who have expressed their keen interest in the conference topic. As always with such conferences, not all of the colleagues on our list could accept the invitation, but we are confident that the voices assembled in this volume reflect a representative cross-section of ongoing *Toledot Yeshu* research.

If the conference and the evaluation of the various recensions in the Princeton *Toledot Yeshu* project have made one thing clear, it is the fact that there never was

³ *Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 50 (1984): 83–100.

⁴ Rome: Newton Compton, 1985. See also his article “Due nuovi fonti sulle Toledoth Jeshu,” *Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 55 (1990): 127–32.

⁵ Further progress in *Toledot Yeshu* research was made by, among others, Günter Schlichting, *Ein jüdisches Leben Jesu* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1982); Hillel I. Newman, “The Death of Jesus in the *Toledot Yeshu* Literature,” *JTS* 50 (1999): 59–79; Yaacov Deutsch, “New Evidence of Early Versions of *Toldot Yeshu*,” *Tarbiz* 69 (2000): 177–97 (in Hebrew).

⁶ Out of c. 150 known *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts, only very few were published. In addition to the aforementioned publications by Krauss, Horbury, and Deutsch, see Abraham Harkavy, “Leben Jesus,” *Hebräische Bibliographie* 15 (1875): 15; Elkan N. Adler, “Un fragment araméen de Toldot Yéschou,” *REJ* 61(1910): 126–30; Louis Ginzberg, ed., *Genizah Studies in Memory of Doctor Solomon Schechter (Ginze Schechter)* (3 vols.; New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1928), 1:329–38; Michael Higger, “Ma’aseh Yeshu,” *Chorev* 3 (1936): 143–52 (in Hebrew); Zeev Falk, “A New Fragment of the Jewish Life of Jesus,” *Imm* 8 (1978): 72–9; Daniel Boyarin, “A Revised Version and Translation of the ‘Toledot Yeshu’ Fragment,” *Tarbiz* 47 (1978): 249–52 (in Hebrew).

a *Toledot Yeshu* Urtext back to which all the existing versions can be traced.⁷ The romantic search for the one and only Urtext is an idea that has misled scholars in many areas of Jewish Studies (and, of course, not only there), and *Toledot Yeshu* is a prime example of this futile exercise. What we can establish are various foci or nuclei, snapshots as it were, that can be fixed in place and time; but these snapshots on no account represent fixed points of a unilinear and mono-causal chain of development originating from a given *Urtext* and leading to all the branches of the text tradition. We even don't know at which point in history the snapshots begin embodying something that justifiably so might be called "*Toledot Yeshu*," that is, a fully developed narrative deserving this title. Or, to put it differently and more precisely, there may well have been *different* nuclei representing *different* macroforms of *Toledot Yeshu* at *different* times and places.

A first cluster of contributions deals with *Toledot Yeshu*'s manuscript traditions and its multiple versions. The earliest known physical evidence of a peculiar version of *Toledot Yeshu* is preserved in the Aramaic fragments from the Cairo Geniza. The earliest of these fragments can be dated to the tenth century, but there can be no doubt that the narrative they transmit is earlier. One way, probably the safest way, to determine the date and provenance of this narrative is to examine the fragments' language, that is, the Aramaic dialect they use. Michael Sokoloff undertook this task and has come to very interesting and remarkably unambiguous results. Recently, Willem Smelik has claimed that *Toledot Yeshu* was originally composed in third-fourth century Palestine (more precisely in the Galilee) in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, was then transferred to Babylonia, where it received an updating in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, and was finally brought back to Palestine and converted to Late Jewish Literary Aramaic.⁸ In constant dialogue with Smelik, Sokoloff contests Smelik's findings and concludes that *Toledot Yeshu*'s Aramaic is a mixture of Jewish Babylonian and Targumic Aramaic and that its vocabulary clearly points to Jewish Babylonia as its provenance. Its time of composition, he proposes, was "towards the middle of the first millennium CE."

An important nucleus of *Toledot Yeshu* traditions has come down to us in certain quotations to be found in the writings of Agobard, bishop of Lyons, and his successor, Amulo, in the first half of the ninth century. Peter Schäfer reevaluates these references and, providing a detailed comparison with the Aramaic fragments, confirms Di Segni's assessment that both share many characteristics and hence belong to the same recension (Di Segni's Pilate group). With regard to the narrative of Yeshu's conception and birth, which is so conspicuously missing in the Aramaic fragments and in Agobard/Amulo, he argues that it wasn't part of

⁷ This insight is not new, but confirms what Di Segni wrote already in 1985; see his *Il vangelo del ghetto*, 217 f.

⁸ Willem F. Smelik, "The Aramaic Dialect(s) of the Toldot Yeshu Fragments," *Aramaic Studies* 7 (2009): 39–73.

their version and must have been added at a later stage.⁹ He then puts Agobard's and Amulo's *Toledot Yeshu* in the broader context of the two bishops' statements about the Jews in contemporary Carolingian society, and concludes that the Jews in the Carolingian Empire under Louis the Pious not only were well aware of a version of *Toledot Yeshu*, but made public and even aggressive use of it.

Turning to the famous Strasbourg manuscript that figures so prominently in Krauss' *Leben Jesu*, William Horbury locates the manuscript in an eighteenth-century Galician Karaite milieu and then proceeds to determine earlier stages of the text as presented in the Strasbourg copy. He finds evidence that the Strasbourg text must have been identical with texts that were current in France and Spain in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and are now lost. But certain elements or microforms in the Strasbourg text lead him back in time much earlier. The first microform is the list of the new Christian festivals substituting the old Jewish ones, which he locates, following Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra,¹⁰ in fourth or early fifth century Palestine or Syria. Second – noticing that, of all the Hebrew manuscripts of Di Segni's Helen group, only Ms. Strasbourg incorporates the Talmudic narrative of the trial and execution of five disciples of Yeshu (an important element of Di Segni's Pilate group, which is well known from the Aramaic fragments) into its *Toledot Yeshu* version – he suggests a link between the Strasbourg text and the much earlier version preserved in the Aramaic fragments from the Cairo Geniza. Finally, he proposes that even the birth story, which opens the Strasbourg manuscript and which Di Segni and Schäfer consider to be a medieval addition, in fact represents a much earlier element of the *Toledot Yeshu* narrative. Hence, he concludes that the Pilate group of the Aramaic fragments and Agobard/Amulo originally contained the birth story and that the Strasbourg manuscript echoes this early version.

One of the most baffling recensions of *Toledot Yeshu* is the one published in 1705 by the Christian scholar Johann Jacob Huldreich (Huldricus), together with a Latin translation and annotations. It was much neglected in *Toledot Yeshu* scholarship, presumably because of its complexity and unique characteristics, and Adina Yoffie deserves credit for again drawing our attention to it. Comparing the Huldreich version with the other *Toledot Yeshu* versions, she argues that it combines some very early parts of the *Toledot Yeshu* tradition known from the earliest Hebrew manuscripts and even the Aramaic fragments with high medieval and very late Slavic elements. Altogether, she concludes, the Huldreich

⁹ See also Di Segni, *Il vangelo del ghetto*, 33, 113, 127–218, and Peter Schäfer, "Jesus' Origin, Birth, and Childhood according to the *Toledot Yeshu* and the Talmud," in *Judaea-Palaestina, Babylon and Rome: Jews in Antiquity* (eds. Benjamin Isaac and Yuval Shahar, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), forthcoming.

¹⁰ Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, "An Ancient List of Christian Festivals in *Toledot Yeshu*: Polemics as Indication for Interaction," *HTR* 102 (2009): 481–96.

version was composed in the fifteenth or sixteenth century at the earliest by an unknown author or a group of authors.

Finally in this first group of contributions, Michael Stanislawski forces his way through the even more neglected thicket of Yiddish *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts. Briefly surveying the known Yiddish manuscripts, he determines that a manuscript at the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York (JTS Ms. 2211) differs from the other Yiddish manuscripts in that it doesn't follow any single or stable Hebrew text; rather, it combines different and often contradictory sources and displays clear traits of what Stanislawski calls the "Ashkenization" of the *Toledot Yeshu* tradition. Mary's portrayal as a prophetess gone wrong in particular, which diverges considerably from the other *Toledot Yeshu* versions, can be read as a subversion of the Marian cult prevalent in the Christian society of Central and Eastern Europe in the late seventeenth century.

A second cluster of contributions makes an attempt to locate *Toledot Yeshu* in its broader cultural context. Pierluigi Piovanelli compares certain motifs in the *Toledot Yeshu* with the *Book of the Cock*, a Christian apocryphal text from Late Antiquity that is preserved in Ethiopic but was originally written in Greek, probably in the second half of the fifth century. This book, he argues following Hillel Newman,¹¹ belongs to a roster of late antique Christian apocryphal texts that *respond* to polemical Jewish stories such as those found in *Toledot Yeshu*. In his view, this brings us if not to an Urtext of *Toledot Yeshu* but nonetheless to a more or less well developed "first edition" of *Toledot Yeshu* already circulating at the end of the fourth or the beginning of the fifth century C. E. Furthermore, following Ernst Bammel¹² and William Horbury, he sets out to track down the hypothetical prehistory of *Toledot Yeshu* in the second and third century. Here, it is the conspicuously positive depiction of Judas in particular, which *Toledot Yeshu* shares (more precisely which the Aramaic fragments of *Toledot Yeshu* share) with the newly discovered *Gospel of Judas* (before 180 C. E.) and the *Book of the Cock*, that leads him back into the second century C. E. He concludes with the (not so) rhetorical question: "(W)hat if the earliest *Toledot Yeshu* stories were the *oral* product of Jewish communities that were living, probably in Syria-Palestine,¹³ in close contact and connection with a group, or multiple groups, of Jewish Christians?"

Quite a different picture arises from Eli Yassif's article. Taking seriously the fact that *Toledot Yeshu* is a fully developed narrative (as opposed to the fragmentary nature of Talmudic references) with its own textual autonomy (as

¹¹ See above, n. 5.

¹² Ernst Bammel, "Christian Origins in Jewish Tradition," *NTS* 13 (1966–67): 317–35, reprinted in idem, *Judaica. Kleine Schriften* (2 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986), 1: 220–38; idem, "Origen *Contra Celsum* i. 41 and the Jewish Tradition," *JTS* 19 (1968): 211–13, reprinted in *Judaica*, 194–95; idem, "Der Jude des Celsus," in *Judaica*, 265–83.

¹³ Here following Smelik rather than Sokoloff.

opposed to the genre of midrash) he determines that these features are typical of the early Hebrew narratives first produced in the Middle Ages. The emergence of autonomous narratives that coincides with the emergence of works devoted to specific disciplines (such as *Midrash Aseret ha-Dibrot* and *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*) starts in the eighth century and originated in Islamic Babylonia. This, Yassif claims, is the cultural milieu to which *Toledot Yeshu* belongs: it was written by young Jewish scholars in and around the Babylonian *yeshivot* in Jewish Iraq in the second-third century of Islam. He bolsters this underlying hypothesis with a number of more detailed analyses: *Toledot Yeshu* is a typical Volksbuch whose different versions are not textual mutations of one Urtext but, rather, autonomous compositions belonging to different communities; it has a well-defined hero, who, however, is not a victim but a villain; like the novella, it displays an unexpected turning point or Wendepunkt that drastically changes the protagonist's life – the theft of the Ineffable Name and its successful magical use, which, although well known in Jewish folklore as early as the rabbinic period but of considerably greater interest in Geonic Babylonia, becomes the hallmark of Jewish superiority to Christianity; it exhibits a novella-like interest in the erotic; and it is critical of the hierarchical norms of Jewish society.

In his article “The *Toledot Yeshu* in the Context of Jewish-Muslim Debate,” Philip Alexander addresses the much neglected question of *Toledot Yeshu* within the Islamic context, that is, its *Sitz im Leben* not only in the Jewish-Christian but also in the Jewish-Muslim debate. In other words, locating *Toledot Yeshu* in the triangle between Muslims, Christians, and Jews, he asks where the tract stands in relation to the Muslim “Gospel” and what this might tell us about its circulation among Jews in the Muslim world. After a meticulous discussion of the physical evidence of *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts in the Muslim world and the tract's relationship with both the Christian and the Muslim “Gospel,” he proposes: having originated as an anti-Christian tract in Aramaic in late antiquity (presumably in the Galilee) – that is, as a Jewish anti-Gospel – *Toledot Yeshu* was taken to the East, where it was reworked and played an important role in the Jewish-Christian debate in late Sasanian Babylonia. With the rise of Islam, it gained new life in buttressing a distinctive Jewish identity not just against Christianity, but now also against Islam.

In the following contribution, Sarit Kattan Gribetz explores the ways in which *Toledot Yeshu* employs tropes and images from the Book of Esther and attempts to place these literary allusions into their broader socio-historical context. She proposes that the parallels with the Book of Esther not only serve to highlight specific common motifs but in fact relate the overall narrative themes of the Book of Esther to *Toledot Yeshu*. Hence, since the association between Haman, Jesus, Purim, and anti-Christianity can be traced as early as the late fourth/early fifth century, a certain nucleus of *Toledot Yeshu* must have been present at this time. In a last step, she ventures the tentative conclusion that *Toledot Yeshu* even might

have been used as a type of megillah, that is, to be recited and performed, similar to the use of the Book of Esther on Purim. As for the date of this public performance she discusses the ninth of Tevet, Christmas, Easter and Purim as possible days, with Christmas as the most likely candidate (at least for the later sources).

Most of the contributions to the volume focus on the exploration and explanation of certain motifs or subjects in *Toledot Yeshu*. Michael Meerson boldly tackles some of the most conspicuous ones related to Yeshu's death and burial: the fork on which Yeshu was suspended, the cabbage "tree" on which he was hanged, and his burial in an aqueduct. The fork (*furca*), as opposed to the cross, is peculiar to Agobard's version of the *Toledot Yeshu*, and Meerson suggests that, at Agobard's time, the fork as a tool of death penalty had long since replaced the cross. In using the term *furca*, Agobard therefore deliberately ignores the tradition of the crucifixion and displays his acquaintance with Roman legal and punitive practices as published in the sixth century *Corpus Iuris Civilis*. The cabbage stalk is the most bizarre of all *Toledot Yeshu* motifs claiming that all the trees which the rabbis tried out to hang Yeshu upon them immediately broke, thanks to Yeshu's magical powers, and that only the cabbage plant – because Yeshu forgot to include it in his curse of the trees – finally accepted his body and did not break. For the first time taking the cabbage stalk seriously and not trying to explain it away, Meerson looks into the botanical make-up of the cabbage and finds out that the wild cabbage, contrary to our modern perception, in its second year shoots out an unusually high stem and that, for this reason, it was considered – as early as the fourth century B. C. E. – to be a "tree-herb." More importantly, he points to the fact that the wild cabbage could be identified with the wild mustard and that it is precisely this plant that is mentioned in Matthew 13:31 f. as the smallest of all seeds which grows into "the greatest garden plant and becomes a tree." Hence, while in the New Testament the wild mustard/cabbage signifies the triumph of Christianity, in *Toledot Yeshu* it is used to signify Christianity's ultimate failure – Yeshu's humiliating death on the cabbage tree. As to the other strange peculiarity of Agobard and the Aramaic fragments, Yeshu's burial in an aqueduct or a water reservoir, Meerson suggests that it is a faint echo of the aqueduct built by Pilate that not only was paid for by Temple money but cut its way through a cemetery that was in use during that period. In his conclusion, Meerson first draws our attention to that fact that *Toledot Yeshu* indeed contains many traditions that at the time when they coalesced into their literary form were no longer understood by the scribes and their readers but (sometimes) can be traced back to their late antique origin and, second, warns us not to mistake the date of a specific detail or motif in *Toledot Yeshu* for the date of the composition as a whole.

Ora Limor and Israel Yuval turn to the enigmatic figure of Judas Iscariot who, thanks to the discovery of the *Gospel of Judas*, has attracted much attention. They compare the image of Judas in *Toledot Yeshu*, the Legend of the Finding of

the Cross, and the Golden Legend and start from the basic assumption that Judas represents the Jewish people and that his behavior represents the Jewish attitude to Christianity and its savior. Always presented as a subversive figure, Judas can act clandestinely either in order to destroy Christianity and to save Judaism or, vice versa, to destroy Judaism and to save Christianity. It is obvious that *Toledot Yeshu* is a prime example of Judas in his first capacity, presenting a clear counter-narrative to the New Testament: in burying Yeshu in a cesspool Judas mocks the cult of the Christian holy place by transforming the Holy Sepulcher into a latrine (the authors suggest that this motif reflects a Jewish answer to the Crusader experience); the late Huldreich version, created in a German-speaking environment, transmits a curse in which Judas curses Yeshu (not the other way around) and makes fun of Yeshu; and the version published by Krauss¹⁴ even describes a pogrom perpetrated by the Jews against the Christians in Jerusalem (the authors argue that this motif, rather than echoing the famous slaughter inflicted upon the Christians by the Jews in 614 C. E. after the Persian conquest of Jerusalem, is a product of medieval Jewish fantasy).

In the Legend of the Finding of the Cross, a Jew by the name Judas discovers, on Queen Helena's request, the location of Jesus' cross, whereupon he converts to Christianity and (renamed Kyriakos – "of the Lord") brings about the conversion of all Jews. In *Toledot Yeshu*, Judas, knowing the location of Yeshu's body, reveals it to Helena – not in order to support Christianity but, on the contrary, to refute the Christian claim that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead, that is, to expose Jesus as a swindler and impostor. The authors suspect that *Toledot Yeshu* was familiar with the Legend of the Finding of the Cross, which became known to the Jews in the fifteenth century. Finally, the authors point out that the much more negative image of Judas in the Golden Legend (appearing in Europe in the twelfth century and broadly disseminated), where he is depicted as almost pathologically distorted, doesn't find a response in Jewish sources. They attribute this striking fact to the worsening of relations between the Christian majority and the Jewish minority during the High Middle Ages, when the Jews preferred to ignore their Christian neighbors rather than to answer them.

A similar subversive role is played by Simon Peter, the primary founder of Christianity as an authentic faith for the Christians – and an underground double-agent of the rabbis who ultimately saves Israel by bringing about the final separation of Christianity from Judaism for the Jews. John Gager follows the traces that this strange figure has left in *Toledot Yeshu* and related Jewish sources (*Megillat Ta'anit*, Rashi, Rabbenu Tam, the Nishmat prayer, *Mahzor Vitry*) and finds the blueprint of Peter the false believer and double agent in no less a source than in the Gospel of Mark. Then, addressing the question of how *Toledot Yeshu*'s Peter became a refined poet of liturgical texts (*piyyutim*), he refers to the apocryphal

¹⁴ Krauss, "Une nouvelle recension," 65–73.

letter of Peter to James that serves as an introduction to the Homilies which are part of the Pseudo-Clementines. It is there, he argues, that we encounter a Christian text with Peter as the author of liturgical compositions and as the fierce defender of Judaism, a Peter who embodies the main message of *Toledot Yeshu*: to reclaim as Jews the major figures of foundational Christianity. Finally, in an appendix, Gager summarizes his views regarding the notoriously difficult dating problem of *Toledot Yeshu*:

We must imagine smaller as well as larger blocks of materials that show up in different versions and traveled in separate channels; individual elements in these channels reach back as far as the early second century. As to the Simon Peter complex in *Toledot Yeshu*, one version took shape somewhere between the fifth and the seventh centuries in the regions of eastern Christianity (Syria to Babylonia). The bits of information gathered by scholars should not taken, however, as evidence of a single, stable and integrated *Toledot Yeshu* narrative, but, rather, as pointing to accounts with different elements at different places and times. In particular, we must pay attention to the Eastern and Western setting of certain motifs, with the Peter story most likely originating in the West. Most importantly, we must dismiss the notion of a *Toledot Yeshu* Urtext, that is, of a single point of origin for the *Toledot Yeshu* composition.

Another figure who plays a prominent role in *Toledot Yeshu* is (Queen) Helena, but her identity is blurred and encompasses at least three women bearing the name Helena (or its cognates), namely Queen Helena of Adiabene, Helena Augusta the mother of Constantine and Helen the lover/spouse of Simon Magus; a fourth contender is the Hasmonean Queen Salome Alexandra, although she doesn't bear the name Helena. Galit Hasan-Rokem pursues this polymorphous figure as a prime example of both the variability and the inconsistency exhibited in *Toledot Yeshu*, reading *Toledot Yeshu* as a palimpsest and arguing for a disparate rather than related and coordinated existence of the *Toledot Yeshu* versions. Of the three Helenas, the Helen of Simon Magus is the least significant in *Toledot Yeshu*, whereas Helena of Adiabene and Helena Augusta are almost equal competitors as regards possible historical references. Both share, however, with each other (and to a certain degree with Simon Magus' Helen) the explicit connection with Jerusalem, certain sexual motifs, a strong association with conversion, and great generosity for religious institutions. Yet, ultimately, it is the imagined map of Jerusalem that Hasan-Rokem identifies as the birthplace of the composite Helena figure presented in *Toledot Yeshu*. The central role of Helena as a palimpsest in *Toledot Yeshu*, Hasan-Rokem concludes, may be understood as an encoding of the palimpsest Jerusalem, with the polymorphic Helena subverting unanimous and all too self-confident statements of its ownership.

A last cluster of contributions deals with the reception history of *Toledot Yeshu*. Yaacov Deutsch summarizes the Christian reception of *Toledot Yeshu* in the High Middle Ages and the early modern period, pointing out that, ironically,

Toledot Yeshu is the unique example of a Jewish text the information about which in Christian sources is richer than the information in Jewish sources. He begins by stating that it is highly unlikely that prior to the ninth century there existed a composition that included most of the stories appearing in the manuscripts and printed editions known to us from the Middle Ages and onward and that the motifs scattered in earlier sources served as building blocks for the *Toledot Yeshu* literature rather than being evidence of a composition "*Toledot Yeshu*." The earliest version of *Toledot Yeshu* which, however, does not contain the birth narrative, can be found in the Pilate group of the Aramaic manuscripts to which Agobard and Amulo are closely related. The next nucleus in Christian sources appears in the thirteenth century in a collection of Hebrew passages from Paris and in the writings of the Anonymus of Passau (ca. 1260), followed by the famous lengthy quotation in Raimundus Martinus' *Pugio Fidei* (around 1280), which corresponds to the manuscripts of the Helen group but (in contrast to them) lacks the birth narrative; another Latin translation was published by the Viennese cleric and historian Thomas Ebendorfer (d. 1464). With the number of Christian references to *Toledot Yeshu* growing rapidly in the fourteenth and fifteenth century, parts of *Toledot Yeshu* were printed for the first time by Christian scholars in 1470 and 1520, followed by the first printed edition of the full text with Latin translation by Johann Christoph Wagenseil in his notorious *Tela Ignea Satanae* of 1681 and by Johann Jacob Huldreich in 1705.

Briefly contrasting with this picture emerging from the Christian sources the available Jewish sources, Deutsch notices that the latter up to the seventeenth or even eighteenth century only rarely refer to *Toledot Yeshu*; conspicuously, with only one exception (Ibn Shaprut's *Even Bohan*) all of these references belong to the Helen group of manuscripts. From the combined Christian and Jewish evidence he concludes that the Helen group was created sometime during the twelfth or the thirteenth century and from then on became the dominant version of *Toledot Yeshu*; he doesn't find proof that prior to the twelfth century *Toledot Yeshu* was a comprehensive narrative that described Jesus' life from birth to death. The latest version of *Toledot Yeshu* is the one known as the Herod group with its primary witness in the text published by Huldreich in 1705.

The last paper by Paola Tartakoff adds a very different perspective: the function that *Toledot Yeshu* served in the context of Jewish-Christian relations in the Crown of Aragon in the mid-fourteenth century. She analyses the story of a certain Jew by the name of Alatzar who converted to Christianity and took the new name Pere. Pressed by his Jewish friends, Pere publicly renounced Christianity and, tied to the stake and already beginning to burn, was rescued by the inquisitor. He then renounced Judaism for a second time and denounced his Jewish friends for having re-Judaized him. In the subsequent inquisitorial trial, *Toledot Yeshu* played an important role as the Jews' major tool to convince Alatzar/Pere of Jesus' true origin as a bastard conceived through adultery. Tartakoff places

this trial in its historical context and argues that the *Toledot Yeshu* narrative was indeed used in the medieval Crown of Aragon not only to re-Judaize apostates but even to force a repentant apostate to unveil *Toledot Yeshu* in public and hence to instigate open confrontation with Christians. This result, in turn, deepens our understanding of the text itself since we need to take into consideration that the *Toledot Yeshu* narrative might have been molded to suit particular goals and hence been subjected to a creative process shaped by the ever changing circumstances of Jewish life.

It goes without saying that many of the questions raised by the enigmatic and elusive text *Toledot Yeshu* have not been addressed in the pages of this volume, let alone been answered. But we hope that, in presenting the papers of our conference to the public, we at least succeed in reopening the scholarly discourse and encouraging new questions and answers.

The Date and Provenance of the Aramaic *Toledot Yeshu* on the Basis of Aramaic Dialectology

Michael Sokoloff

The Publication of the Aramaic Texts

While a late Hebrew version of *Toledot Yeshu* has been known for centuries,¹ only very little of the original Aramaic version was available until the late nineteenth century. The first published Aramaic fragment appeared in אבן ברוך, a polemic work of Šemṭob ibn Šapruṭ, who lived in Spain in the latter part of the 14th cent.² In 1875, Abraham Harkavy published a page of an Aramaic version.³ In 1902, Samuel Krauss, in his comprehensive book on *TY*, published two pages from an unidentified Cairo Geniza manuscript.⁴ In 1911, Elkan N. Adler published a fragment from his personal collection⁵ which Krauss republished the following year, together with an additional fragment belonging to Adler.⁶ In 1928, Louis Ginzberg published a large amount of the Aramaic text from two manuscripts in the Taylor-Schechter collection.⁷ In 1970, William Horbury republished the first page of Ginzberg's first fragment which the latter was unable to read, together with many corrections to the other pages of this fragment.⁸ In

¹ For our knowledge of this composition until the twentieth century, see *LJ*.

² The text was reprinted in *LJ* 147 from a now lost manuscript, formerly in Breslau. See now: José-Vicente Niclós, ed., Šem Ṭob ibn Šapruṭ, "*La piedra de toque*": *Una obra de controversia judeo-cristiana: introducción, edición crítica, traducción y notas al libro I* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1997). In light of the Aramaic texts from the Cairo Geniza, it is clear that the author had a much longer Aramaic text similar to them, but that what he cites was an abridgment.

³ See Abraham Harkavy, "Leben Jesus," *Hebräische Bibliographie* 15 (1875): 15 (published from St. Petersburg Evr. IIA 105/9, #64109 in The Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jerusalem).

⁴ See *LJ*, 143–44.

⁵ See Elkan N. Adler, "Un fragment araméen de Toldot Yéshou," *REJ* 61(1910): 126–30 (*JTS* 2529, Adler 2102).

⁶ See Samuel Krauss, "Fragments araméens de Toldot Yéshou," *REJ* 62 (1911): 28–37 (= *Mss. A, B*).

⁷ See *GŠI*, 329–38 [publication of two fragments: 1. T-S Misc. 35.87 (= Ms. H); 2. T-S Misc. 35.88 (#19674 in The Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jerusalem)].

⁸ See Horbury, 116–21. As anyone who has ever dealt with Ginzberg's edition of the fragments of the Palestinian Talmud from the Cairo Geniza can attest, his copies were notoriously inaccurate.

1977, Zeev Falk published an additional page belonging to the first manuscript published by Louis Ginzberg,⁹ and Daniel Boyarin republished it a year later with many corrections.¹⁰ Finally, in 2000, Yaacov Deutsch published two new Hebrew texts of *TY* which differ from the medieval version, and which are, in fact, a translation of the Aramaic original. He included in this article a composite republication of most of the previously published Aramaic material.¹¹

Previous Discussions of the Aramaic Language of the Texts

In their publications of the Aramaic texts, Harkavy and Krauss made no attempt at analyzing the Aramaic language of the text in order to determine its date and provenance. Ginzberg in his introduction to his publication of the *TY* Aramaic text in *GŚI*, was the first scholar to relate to these issues, and he correctly pointed out that the Aramaic language of the text was linguistically a composite of TA and JBA. However, as will be seen further on, in spite of this, most of his specific lexicographical and philological comments were either incorrect or unfocused.¹²

The present writer added several linguistic observations concerning the language of the text in notes to Boyarin's article. However, the most thorough attempt by far to analyze the Aramaic language of this composition is to be found in a recently published article by Willem Smelik.¹³

In order to understand Smelik's suggestions for the date and provenance of *TY*, it will be helpful to first outline briefly Jewish Aramaic dialectology during the first millennium CE:

Aramaic was divided during this period into two major dialect areas which are termed MWA and MEA, each of which was further divided into dialects along confessional grounds. The two major Jewish dialects, JPA and JBA, are known to us mainly from literary texts of Rabbinic literature, and to a lesser extent, also from a body of non-Rabbinic and epigraphic texts.

⁹ See Zeev Falk, "A New Fragment of the Jewish 'Life of Jesus,'" *Tarbiz* 46 (1977): 319–22 (in Hebrew). Its siglum is T-S NS 298.56.

¹⁰ See Daniel Boyarin, "A Revised Version and Translation of the 'Toledot Yeshu' Fragment," *Tarbiz* 47(1978): 249–52 (in Hebrew).

¹¹ See Yaacov Deutsch, "New Evidence of Early Versions of *Toldot Yeshu*," *Tarbiz* 69 (2000): 177–97 (in Hebrew). Deutsch reprinted in this article the texts published by Ginzberg-Horbury and Falk-Boyarin, and in the present study, Aramaic *TY* will be cited according to the page and line numbering of this edition.

¹² It is the opinion of the present writer who has reviewed all of Ginzberg's philological studies that his philological conclusions were on the whole erratic.

¹³ See Smelik, Aramaic Dialect. Smelik has been working on this text for the past few years in the framework of the project "Late Aramaic: The Literary and Linguistic Context of the Zohar" in the Zohar Workshops centered at University College, London (See <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hebrew-jewish.home/zoharws.php>).

In addition to these two literary dialects which were based on the vernaculars of the Jewish communities of Eretz Israel and Babylonia, two other Jewish literary Aramaic dialects are relevant to our discussion:

1. TA, the dialect in which the official Targumim to the Pentateuch and the Prophets, known respectively as TO and TJ, were composed. The date and provenance of this dialect is still debated by scholars,¹⁴ but it is clear that during the Talmudic and Geonic Periods it was known and employed only in Babylonia. Its base is a form of Official Aramaic of the late Second Temple Period.

2. LJLA, the dialect in which the late Targumim to the Writings and the Pseudo-Jonathan Targum to the Pentateuch were composed. While its basis is JPA, it contains a strong admixture of JBA and TA elements, as well as including many loanwords from both Persian and Akkadian.¹⁵

Smelik's conclusions can be summarized as follows¹⁶:

1. The provenance of *TY* is Palestine, and it was originally composed in JPA of the third-fourth centuries CE;

2. At some later date, *TY* was transmitted in an oral or written form to Babylonia;

3. The JBA elements in *TY* do not derive from the original composition, but are rather the result of a later Babylonian updating of the narrative and the elimination of the JPA elements;

4. After the original Palestinian composition received its JBA form, it was brought back to its Palestinian homeland where it was converted to LJLA.

Linguistic Analysis of the Vocabulary of *TY*

The arguments in Smelik's article are based mainly on several morphological and lexical features found in the Aramaic *TY* texts. Indeed, his startling conclusion – viz. that the text originated in Palestine, was transmitted to Babylonia where it underwent a partial transformation, and then was returned to Palestine where further morphological changes took place – seems complicated to say the least, and, to my mind, insupportable in light of the linguistic evidence. As will be seen, he has placed an inordinately strong emphasis of one morphological feature of *TY* occurring in one manuscript, and – following Ginzberg's incorrect philological remarks – also on several supposed JPA lexical features. In the following analysis, the present writer will deal with the morphology and vocabulary

¹⁴ See Christa Müller-Kessler, "The Earliest Evidence for Targum Onkelos from Babylonia and the Question of its Dialect and Origin," *Journal for the Aramaic Bible* 3 (2001): 181–98.

¹⁵ See Stephen A. Kaufman, "Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and the late Jewish Literary Aramaic," in *Studies in Bible and Exegesis* (eds. M. Bar-Asher et al., Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1993 [in Hebrew]), 3: 363–82.

¹⁶ See Smelik, *Aramaic Dialect*, 69–73.

of *TY* in order to show that it is permeated by JBA and TA¹⁷ to such an extent that it is extremely improbable to contend that it was originally written anywhere else except in Jewish Babylonia. As to the time of its composition, the absence of known morphological elements from Geonic JBA and the presence of morphological elements from TA point to its having been composed sometime before the Geonic Period. While the present writer cannot give a plausible explanation at present for the occurrence of occasional JPA morphological forms found in one manuscript of *TY*,¹⁸ it is his opinion that they cannot refute the overwhelming evidence of JBA morphology, vocabulary, and syntax in *TY* to suppose an original Palestinian provenance for this composition.

1. Morphology¹⁹

The morphology of *TY* is overwhelmingly that of JBA with an admixture of TA.

1.1 Verbal forms

1.1.1 Synthetic participial forms²⁰: JBA – 1sg. עבירנא (189:27); בעינא (190:2); לחישנא (190:8); קרענא, מפיקנא (192:7); 2sg. יהבת (192:6); 1pl. יכלינן (K29:15); שבקינן (186:21); 2m.pl. אתיתון (195:14);²¹ יכליתון (K29:18); תון {י} משכה (194:16); צביתו (189:5).

1.1.2 Infinitive forms of derived conjugations:

a. TA²² – לאחתא (194:21); לאמתא (190:1); לאפקא (190:7); לאצלבא (193:11).

b. JBA²³ – לאחוחיה (G337:11).

1.1.3 Af. of אתיל as אתי – JBA²⁴ – אחיה (191:21); אחייה (191:26).²⁵

1.1.4 3rd pers. imp. w. -ל/-נ prefix²⁶ – JBA – ליטעום (191:2); <ני>עני [ינ] (191:3); ליברו (191:5).

1.1.5 Perfect *qēṣila*-forms TA²⁷ – ילית (191:20); סליקית (195:16; K29:21).

1.1.6 M.pl. participle of III-y verbs – TA²⁸ – הו צבן (194:21).

¹⁷ Note also that the only direct citation of a Targumic text in *TY* is from Onkelos לא תבית לא צליבא TO Dt 21:23 (see 195:12).

¹⁸ In essence, the only distinct JPA morphological form which actually occurs is the 3m.pl. pf. verb with 3m.sg. suff. ניה- which occurs in Ms. G alongside the JBA forms. Aside from this one point, this manuscript is just as characteristically JBA as all the others.

¹⁹ The examples cited in the following sections are representative but not exhaustive.

²⁰ See Eps, *GBA*, 40 ff.

²¹ This form was incorrectly analyzed by Smelik, *Aramaic Dialect*, 57, as a pf. The entire phrase reads: אמ אתיתון מחר "if you come tomorrow."

²² See Dalman, *GJPA*, 81

²³ See Eps, *GBA*, 49.

²⁴ This is a typical JBA form (see *DJBA*, 178, Af. #2, w. lit.). JPA employs either אייתי or אייטי (see: *DJPA*, 80 ff.).

²⁵ But once אחיאו (G336:4), the TA form [Dalman, *GJPA*, 358].

²⁶ The statement of Smelik, *Aramaic Dialect*, 56 that the prefix -ל occurs in JPA to express volitional modality is completely incorrect. This prefix never occurs in accurate JPA texts.

²⁷ See Dalman, *GJPA*, 260.

²⁸ See Dalman, *GJPA*, 350.

1.1.7 *t*-verbal stems: In addition to the retention of *t* as in TA and JPA, there are many more examples with its assimilation as in JBA.

a. w. *t* – אתהפֿיך (191:13); איתחזור (G336:11).

b. w. assimilation of *t*²⁹ – חיבעל (192:5); איפתחי (193:26); איפתח (194:2; G336:16); אחדרו (195:1).

1.1.8 2m.pl.imp. vb. w. *n* – TA, JPA³⁰ – [תאתן] (194:15); תחוזן (194:18); תשכחון (195:15); תרעון (195:16).

1.1.9 2m.sg. imper. of אולֿל – JBA³¹ – זיל (196:2; G336:10).

1.1.10 3m.pl.pf. All forms have the classical *v*-ending found in TA and often in JBA but not in JPA,³² e. g. אולו (186:9); אשכחו (186:11).

1.2 Nominal forms³³:

1.2.1 M.pl. forms. The dominant morpheme is *v*- as in JBA, while only a few examples of *v*ן-

(abs.) and *v*-יא (det.) as in TA and JPA occur.

a. w. *v*ן- TA, JPA – גבריֿן (186:11); גובריֿן (189:9).

b. w. *v*- JBA – E. g. כתאבי דחרשי (186:19); ירחי (190:23); כ[ת]בי ואגרי (190:26); שעי (192:11); מילי (192:11); יומי (191:1; 9); יומי (191:6); יומי (191:10); ירחי (191:30); ירחי (191:30); מיתאי (196:3); יא- TA, JPA – מיליא (189:27); חרשיא (192:30); מיתאי (196:3).

1.3 Pronominal forms:

1.3.1 3m.sg. suff. pron. TA³⁴: עלוהי (188:26); תלמידוהי (186:30); JBA: תלמידיה (186:28); כרעיה (195:22); ידיה דישו (186:20).

1.3.2 Poss. suff. endings TA, JPA³⁵ – 3m.pl. בהון (191:11); דיניהון (192:22); JBA³⁶: 3 f.pl. כוליה מדינתא (190:26).³⁷

1.3.3 3m.sg. acc. suff. ending fol. 3m.pf. Several types occur in *TY*:

a. JBA³⁸ – ה- <ו> את (188:21); קטלוה (188:27); אסקוה (G337:3).

b. TA³⁹ – ה- איתוהי (186:14); חנקוהי (187:22); [צ]לבוהי ורגמוהי (188:14); קברוהי (194:26); אשכחוהי (194:31); קברוהי (G337:14); זקפוהי וקטלוהי (H 335b:5).

c. JPA⁴⁰ – ניה- צלבנוהי (G336:2); אחתונוהי (G337:14); אשכחונוהי (G338:2).

²⁹ See Eps, *GBA*, 50 ff.

³⁰ In JBA, there is no final *-n*.

³¹ See *DJBA*, 100. The initial *aleph* is retained in both TA and JPA (see Dalman, *GJPA*, 300; *DJPA* 43).

³² See Dalman, *GJPA*, 254.

³³ It may be noted here that the form ברתחיה (191:14) does not have a “pleonastic ending” as stated by Smelik, *Aramaic Dialect*, 69. As correctly understood by Deutsch in his edition, the scribe added an interlinear ך to correct the first erroneous תי״ו ברתחיה to the correct ברתיה.

³⁴ See Dalman, *GJPA*, 204.

³⁵ See Dalman, *GJPA*, 204.

³⁶ See Eps, *GBA*, 124.

³⁷ But incorrectly: כולוהון מדינתא (191:7)

³⁸ See *MALBT*, 59.

³⁹ See Dalman, *GJPA*, 387.

⁴⁰ See Dalman, *GJPA* 381. Note that all of the examples occur in Ms. G.

1.3.4 3m.sg./pl. acc. suff. ending fol. 3m.pf. – TA, JPA⁴¹ – שדרינון (186:8); כתבינון (186:25); טענונון, אובל >ונון (G336a:1).

1.3.5 3 f.sg. acc. suff. ending fol. 3m.pf.III-γ vb. – JBA, TA – אחיה (192:18)⁴²; אתיה (194:7); קריה (195:7).

2. Syntax

2.1. קא + participle – This syntagm is employed only in JBA⁴³ – קא מטעי (186:13; 29); קא ילדה (191:22); קא ילדה (192:2); [...] קא (192:29).

2.2 *qētīl lē*-syntagm – JBA⁴⁴ – כתא[בי אלין] לא חזי לי – (186:27).

2.3. Indeterminate forms of nouns – As in JBA, the determinate forms are always employed, except in specific syntactic usages, e. g. אם דכר אם נוקבה (190:17); בכל ערן ובכל ש[עה] (191:12).

2.4. Position of deictic pronouns – As in JBA these are always placed before the noun,⁴⁵ e. g. ההוא עוברא (191:13).

2.5. Use of acc. marker ית- – This syntagm is used in TA and JPA.

a. Independent⁴⁶ – ית פגריה = איתי ית פגרי (195:18) (K29:22)

b. W. pron. suff. – יתהון (193:5); צלבו ית[יה] (193:8); לאצלבא יתיה (193:11); למיצלב יתיה (193:12); יסקון יתיה (194:10); תפשו יתהון (195:1); צלבתון יתיה (195:5); גרר יתיה (195:22); תשכחון יתי (195:15); אטעי יתהון (195:13); אטעי יתיה (195:18); דנו יתיה (335b:5); אנא מייתי יתיה (K29:22);

2.6 Use of acc. marker -ל – This usage is common in all of the Middle Aramaic dialects.

a. alone – אנא קרענא ליה לכרסה (G336:1); נסכו ליוח[נן] מצבענא (192:7); מפינקא ליה ממעי אימיה (197:8); etc.

b. w. proleptic pron. – איתוהי ליוחנן מצבענא (186:14); אתיה ליישו (191:26); בזעה (192:14); אסקוה ליישו רשיעא (G337b:3); etc.

2.7 Use of independent poss. pron. -דיד- and -דיל- – Both forms are employed in the texts. The former is used in TA and the latter in JBA and JPA.⁴⁷

3. Vocabulary

The following analysis of the vocabulary of *TY* shows that most words which are peculiar to a particular MA dialect are found either in JBA or another MEA dialect.⁴⁸ A large number of additional words are known specifically from TA. The following are the examples:

⁴¹ See Dalman, *GJPA*, 385.

⁴² In JPA, the end. is תה-, e. g. תניתה (Dalman, *DJPA*).

⁴³ See *DJPA*, 976.

⁴⁴ See *DJBA*, 612.

⁴⁵ See *GJPA*, 368.

⁴⁶ Smelik, *Aramaic Dialect*, 54, incorrectly states that *TY* does not use this independent form.

⁴⁷ See *DJBA*, 327; *DJPA*, 145.

⁴⁸ Smelik, *Aramaic Dialect*, 60, suggests that הנא is borrowed from Syriac ܢܘܢܐ. This is entirely unlikely. The passage reads: ܕܝܢ ܗܢܐ ܝܫܘ ܢܗ ܦܢܪܝܐ (K29:25), where it is a clear corruption

3.1. JBA Vocabulary

1. אחד בשושיפא “to grasp in a towel/garment” (194:6) – Similarly, Šemṭob ibn Šapruṭ’s כוחן אבן כוחן text reads: יהורה בשושיפא רטרניא (LJ 147:24). This phrase is exactly like the Geonic phrase בשושיפא או בסודרא ליה דנקיט ליה.⁴⁹

2. pe. אחד ל- “to hold back, retain” (191:24; 29) – The text reads: אית בעמא {ה} ריהודאי דאחרין לולדא במעי אימיה תריסר ריחי “there are among the Jewish people those who retain the fetus in the mother’s womb for twelve months.” This meaning of אחד pe. is known elsewhere only from Syriac.⁵⁰

3. איניש “someone, person” (191:2) – This form is characteristic of MEA,⁵¹ occurring in JBA and Ma.⁵²

4. אית ב- “to contain, have” – The text reads: אית בעמא דיהודאי (191:23). This is a JBA usage.⁵³

5. אלהא רבא “great God” (K29:26; 335b:6) – The phrase is known from JBA.⁵⁴

6. אמאי “why” (192:2) – This word occurs only in JBA, while JPA has למה.

7. אמר מילא “to recite an incantation” (G336:15; 193:23) – While this idiomatic phrase is documented in both JPA⁵⁵ and JBA,⁵⁶ its use here with the abs. form מילא may point to a MWA origin.

8. בההיא שעתא “at that time” (194:12) – In contrast to Smelik,⁵⁷ this adverbial expression does not reflect LJLA, but is perfectly good JBA and occurs often in texts.⁵⁸

9. אתרואתא “places” (191:8) – This is the JBA pl. of the noun אתרא, occurring also in the other MEA dialects,⁵⁹ as opposed to the pl. אתרין in the MWA dialects.⁶⁰

10. בעו רחמי מן מרי {ה} דרחמי “they prayed to the Lord of Prayers” (191:10) – This is a thoroughly JBA expression composed of two idiomatic expressions.

from הוא. The examples given in *DJBA*, 385 are in square brackets and also indicate that this word is a corruption.

⁴⁹ See *DJBA*, 1126. Ginzberg’s attempt in *GŠI*, 337, n. to l.1, to understand this word as a cock’s crest should be completely rejected. Besides the fact that the parallel quoted here from כוחן אבן supports the known meaning of this word (*DJBA*, 1126), his attempt to connect this word semantically with Aramaic כרבלתא is far-fetched to say the least.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Gregorii Bar-Hebraei chronicum syriacum* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1890), 390:21 (*SL*, 25, mng. 3).

⁵¹ It occurs also in Ma עניש *MD*, 353.

⁵² See *DJBA*, 119. Contrary to Smelik, *Aramaic Dialect*, 44, this is not a phonetic change from איניש, but probably reflects Official Aramaic איש which later disappeared. JPA only has אנש.

⁵³ See *DJPA*, 127, mng. c.

⁵⁴ See *DJPA*, 133.

⁵⁵ See *DJPA*, 305, mng. 3b.

⁵⁶ See *DJBA*, 669, mng. 5.

⁵⁷ See Smelik, *Aramaic Dialect*, 60.

⁵⁸ See *DJBA*, 1168.

⁵⁹ See *DJBA*, 179.

⁶⁰ See *DJPA*, 81.

Both the word רחמי “prayer” as well as the phrase בעא רחמי “to pray” are well attested in JBA⁶¹ and are also found in Ma.⁶² As to the expression מרי דרחמי, Ginzberg pointed to the Hebrew expression בעל הרחמים “Merciful One” occurring once in Mishnaic Hebrew in *Leviticus Rabbah* and contended that it is an Aramaic calque of this phrase instead of the more common Aramaic רחמנא.⁶³ The Hebrew phrase there reads in its entirety: אין בעל הרחמים נוגע בנפשות תחילה: “the Merciful One does not smite the souls first” (LevR 17:4, ed. M. Margulies, p. 378:2). While this is clearly is an epithet of God, it is also certain that its literal meaning from the context is “Lord of Mercy.” However, in view of the first part of the Aramaic phrase in *TY*, it is clear that this cannot be its meaning in this text where it should rather be translated as “Master of Prayers.” To the best of my knowledge, this Aramaic phrase is unattested anywhere in JBA; however, its Hebrew equivalent is known from a Babylonian Seliḥot prayer from the Geonic Period: מכניסי רחמים הכניסו רחמינו לפני בעל הרחמים “May the ones who bring in prayers bring in our prayers before the Master of Prayers,”⁶⁴ i. e. the angels are implored to be intercessors in bringing the congregation’s prayers before God, who is the Master of Prayers.⁶⁵ Moreover, we should also note that this exact phrase actually occurs in Ma, another MEA dialect: יא מאריא ראהמיא יא מאריא “O Lord of prayers, O Lord of petitions” Lidzbarski, ML 188:1.⁶⁶

11. owner of a garden” (186:10)⁶⁷ – The form known from JBA is nearly always גינאה,⁶⁸ although גנאה is also attested. Note that the variant form גננא (193:24) is found also in JPA and in Sy.⁶⁹

12. “so” (187:29; 188:12) – A typical JBA word that is not found in MWA.⁷⁰ The Sy form הכן (189:10)⁷¹ is employed once.

13. “those people” (194:30) – This is a typical JBA phrase.⁷²

14. וכין דהפיך pa., itpe. “to transform, be transformed” – The texts read: וכוין דהפיך “when God transformed that fetus into a stone” (191:18); ואתהפיך הוא עוברא דהוה במעי ברתיה דיקסר והוה אבנא “that fetus which was in his

⁶¹ The MWA dialects only have the meaning “mercy” for this word (*DJPA*, 521).

⁶² See *DJBA*, 1069, mng. 3.

⁶³ See *GSI*, 329, n. to l.12 (He is followed in this interpretation by Smelik, *Aramaic dialects*, 68.). For the use of רחמנא as an appellation of God in JBA, see *DJBA*, 1069.

⁶⁴ See Israel Davidson et al., eds., *Siddur R. Saadja Gaon* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1970 [in Hebrew]), 357:21; Daniel Goldschmidt, ed., סדר הסליחות כמנהג ליטא וקהילות הפרושים בארץ ישראל, (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1965), 16:16.

⁶⁵ Note that in the following line God is called: שומע תפלה.

⁶⁶ See *MD*, 251.

⁶⁷ The original meaning is “gardener.”

⁶⁸ See *DJBA*, 281.

⁶⁹ See *DJPA*, 133; *SL*, 249.

⁷⁰ See *DJBA*, 382.

⁷¹ See *SL*, 342. The form הכן occurs also in JPA (see *DJPA*, 165), where it is a defective spelling for הכין. This is unlikely here since *TY* employs plene orthography.

⁷² See *DJBA*, 388. Note, however, that the more classical Aramaic form אלין, well known also from TA, occurs in the conflated phrases אלין אינשי אלין (195:13) and כתאבי אלין (186:24).

daughter's womb was transformed into a stone" (191:13). This meaning is attested in JBA,⁷³ but not in JPA.

15. השתא "now" (195:17) – This word occurs only in JBA.⁷⁴

16. חדר, הדר itpe. "to encircle" (195:1; 191:13) – This root appears occasionally in Geonic JBA with ה. ⁷⁵ The morphology of the itpe. form with assimilation of *t* as well as its meaning agree well with the attested form in JBA.

17. טען בפרזלא "to place iron manacles upon s. o." (193:6; G336:1) – This specialized meaning of פרזלא is found in MEA only in JBA⁷⁶ and in Sy.⁷⁷ The meaning of טען ב- "to place upon s. o." is documented for JBA.⁷⁸

18. כולי עלמא "everyone" (189:10) – This is a ubiquitous term in JBA⁷⁹ not found in JPA which uses כל עמא.⁸⁰

19. כל מירי "anything, whatever" (190:2) – This is a common phrase in JBA.⁸¹

20. כנא רכרובא "stalk of a cabbage" (194:9⁸²; G337b:4⁸³) – In spite of the incongruous small size of this plant, this reading – which occurs twice in the Aramaic text as well as in the later Hebrew tradition of *TY* – should not be emended to חרובא as was done by Smelik.⁸⁴ The text here brings to mind the tradition concerning Haman who was hanged on a thorn bush,⁸⁵ something which is especially relevant in light of the comparisons in the midrashic literature between Haman and Jesus.

21. מאי "what" – This form of the pronoun is ubiquitous in JBA⁸⁶ both alone (189:23) and w. a fol. noun, e. g. מאי אסותא "what kind of healing" (K29:12).⁸⁷

22. מארותא "lords," pl. of מריא (186:24) – This form used in JBA⁸⁸ as opposed to the pl. מרין found in JPA.⁸⁹

⁷³ See *DJBA*, 388 ff.

⁷⁴ See *DJBA*, 391.

⁷⁵ See *DJBA*, 363. This has no connection with JPA which employs חדר.

⁷⁶ See *DJBA*, 930, mng. 3 (from Anan).

⁷⁷ See *SL*, 1235, mng. 2.c.1.

⁷⁸ See טענהו כולי עלמא בשיריא *Qid* 73a(21) (*DJBA*, 511, Pe., mng. 2).

⁷⁹ See *DJBA*, 560.

⁸⁰ See *DJPA*, 410.

⁸¹ See *DJBA*, 560.

⁸² This is the correct reading of the text (see Horbury, 120), and not רכרובא as read by Ginzberg and followed incorrectly by Smelik, *Aramaic Dialect*, 68.

⁸³ Incorrectly cited by Smelik, *ibid.*, as קנא רכרובא.

⁸⁴ See Smelik, *ibid.*, 68. There is only one suggested interchange of this type in JBA, viz. סירכא (see *DJBA*, 809) and an *ad hoc* emendation on that basis in light of the strong textual tradition of כרובא is extremely unlikely. A later Hebrew version of *TY* preserves the tradition found here: ער שהביאו עץ שלכרוב וחלו אותו עליו (*LJ* 120:21).

⁸⁵ See *Esther Rabbah* 9:2 (14b) and *SYAP*, 182–83.

⁸⁶ See *DJBA*, 634.

⁸⁷ See *DJBA*, 635, mng. d.

⁸⁸ See *DJBA*, 707

⁸⁹ See *DJPA*, 329.

23. *worldly life* “מילי עלמא” (192:4) – This expression occurs several times in JBA.⁹⁰

24. *מן קמי* + imp. (194:9; G337:4) – This usage is well attested in JBA.⁹¹

25. *מצבע(א)נא* “baptizer” (186:4; 186:9; 189:3; 189:21)⁹² – The root *צבע* is often found in JPA, JBA, and MH in the sense of “to dip, dye,” but never in the sense of “to immerse oneself” for which *טבל* or *אמר* are usually employed. As the present writer has pointed out,⁹³ the word under discussion is well known in MWA from CPA *ܡܚܘܒܬܐ* as an appellation of John the Baptist.⁹⁴ Smelik has additionally noted that *מאצבאנא* occurs in Ma in the same usage.⁹⁵ Since a borrowing in TY of a word from CPA is extremely unlikely, its occurrence in TY probably implies that it was borrowed from Ma, with an adaptation to the classical orthography. The existence of another Ma specialized expression in TY in addition to the previously discussed *מרי דחמי* shows that this is not an isolated phenomenon.

26. *מרי יישו* “my/our master” – The use of *מרי* before a PN (cf. 195:10) is common in most of the A dialects. The form here is either JPA or TA since JBA uses *מר*. The form *מרנא* (195:3; 17) is an archaic form⁹⁶ and is known elsewhere from Geonic JBA.⁹⁷

27. *עוכרא* “fetus, embryo” (191:19) – This word is known only from MH and from JBA.⁹⁸

28. *פומא* This word occurs in two meanings in TY: 1. “edge of knife/sword,” in the phrase *חריבא דתרין פומא* (186:23) – This meaning occurs in MEA in both JBA⁹⁹ and Sy;¹⁰⁰ 2. “opening” in phrase *פומא דמערתא* (193:23) – This meaning is found only in Aramaic in JBA¹⁰¹ and CPA.¹⁰²

29. *קום* *pe*. “to be in a state, ready” (193:12 = G336:5) – The text reads: *צליבא קאי למיצלב יתיה קאים למצלביה* “the crucifix pole is ready to crucify him.”¹⁰³ This specialized meaning of the root used with inanimate objects is only attested in JBA.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁰ See *DJBA*, 867, mng. 2.

⁹¹ See *DJBA*, 1026, mng. II.a. Ginzberg’s statement, *ad loc.*, that the verbal form here is a pf. is entirely incorrect.

⁹² This is rendered in the Hebrew translation by the same Aramaic root *צבע* (185:27; 186:15; 193:8)

⁹³ See Boyarin, “A Revised Version,” 250, n. to 1.2.

⁹⁴ See *LSp*, 166. Sy always employs *ܡܚܘܒܬܐ* *SL*, 802.

⁹⁵ Like Ma *יאורנא* “river” *MD*, 187, this word seems to be one of the Ma words which originated in the West.

⁹⁶ Note also *לנא* (186:21).

⁹⁷ See *DJBA*, 707.

⁹⁸ See *DJBA*, 846.

⁹⁹ See *DJBA*, 890.

¹⁰⁰ See *SL*, 1165. It also occurs in CPA (*LSp*, 159) in the form *ܡܘܡܐ*.

¹⁰¹ See *DJBA*, 890.

¹⁰² See *LSp*, 158.

¹⁰³ Smelik, *Aramaic Dialect*, 59, incorrectly translates “the impaler (sic!) was standing.”

¹⁰⁴ See *DJBA*, 1003, mng. 7b.

30. קטם רישא “to behead” (188:21) – This phrase is found also in Sy, where it is used there only in connection with plants.¹⁰⁵

31. רמי pe. “to attach (chords, threads, etc.)” – This root occurs in the phrase בכרעיה [רמא חכלנא] (195:21), and this specific meaning of this verbal root is otherwise found only in JBA.¹⁰⁶

32. שמה דפרשא “the Ineffable Name” (G336:12) – This phrase occurs in MH as שם המפורש¹⁰⁷ and in the Jewish Aramaic dialects as שמה מפרשא.¹⁰⁸ Note, however, that the word פרשא occurs in Ma in the phrase פארשא הארשיא “phylactery against sorcery.”¹⁰⁹

33. שדר בתר “to send for s. o.” (191:31) – While the root שדר pa. occurs in many Aramaic dialects, its use together with בתר is limited only to JBA.¹¹⁰

34. שמין “names,” pl. of שמה (186:31) – The JPA plural is always שמהן,¹¹¹ while the JBA plural is nearly always שמין.¹¹²

35. תרנולא “rooster” (194:4) – The form of this word without *gimel* occurs specifically in JBA.¹¹³

36. Numerals – Nearly all of the numerals occurring in the text are in JBA.¹¹⁴

3.2. TA Vocabulary

1. אגרי “letters” (190:26)¹¹⁵ – All of the Aramaic dialects employ the f.pl. form אגרות except for TA where the pl. is איגרין TJ Is 39:1.

2. - לית/לית ויכלא ל- + inf. “to be able” – This specific expression is found in TA, e. g. מרלית ויכלא קרם ה' לאעלא ית עמא הרין TO Dt 14:16 and in JPA.¹¹⁶

3. בית שקיא רמיה “water trough” (196:1) – The term is found elsewhere only in TA (e. g. TO Gen 24:20).

4. בקושטא “truly, indeed” (195:6)¹¹⁷ – This phrase occurs often in TA (e. g. TO Gen 17:19; Ex 2:14) and in the MH calque באמת, but it is unknown in JPA and JBA.

5. חאך pa. “to laugh” (K29:16)¹¹⁸ – The form is otherwise known only from TA.¹¹⁹

¹⁰⁵ See *SL*, 1353.

¹⁰⁶ See *DJBA*, 1087, mng. 14.

¹⁰⁷ See Jastrow, 1242.

¹⁰⁸ See *DJBA*, 940; *DJPA*, 451. Cf. also Sy *ܦܫܐ ܦܫܐ* *PSm*, 330.

¹⁰⁹ See *MD*, 465.

¹¹⁰ See *DJBA*, 252.

¹¹¹ See *DJPA*, 555.

¹¹² See *DJBA*, 1153 ff.

¹¹³ See *DJBA*, 1235.

¹¹⁴ See, e. g.: תריסר (191:25, 2x); ארבער (196:7).

¹¹⁵ The sg. occurs in *TY* in the restored text *רא[אגרי]* (189:6), which should most likely be read *רא[גרי]*.

¹¹⁶ See *DJPA*, 237.

¹¹⁷ The text reads: בקושקא דאזל לשמיא.

¹¹⁸ The text reads: הוה מחאך עליהון.

¹¹⁹ See Jastrow, 432, s. v. #2 חוך.

6. כר חי “alive” (192:7; 194:19) – This use of כר in a conditional clause occurs elsewhere only in TA (e. g. TO Ex 12:9; Lev 16:10).¹²⁰

7. מעיא “womb” (190:14) – This meaning is found elsewhere in TA (e. g. TO Gen 25:24), JPA,¹²¹ and Sy.¹²²

8. פולחן אלהא “service of the God of heaven” (196:15; cf. K30:34) – The exact expression is found in TA (e. g. TO Dt 32:21) and in Sy.¹²³

9. פייגרא “body” (195:8; 18) – This noun appears in all of the Aramaic dialects in the *qatl*-formation, except for TA where the *qilt*-formation is found (e. g. TO Lev 26:30; Num 14:32).

10. צליבא “crucifixion pole” (193:12; 195:1) – This word which occurs in MWA¹²⁴ and TA (e. g. Gen 40:19) does not occur in JBA which employs זקיפא.¹²⁵

11. קיימא דאורייתא “law” (194:24) – This specific meaning here of common Aramaic קיים occurs only in TA (e. g. קים ודין TO Ex 15:25).

12. רהטא דמיא “water trough” (194:27) – The word occurs once in TA as רט [var רהט] TO Gen 30:38. It is also attested in Sy.¹²⁶

Conclusions

From the comparative linguistic material cited from the relevant Aramaic dialects we may propose the following conclusions:

1. With regard to morphology, *TY* presents on the whole a mixture of forms known mainly from JBA and TA. Forms particular only to MWA (e. g. suff. acc. pronouns to 3m.pf. verbal forms) are extremely rare and cannot prove that *TY* has a Western base.

2. There do not seem to be any particular morphological forms specifically associated with Geonic Aramaic.

3. The evidence of the vocabulary overwhelmingly points to an Eastern provenance. Many expressions are typical of JBA, while several others found only in *TY* but are known elsewhere from MEA dialects, indicating that the author could only have known them if he had lived in a MEA milieu.

4. A large number of other vocabulary items are known only from TA which was employed by Babylonian Jewry for Targumim during the Talmudic and Geonic Periods, as opposed to Palestinian Jewry which utilized JPA for Targumim.

¹²⁰ Conditional clauses are introduced in JBA by כּי and in JPA by מן.

¹²¹ See *DJPA*, 322.

¹²² See *SL*, 800.

¹²³ See *SL*, 1164.

¹²⁴ See *DJPA*, 465.

¹²⁵ See *DJBA*, 418.

¹²⁶ See *SL*, 1441, mng. 7.

5. All of the preceding evidence strongly points to the provenance of the Aramaic *TY* as being Jewish Babylonia, and its time of composition towards the middle of the first millennium CE.

The following abbreviations are employed in this article:

CPA	Christian Palestinian Aramaic
Dalman, <i>GJPA</i>	Gustaf Dalman, <i>Grammatik des jüdisch-palästinischen Aramäisch</i> (second ed.; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1905)
<i>DJBA</i>	Michael Sokoloff, <i>A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period</i> (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).
<i>DJPA</i>	Michael Sokoloff, <i>A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period</i> (second ed.; Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).
Eps, <i>GBA</i>	Jacob Nahum Epstein, <i>A Grammar of Babylonian Aramaic</i> (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1960).
G	Text of <i>TY</i> , published in <i>GŠI</i> , 336–38.
<i>GŠI</i>	Louis Ginzberg, ed., <i>Genizah Studies in Memory of Doctor Solomon Schechter (Ginze Schechter)</i> (3 vols.; New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1928).
Horbury	William Horbury, “The Trial of Jesus in Jewish Tradition,” in <i>The Trial of Jesus: Cambridge Studies in Honour of C. F. D. Moule</i> (ed. Ernst Bammel; Naperville: Allenson, 1970), 116–21.
Jastrow	Marcus Jastrow, <i>A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi and the Midrashic Literature</i> , (2 vols.; London: Trübner; New York: G. P. Putnam, 1886–1903).
JBA	Jewish Babylonian Aramaic
JPA	Jewish Palestinian Aramaic
K	Samuel Krauss, “Fragments araméens de Toldot Yéschou,” <i>REJ</i> 62 (1911): 28–37 (= Mss. A, B).
LevR	<i>Leviticus Rabbah</i>
<i>LJ</i>	Samuel Krauss, <i>Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen</i> (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1902).
LJLA	Late Jewish Literary Aramaic
<i>LSp</i>	Friedrich Schulthess, <i>Lexicon Syropalaestinum</i> (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1903).
Ma	Mandaic
<i>MALBT</i>	Max Leopold Margolis, <i>A Manual of the Aramaic Language of the Babylonian Talmud</i> (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1910).
<i>MD</i>	Ethel Stefana Drower and Rudolf Macuch, <i>A Mandaic Dictionary</i> (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963).
MEA	Middle Eastern Aramaic
MH	Mishnaic Hebrew
MWA	Middle Western Aramaic
OfA	Official Aramaic

- PSm* Robert Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* (2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1868–1901).
- REJ* *Revue des Etudes Juives*
- SL* Michael Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns; Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2009).
- Smelik, Aramaic Dialect Willem F. Smelik, “The Aramaic Dialect(s) of the Toldot Yeshu Fragments,” *Aramaic Studies* 7 (2009): 39–73.
- Sy Syriac
- SYAP* Michael Sokoloff and Joseph Yahalom, *Jewish Palestinian Aramaic Poetry from Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1999 [in Hebrew]).
- TA Targumic Aramaic
- TJ Targum Jonathan to the Prophets
- TO Targum Onkelos
- TY* *Toledot Yeshu*

Agobard's and Amulo's *Toledot Yeshu*

Peter Schäfer

It has been one of the major methodological challenges of research on *Toledot Yeshu* to distinguish between, on the one hand, certain *traditions* collected by Christians, Pagans or Jews for whatever reason and in whichever configuration, and, on the other, a well-defined *work* bearing the title “*Toledot Yeshu*” (or whatever title such a work might have been given). Much of the older research on *Toledot Yeshu* has been guided by the desire not only to discover such a work but also to find it attested as early as possible. Any tradition about Jesus' birth, life, and death that is shared between the *Toledot Yeshu* and some ancient source and that cannot be explained from either the New Testament or rabbinic sources is taken as evidence of a “composition” or “work” *Toledot Yeshu* – and the earlier this ancient source turns out to be the earlier the work *Toledot Yeshu* is dated. The most graphic example of this approach is the famous tradition mentioned by an author as early as the Christian apologist and polemicist Tertullian (second half of the second century C. E.). In his *De spectaculis*, Tertullian gives an impressive list of what the Jews had said about or had done with Jesus, which culminates in the dramatic scene:

This is he whom his disciples secretly stole away that it might be said he had risen (*ut surrexisset dicatur*), unless it was the gardener (*hortulanus*) who removed him, lest his lettuces be damaged by the crowd of visitors (*nec lactucae suae frequentia commeantium adlaederentur*)!¹

All the elements in Tertullian's list can be easily explained by the New Testament, including the gardener who makes his appearance (only) in John: when Mary Magdalene discovers the empty tomb and cannot find Jesus, she mistakes the risen Jesus for the gardener and assumes that the gardener had taken Jesus' body away.² But what is missing in John are the lettuces about which Tertullian's gardener is so concerned, and since not only the gardener but also the lettuces make their appearance in some of the *Toledot Yeshu* versions, many scholars believe that Tertullian in fact refers to some early version of the *Toledot Yeshu*. Samuel Krauss, whose *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (published 1902) remains until today the standard work on *Toledot Yeshu*, boldly states that

¹ Tertullian, *Spect.* 30.

² John 20:15.

Tertullian's words must be regarded as "an excellent summary of everything that is reported in *Toledot (Yeshu)*";³ he even goes so far as to declare Tertullian the ultimate guide for us to determine "which elements belong to the original components of the *Toledot (Yeshu)*."⁴

More recent scholarship has been more restrained in the hunt for early traditions that may be taken as evidence of an allegedly early version of the work *Toledot Yeshu*. But still, even a scholar as careful and cautious as Hillel Newman holds that Tertullian's lettuce garden "is surely our best, not just our first, view of the prototypical form of *Toledot Yeshu*,"⁵ which served as springboard for the later versions (in particular the bizarre tradition of Jesus being hanged on a cabbage tree). And, most recently, Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra has analyzed the list of the (new) Christian festivals versus their (old) Jewish counterparts in the *Toledot Yeshu* and has come to the conclusion that this particular tradition must belong to the late fourth or early fifth century.⁶ Although he is well aware of the difference between dating a tradition and a work and admits that he is dealing with a very small part of *Toledot Yeshu* that appears only in the Helena recension of the work, and although he duly concedes the "possibility that a fifth-century Christian list was used by a Jewish author who lived later, or even much later, and/or not in the same region as the origin of the list,"⁷ Stökl cannot resist the temptation to date the work (that is, some coagulated version of it) in late-antique Palestine. Despite many caveats, he ultimately does extrapolate from one (to repeat: tiny) dated tradition within a certain version of the *Toledot Yeshu* the date and provenance of the work as a whole.⁸

In what follows I would like to redirect our attention to what most, if not all, scholars regard as the first clear attestation not just of certain dispersed traditions but of a work that must have been identical with or at least have resembled some version of the *Toledot Yeshu* as we know it from the manuscripts: Agobard's and his successor Amulo's references to *Toledot Yeshu*.⁹

³ Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1902; repr., Hildesheim: Olms, 1977), 3.

⁴ Krauss, *ibid.*, 247 f.

⁵ Hillel I. Newman, "The Death of Jesus in the *Toledot Yeshu* Literature," *JTS* 50 (1999): 59–79 (esp. 78).

⁶ Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, "An Ancient List of Christian Festivals in *Toledot Yeshu*: Polemics as Indication for Interaction," *HTR* 102 (2009): 481–96.

⁷ Stökl Ben Ezra, *ibid.*, 492 f.

⁸ This becomes very clear in his "Conclusions and Implications" at the end of the article, pages 495 f. In fact, he follows here Bonfil, who simply declares that *Toledot Yeshu* "was apparently written in the fifth or even as early as the fourth century" and that "it was certainly written in an area that was under Palestinian influence during the Byzantine period" (Bonfil [below, n. 12], p. 13). From this, Bonfil draws far-reaching conclusions regarding the Jews of Lyons' dependence on Palestinian rather than Babylonian traditions.

⁹ I would like to thank the participants in the *Toledot Yeshu* graduate seminar during the fall term of 2009 and the subsequent conference for their most helpful comments and critique. My

Agobard

Agobard (ca. 769–840) was enthroned as bishop of Lyons in 816 C. E., after he had served several years as adjunct bishop of his predecessor, Leidrad. He is regarded as one of the major figures of the so-called Carolingian Renaissance, as a proponent of the unity of the Frankish Empire, as an eloquent advocate of the rights of the Church against the growing claims of the Empire – and, depending on the views of the respective authors, as a fervent anti-Semite or at least an outspoken enemy of the Jews.¹⁰ He played an important role in the political ups-and-downs at the Court of his sovereign Louis (778–840), who became his father Charlemagne's successor in 814 C. E., and who is called Louis the Pious. In 834, Agobard lost the power struggle with Louis and was deposed from his miter, but the King allowed him return to his diocese in 838, where he died soon after (840).¹¹

Among his many books, treatises, and letters, Agobard wrote – between the years 823 and 827/28 – a series of letters and documents dealing with the Jews and their rights in the Carolingian Empire.¹² Agobard's works were lost until they were rediscovered in the early seventeenth century and published in several editions, one of which was reprinted in Migne's *Patrologia Latina*. More modern

Princeton colleagues Bill Jordan and Michael Meerson kindly read and commented upon a draft of this paper; Aaron Kachuck provided stylistic assistance and helped in shaping my argument.

¹⁰ Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart* (11 vols.; fourth ed., Leipzig: Leiner, 1909; reprint Berlin: Arani, 1998), 5:238, calls him "Haman-Agobard."

¹¹ On Agobard in general, see Adrien Bressolles, *Doctrine et action politique d'Agobard*, 1: *Saint Agobard, évêque de Lyon, 769–840* (Paris: Vrin, 1949); Egon Boshof, *Erzbischof Agobard von Lyon. Leben und Werk* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1969); Michel Rubellin, *Église et société chrétienne d'Agobard à Valdès* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2003).

¹² On Agobard's relationship with the Jews, see in particular Friedrich Wiegand, "Agobard von Lyon und die Judenfrage," in *Festschrift seiner Königlichen Hoheit dem Prinzregenten Luitpold von Bayern zum Achtzigsten Geburtstage dargebracht von der Universität Erlangen* (Erlangen: A. Deichert, 1901), 221–50; Adrien Bressolles, "La question juive au temps de Louis le Pieux," *Revue d'histoire de l'église de France* 28 (1942): 51–64; J. Allan Cabaniss, "Agobard of Lyons," *Speculum* 26 (1951): 50–76; Arthur J. Zuckerman, "The Political Uses of Theology: The Conflict of Bishop Agobard and the Jews of Lyons," *Studies in Medieval Culture* 3 (1970): 23–51; Robert Bonfil, "The Cultural and Religious Traditions of French Jewry in the Ninth Century as Reflected in the Writings of Agobard of Lyons," in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism, Philosophy and Ethical Literature*, pres. to Isaiah Tishby on his 75th Birthday (eds. Joseph Dan and Joseph Hacker; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1986 [in Hebrew]), 327–48; English version: "Cultural and Religious Traditions in Ninth-Century French Jewry," in *Jewish Intellectual History in the Middle Ages* (ed. Joseph Dan; Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1994), 1–17 (Binah, vol. 3); Friedrich Battenberg, *Das europäische Zeitalter der Juden*, 1: *Von den Anfängen bis 1650*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990), 52 ff.; Johannes Heil, "Agobard, Amolo, das Kirchengut und die Juden von Lyon," *Francia. Forschungen zur westeuropäischen Geschichte* 25 (1998–1999): 39–76. The most recent comprehensive treatment of our subject (with all the relevant literature) is the unpublished dissertation by Anna Beth Langenwalter, *Agobard of Lyon: An Exploration of Carolingian Jewish-Christian Relations* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2009).

editions have appeared in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* and van Acker's *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*.¹³ The titles and sequence of his works related to the Jews are as follows:¹⁴

1. *Consultatio et supplicatio de baptismo Judaicorum mancipiorum* ("A Consideration and Entreaty Regarding the Baptism of Jewish Slaves"), a brief note written to the three officials Helisachar, chancellor of the empire, Adalard, abbot of Corbie, and his brother Wala, hence also called *Consultatio ad Adalardem, Walam et Helisachar* (PL 104:99–106; MGH, *Epistolae Carolini Aevi* 3:164–66; letter no. 6 in van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, 115–117; *De baptismo mancipiorum Iudaeorum [ad Adalardum, Walam et Helisacharum]*); ca. 823 C. E.

2. *Epistola contra praeceptum impium de baptismo Judaicorum mancipiorum* ("Against the Impious Command Concerning the Baptism of Jewish Slaves"), written to the Archchaplain Hilduin and Wala, now the abbot of Corbie, hence also called *Epistola ad proceres palatii Walam et Hilduin* (PL 104:173–78; MGH, *Epistolae Carolini Aevi* 3:179–82; letter no. 10 in van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, 185–88); 826 C. E.¹⁵

3. *De Judaicis superstitionibus* ("On the Jewish Superstitions"), written by Agobard and two of his colleagues (Bernard of Vienne and Faof of Chalon-sur-Saône) and addressed to Louis (PL 104:77–100; MGH, *Epistolae Carolini Aevi*, 3:185–99; letter no. 12 in van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, 199–221; *De Judaicis superstitionibus et erroribus [ad Ludovicum]*); 826 C. E.

4. *De insolentia Iudaeorum* ("On the Insolence of the Jews"), a personal letter by Agobard to Louis, sent together with *De Judaicis superstitionibus* (PL 104:69–76; MGH, *Epistolae Carolini Aevi*, 3:182–85; letter no. 11 in van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, 191–95); 826 C. E.¹⁶

5. *Epistola exhortatoria de cavendo convictu et societate Judaica* ("Exhortatory Epistle on Avoiding Eating and Associating with Jews"), addressed to his fellow bishop Nibridius of Narbonne, also called *Epistola ad Nibridium* (PL 104:107–14; MGH, *Epistolae Carolini Aevi*, 3:199–201; letter no. 14 in van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, 231–34); 827 or 828 C. E.¹⁷

¹³ Lieren van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opefa omnia* (Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 52; Turnhout: Brepols, 1981).

¹⁴ I follow Cabaniss "Agobard"; Wiegand, "Agobard," 221, n. 2, gives the same sequence, but Graetz, *Geschichte*, 5:235, n. 2, and Heil, "Agobard," 42 ff., differ slightly. For a full German translation of Agobard's writings against the Jews, see *Des heiligen Agobard, Bischofs zu Lyon, Abhandlungen wider die Juden. In Briefform, aus dem Lateinischen übertragen und mit einem kurzen Bericht über Agobard's Leben versehen von Emanuel Samosz* (Leipzig: Heinrich Hunger, 1852). Gustav Strobl, *Kann ein Christ Antisemit sein? Die Briefe des Erzbischofs Agobard in Lyon über die Juden* (Erfurt: U. Bodung, 1937), is an anti-Semitic pamphlet.

¹⁵ Heil, "Agobard," 51.

¹⁶ Heil, *ibid.*, 52.

¹⁷ Heil, *ibid.*, 57.

The passage that obviously relates to *Toledot Yeshu* belongs to *De Judaicis superstitionibus*, written about 826 C.E. by Agobard and his fellow bishops. Its context clearly shows that Agobard is well aware of certain Jewish writings, although their precise identification remains uncertain.¹⁸ Agobard begins by saying that the Jews maintain that God is corporeal, with distinct bodily members like human beings (except for the fact that his fingers are immobile and stiff because he doesn't work with his hands). Whether or not this information derives from what has become known as *Shi'ur Qomah*, as some scholars argue,¹⁹ is difficult to ascertain; but when he immediately continues that God, according to the Jews, sits on a throne carried by four creatures and located in a huge palace (*sedere autem ... in solio, quod a quatuor circumferatur bestiis, et magno quamvis palatio contineri*), the assumption indeed suggests itself that Agobard refers here to the Hekhalot literature.²⁰ Similarly, that the Jews according to him believe that the letters of their alphabet are eternal (*existere sempiternas*) and have been assigned, before the creation of the world, the tasks commanded by them in the temporal world – this Jewish belief may well originate from *Sefer Yetsirah*,²¹ probably in combination with the *Otiyyot de-R. Aqiva*.²² And the following reference is even clearer:

And furthermore they maintain that there exist several earths, several netherworlds, and several heavens. One of the latter, which they call *Racha*, that is, firmament, supports according to them the mills of God, in which the manna is ground into food for the angels. Another (heaven) they call *Araboth*, in which, they add, God resides and which is referred to according to them in the Psalm (verse): "Give way to the one who rides upon Araboth."²³ Moreover, (they maintain), that God possesses seven trumpets, each of which measures one thousand cubits.²⁴

This is a somewhat garbled version of the seven earths, netherworlds, and heavens tradition which is well documented in rabbinic literature. But, whereas

¹⁸ PL 104:86c ff.; van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, 205 f.

¹⁹ Heinrich Graetz, "Die mystische Literatur in der gaonäischen Epoche," *MGWJ* 8 (1859): 67–78, 103–18, 140–53 (esp. 111); Cabaniss, "Agobard," 62. Another possibility is that the stiff fingers are a distorted echo of the rabbinic tradition that the *angels* cannot sit because they have no knee joints (see *b. Hagiga* 15a).

²⁰ Graetz, *ibid.*, 111; Langenwaller, *Agobard of Lyon*, 170, suggests (following Bonfil, "Cultural and Religious Traditions") that Agobard might as well refer to certain "midrashic interpretations of the revelation on Sinai," since the boundaries between *midrash* and the Hekhalot literature were still fluid in Agobard's time. On the contrary, it seems that the Jewish sources Agobard is relying on are quite peculiar (and Langenwaller's references to support her claim are much too vague to be of use).

²¹ Cabaniss, "Agobard," 62.

²² Graetz, "Die mystische Literatur," 68 f.; Cabaniss, *ibid.*, 62; Arthur Marmorstein, "Alphabet des R. Akiba," *Enc.Jud.* (Berlin: Eschkol, 1928), 2:451.

²³ Ps. 67:5 in the Vulgate (Ps. 68:5 in the Hebrew Bible). Agobard has: *Iter facite ei, qui caballicat super Araboth*, which, interestingly enough, is an almost literal translation of the Hebrew and does not follow the Vulgate ("*iter facite ei qui ascendit super occasum*").

²⁴ PL 104:87b; van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, 206.

classical rabbinic literature is primarily interested in the heavens and merely lists the names of the earths and the netherworlds, it is only the treatise *Seder Rabba di-Bereshit* that gives a full picture of the earths, netherworlds, and heavens, including their respective inventories.²⁵ As far as the inventory is concerned, only *Seder Rabba di-Bereshit* and the Bavli (*Hagiga* 12b)²⁶ present an inventory of the heavens that is almost identical in both sources. There, the manna is ground for the righteous (not the angels, as Agobard has it, but we should remember that the righteous become like angels after their death already in pre-rabbinic sources) in the third heaven, Shehaqim, and not in the second heaven, Raqia' (which is clearly Agobard's *Racha*). And both the Bavli and *Seder Rabba di-Bereshit* agree that God sits on his throne in the seventh heaven Aravot; they even quote the same verse as Agobard does: Ps. 68:5. Hence, although the possibility cannot be ruled out that the Bavli was Agobard's immediate source here, the combination of earths, netherworlds, and heavens makes it more likely that he refers to some version of *Seder Rabba di-Bereshit* rather than to Bavli *Hagiga*. The only element of Agobard's description that is missing in both *Seder Rabba di-Bereshit* and the classical rabbinic literature are the seven trumpets, but the enormous measurement of the trumpets (one thousand cubits) may point to the *Otiyyot de-R. Aqiva*²⁷ or again to *Seder Rabba di-Bereshit* with its emphasis on the huge distance between the heavens and the measurement of certain parts of the heavenly inventory.²⁸

Now follows what Agobard has to say about the Jews' distortions of the life and death of Jesus. I will first quote the text in English translation and then compare its various motifs with the *Toledot Yeshu*.

And also in the teachings of their ancestors they read that Jesus was (considered) among them as an honorable young man, educated under the tutorship (*magisterio*) of John the Baptist, (as one) who had many disciples, one of whom was given (by Jesus) the name Cepha, that is, Peter, due to the severity (*duritia*) and dullness (*hebitudo*) of his mind. And when the people expected him (Jesus) (to appear) on a holiday, some of the boys of his

²⁵ On this, see in detail Peter Schäfer, "In Heaven as It Is in Hell: The Cosmology of *Seder Rabba di-Bereshit*," in *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions* (eds. Ra'anan S. Boustán and Annette Yoshiko Reed; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 233–74.

²⁶ On the cosmology of *b. Hagiga*, see Peter Schäfer, "From Cosmology to Theology: The Rabbinic Appropriation of Apocalyptic Cosmology," in *Creation and Re-Creation in Jewish Thought: Festschrift in Honor of Joseph Dan on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (eds. Rachel Elior and Peter Schäfer; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 39–58.

²⁷ "Alfabet-Midrasch des R. Akiba. Erste Recension," in *Bet ha-Midrasch* (ed. Adolph Jellinek, third ed.; Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1967), 3:31 (letter ν): when God resurrects the dead he will sound a Shofar as large as one thousand cubits.

²⁸ See Peter Schäfer et al., *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981), §§ 462 ff. One could think, of course, also of the *Shi'ur Qomah* traditions.

school would run towards him, who were chanting *Hosanna to the son of David*,²⁹ out of the honor and reverence for (their) master.

In the end, however, accused of much mendacity, he was thrust back (*retrusum*) in jail according to the verdict of Tiberius (when) he had thrown into his daughter – to whom he had promised a male offspring without (the agency of) a man – a stone fetus (*eo quod filia ipsius, cui sine viro masculi partum promiserat, lapidis conceptum intulerit*). Then, he was suspended on a “fork” (*furca*) like an execrable magus, and there he was hit on the head with a stone (*ubi et petra in capite percussum*). Killed in this way, he was buried next to some aqueduct, and some Jew was entrusted with the custody. At that very night, however, the aqueduct was suddenly flooded. By Pilate's order, (Jesus' corpse) was sought for twelve months but never found.

Then, Pilate published the following law for them (the Jews): “It is obvious,” (the law) says, “that the very one, who was killed by you because of envy, was resurrected as he had promised, (the one) who was found neither in (his) grave nor in any other place. And for this reason, I order you to worship him (*ut adoretis eum*). (Anyone) who refuses to do this should understand that his future lot is in hell.”

Indeed, their elders have fabricated all of this, and (now) they eagerly/often read it with stupid stubbornness (*stulta obstinatione lectitant*) in order that with inventions of this kind the full truth of the virtue and passion of Christ could be emptied out, and that worship is not due to him because he is the true God, but because it was imposed on him by the law of Pilate. And (also) Peter (they say) was by no means rescued from prison by an angel, as we do believe, but by the mercy of Herod, who held his wisdom in high esteem.³⁰

Reading this passage, it becomes immediately clear that it shares quite a number of elements with *Toledot Yeshu*, particularly with its Aramaic version known from the Genizah fragments. Most conspicuous are the *dramatis personae* next to Yeshu/Jesus: John the Baptist, Tiberius, and Pilate, who are also prominent (only) in the Aramaic fragments. Riccardo Di Segni, in his influential classification of the *Toledot Yeshu* versions, accordingly lists Agobard together with the Aramaic fragments in one group (his “gruppo Pilato”).³¹ What has been preserved in the Aramaic fragments begins³² with John the Baptist being imprisoned by Tiberius and questioned by R. Yehoshua b. Perahyah (together with a certain Marinus and Omitus) about the “Scriptures of sorcery found in the hands of Yeshu, your disciple.” So here, too, it becomes immediately clear that John the Baptist is Yeshu's teacher. John the Baptist answers in the Aramaic fragments that he has nothing to do with these Scriptures but that Yeshu and his students have fabricated them. The students are mentioned by name in the Aramaic fragments (Mattai, Naqi, Buni, Netzer, and Todah) – a tradition that

²⁹ Mt. 21:15 – and it is explicitly said there that “children” (*tous paidas*) greeted Jesus with these worlds in the Temple.

³⁰ PL 104:87b–88a; van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, 206 f.

³¹ Riccardo Di Segni, “La tradizione testuale delle Toledòth Jéshu: Manoscritti, edizioni a stampa, classificazione,” *La Rassegna mensile di Israel* 50 (1984): 83–100 (esp. 84 ff.).

³² Ms. Cambridge T.-S. Misc. 298.56. All quotations from the *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts are according to our Princeton *Toledot Yeshu* database.

we also know from the Bavli³³ – and put on trial, presided over by R. Yehoshua b. Perahyah.³⁴ This section is lacking in Agobard, but Agobard does know that Yeshu has “many disciples,” singling out Peter Cepha (he is clearly aware that “Peter” refers to “stone” or “rock”). In the Aramaic fragments, there then follows a trial of John and Yeshu – presided over by the Emperor Tiberius himself and in the presence of Pilate, Marinus “the Great Elder,” R. Yehoshua b. Perahyah, and R. Yehudah, “the gardener of the city of Tiberias.” Tiberius inquires about John’s and Yeshu’s occupation, and Yeshu answers that they both are “the sons of the God of Heaven.” This is again lacking in Agobard; instead he has Yeshu’s students hail him as the Messiah (an obvious reference to Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem in the New Testament).³⁵

The next section in Agobard comes closest to the Aramaic fragments. A part of Yeshu’s and John’s answer regarding their occupation is missing in the Aramaic text, but when Yeshu boasts himself of being capable not only of healing the sick but even of giving life to people or causing them to die, this is obviously his answer to Tiberius’ question about his occupation. And then comes a long section about the Emperor’s daughter and Yeshu, to which Agobard no doubt refers with his rather enigmatic and brief comment that Yeshu, having promised the Emperor’s daughter a male child without the agency of a man, had “thrown into her/inserted in her a stone fetus” (*lapidis conceptum intulerit*). The Aramaic text is much more elaborate here: Yeshu boasts of being able to give Tiberius’ daughter “a child without (the agency of) a man” (*welad be-la gevar*), and the Emperor takes him by his word.³⁶ Yeshu utters his “words of sorcery,” and Tiberius has Yeshu put in fetters for nine months until his daughter should give birth to the promised child. The people of Israel are in great distress, and R. Yehoshua b. Perahyah decrees a prolonged fast to avert the expected disaster – and indeed, God performs a miracle and turns the fetus (*’uvra*) in the daughter’s womb into a stone (*’avna*). This is obviously a deliberate play on words (*’uvra* versus *’avna*). When the nine months had passed without his daughter giving birth, Tiberius demands an explanation from Yeshu, and Yeshu refers to the alleged fact that some Jewish women give birth after twelve months. When the twelve months

³³ *b. Sanhedrin* 43a–b; on this tradition, see Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 75 ff.

³⁴ Ms. Cambridge T.-S. Misc. 35.87; I follow the translation by William Horbury in his unpublished dissertation *A Critical Examination of the Toledoth Jeshu* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1970), 77–89.

³⁵ Mt. 21:9 ff.; Mk. 11:9 ff.; Lk. 19:38 ff.; cf. Ps. 118:26.

³⁶ More precisely, Yeshu boasts of being able to give a barren woman a child without the agency of a man (Ms. Cambridge T.-S. Misc. 35.87, fol. 1a, line 28), but how exactly he exercises this ability on the Emperor’s daughter is missing in this manuscript. Ms. Adler JTS 2529.2, fol. 1b, lines 4–9, has preserved this passage: “They (Yeshu and John the Baptist) said: ... And also into a barren woman who never gave birth we can put an offspring without (the intercourse with) a man. And when the Caesar heard this, he laughed at them, and said to them: I have [...] a virgin. Can you put sons in her without a man?”

had passed and the daughter still hadn't given birth, Yeshu suspects that she cannot give birth because she is a virgin and offers to tear open her womb and to deliver the child alive. The Emperor agrees, Yeshu tears the daughter's womb open – and finds in her belly a stone instead of a child. Yeshu is unable to make the stone alive, and Tiberius decides that both John and Yeshu deserve the death penalty. Whereas John the Baptist is executed immediately, Yeshu escapes and, by means of his magical power, flies in the air of heaven like a bird, until R. Yehudah the gardener brings him down, using some powerful counter-magic.

This particular part of the story – the flying contest between Yeshu and Yehudah the gardener – is again missing in Agobard. Immediately after the abortive demonstration of Yeshu's magical power, Agobard proceeds with Yeshu's execution: Yeshu is suspended on a "fork" (*furca*) – that is, a fork-shaped gallows³⁷ – and brought to death by stoning, literally "hit on the head with a stone." Here, the Aramaic version deviates from Agobard, because it tells us that Yeshu is crucified on the (in)famous cabbage stalk³⁸ – a motif that is completely incomprehensible in the Aramaic version and further elaborated in the Hebrew versions.³⁹ But, nevertheless, the Aramaic version continues, a few lines further down, that "they stoned him (Yeshu) with a stone (sg.), and he died on the cross,"⁴⁰ which is precisely how Agobard puts it. So it seems that the Aramaic recension of the *Toledot Yeshu* has two versions of Yeshu's death (crucifixion on a cabbage stalk and stoning with a stone), of which Agobard's recension knows only the latter – or else ignores the former because it doesn't understand it. Instead, it emphasizes the Jewish death penalty of stoning, but gives it a peculiar twist: Yeshu, who could only create a stone in the womb of Tiberius' daughter and not a child, is appropriately killed by a stone. Moreover, since Yeshu's most important disciple is called Peter, that is "stone," Agobard's recension most likely wants to subtly (or not so subtly) imply that Jesus' hope in building his church on the rock of Peter (Mt. 16:18: "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church") was utterly misguided: Peter was called "stone" or "rock" because of the "severity and dullness of his mind," not because he became the foundation of the church. In fact, according to Agobard's version, there is no such foundation because Peter turned out to be a blockhead and Yeshu was killed by a stone.

The next important element in Agobard's version is that Yeshu was buried next to a water channel (*juxta quemdam aquaeductum*) and that a Jew was entrusted with the custody of his grave.⁴¹ This again echoes the Aramaic version according to which Yeshu was buried "in a channel of water in the garden of R. Yehudah the gardener" (*rihata de-mayya be-ginnta de-R. Yehudah gannana*).

³⁷ On this, see Michael Meerson's article in this volume.

³⁸ Ms. Cambridge T.-S. Misc. 35.87, fol. 2a, line 7.

³⁹ On the cabbage tree, see in more detail Michael Meerson's article in this volume.

⁴⁰ Ms. Cambridge T.-S. Misc. 35.87, fol. 2a, line 11.

⁴¹ On this, too, see in more detail Michael Meerson's article in this volume.

But the end of the story becomes very different in Agobard and the Aramaic version. Whereas, in Agobard, the water channel was suddenly flooded and Yeshu's corpse disappeared – evidently because the water streaming in swept his body away – in the Aramaic version, Yehudah the gardener deliberately kept Yeshu's corpse hidden as proof that Yeshu wasn't resurrected and hadn't ascended to heaven, as he had promised and as his followers wanted everybody to believe. Accordingly, whereas in Agobard Pilate draws the conclusion from the disappearance of Yeshu's corpse that he was indeed resurrected and consequently orders the Jews to worship him, the Aramaic version has Yehudah the gardener dragging Yeshu's corpse through the streets of Tiberias and delivering it to Pilate, who accepts the truth that Yeshu was wicked and orders Yehudah to bury him "in the place where they bury the dead,"⁴² that is, to give him a decent burial. So, whereas in the Aramaic version it is the Jews who ultimately triumph,⁴³ in Agobard's version it is the Christians who have the final say. Since it is highly unlikely that Agobard's Jewish *Vorlage* included such a happy ending from the Christian point of view, we may safely assume that Agobard fabricated it.

So what we have in Agobard is an abbreviated, summarized, and slightly twisted version of a certain *Toledot Yeshu* recension that comes closest, of all the *Toledot Yeshu* recensions we know, to the one preserved in the Aramaic fragments. The dramatis personae in Agobard's recension, John the Baptist as Yeshu's teacher and the stone embryo in the womb of Tiberius' daughter, are the most conspicuous features that connect it with the Aramaic *Toledot Yeshu*. Moreover, both the Aramaic recension and Agobard begin their story with Yeshu's education and his disciples and leave out the birth narrative and his suspicious origin.⁴⁴ We cannot be sure, however, whether the Aramaic recension did not contain this first part of Jesus' life story or whether in fact it is missing because of the fragmentary character of our Aramaic manuscripts, that is, because it is simply not preserved in the manuscripts that we happen to have. Yaacov Deutsch has published a Hebrew version of *Toledot Yeshu* that runs parallel to the Aramaic fragments and that indeed contains the beginning of Jesus' life story, which goes, briefly summarized, as follows:⁴⁵

During the reign of King Herod, Josef and Miriam were married in Nazareth in Galilee, but Miriam was barren and could not conceive a child from Josef. One Sabbath eve, when the righteous and pious Josef had left his house for the Syna-

⁴² Ms. Cambridge T.-S. 35.87, fol. 2a, lines 27–28.

⁴³ The triumphant tone is unmistakable in the Aramaic version: "And the one who performed the great judgment on Yeshu the wicked, he will swiftly perform judgment and retribution upon the haters of his people and everyone who forsakes the worship of the God of heaven and goes and worships Yeshu the wicked" (Ms. Cambridge T.-S. Misc. 35.87, fol. 2a, lines 30–32).

⁴⁴ Langenwarter, *Agobard of Lyon*, 169, claiming that all the *Toledot Yeshu* versions contain the story of Yeshu's illegitimate birth, is not aware of the Aramaic recension.

⁴⁵ Ms. St. Petersburg RNL EVR I.274, in Yaacov Deutsch, "New Evidence of Early Versions of *Toldot Yeshu*," *Tarbiz* 69 (2000): 177–197 (in Hebrew).

gogue service, some wicked man (who remains anonymous) slips into Miriam's bed and has intercourse with her (she doesn't recognize him and thinks he is her husband). After Miriam has given birth to Yeshu, the couple goes to Egypt where Miriam gives birth ("in fornication," as the text explicitly says) to more sons and daughters. Yeshu grows up in Egypt as a gifted child, learning both Torah and the magical art of Egypt. The couple returns with their children to Nazareth, and when the Jewish court there declares him a bastard, Yeshu becomes a heretic and claims that he is the son of God. He performs miracles (among other things, he draws images of birds and makes them fly; he splits a river so that he and his disciples can walk through it on dry land; he feeds a multitude with one loaf of bread; he turns water into wine; etc.). Then, shifting to some kind of mixture of Aramaic and Hebrew, the story, now locates itself in Tiberias, with Tiberius and Pilate on the Roman side and Yehudah the gardener, Yehoshua b. Perahyah, and Marinus, "the Great Elder of the Jews," on the Jewish side. They question Yeshu about his family background, and he reveals that his father is Pandera, a carpenter by profession, his mother is Miriam, who takes care of the beauty of women, that the father of his mother is Pappos, also a carpenter, and that he himself works as a fisherman. Then they question him about the Scriptures of sorcery that he uses, and Yeshu at first claims that they were written by Balaam and that he found them in Egypt, but when they threaten to kill him if he doesn't tell the truth, he finally answers that his master and teacher John (the Baptist) gave them to him. And then follows the episode of John the Baptist as we know it from the Aramaic fragments.⁴⁶

From this brief overview it becomes immediately clear that the first part belongs to the (later) Hebrew standard versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, with some proximity to the Huldreich recension (Herod). The style and content of this part is very different from the Aramaic recension as preserved in the Aramaic fragments, and it is highly unlikely that Deutsch's Hebrew recension reflects the full content of the Aramaic recension (that is, the missing part in the Aramaic fragments) as Deutsch has suggested.⁴⁷ At most one could consider that the Aramaic recension might have started when Tiberius, Pilate, Yehudah the gardener, Yehoshua b. Perahyah, and Marinus enter the story, which is marked also by the sudden shift to Aramaic and the fact that Yeshu's father now is Pandera and not Josef. This would mean that Yeshu's family background – Miriam, Pandera, Pappos – did belong to the original Aramaic recension, but that the elaborate story of Miriam's seduction, as we know it from the later Hebrew versions, did not.⁴⁸ His family back-

⁴⁶ Beginning Ms. Cambridge T.-S. Misc. 298.56 and followed by Ms. Cambridge T.-S. Misc. 35.87.

⁴⁷ Deutsch, "New Evidence," 180 ff.

⁴⁸ Remarkably, it is even missing in Raimundus Martinus' 13th century Latin version that is otherwise closely related to De Segni's "gruppo Elena, primo tipo," and there in particular to the Strasbourg manuscript, published and translated by Krauss.

ground could easily be concocted from motifs known from the New Testament (the carpenter, the fisherman), from Celsus⁴⁹ and/or from the Bavli⁵⁰ (Egyptian magic, Miriam the hairdresser, Pandera the lover,⁵¹ Pappos b. Yehudah⁵²), but it is conspicuous that the Aramaic recension has just the name Pandera and doesn't seem to know anything about Miriam's seduction and adultery. Agobard clearly wasn't aware of any of these details relating to Jesus' uncertain origin.

How, then, did Agobard know of the *Toledot Yeshu*? It seems unlikely that he could read these stories in the original Hebrew; rather, he must have heard them from contemporary Jews, probably in Lyons.⁵³ As I have mentioned already, he is aware of quite a number of such Jewish writings, presumably among them *Shi'ur Qomah*, the Hekhalot literature, *Sefer Yetsirah*, *Otiyyot de-R. Aqiva*, and *Seder Rabba di-Bereshit*. Of *Toledot Yeshu* he explicitly says that the elders of the Jews have fabricated (*confinxerunt*) these stories and that the Jews with stupid stubbornness *lectitant* them. The verb *lectitare* means "to gather/collect eagerly" or "to read often with eagerness." Hence, Agobard knows that the Jews of his time take particular interest in certain motifs of Jesus' life story that they have invented and that they eagerly collect and/or read. It may well be that there is little point in distinguishing between collecting and reading and that, consequently, the Jews of Agobard's time in fact continued collecting material that eventually made it into various versions of *Toledot Yeshu*. In other words, the process of "*Toledot Yeshu*" taking shape was still going on, and there was clearly not one final version of *Toledot Yeshu* available at Agobard's time; the version that he knew and from which he takes his details was nothing but a snapshot of *one* recension prevalent in the Lyons of his time. We cannot determine, of course, how old this recension was, that is, when precisely it was concocted. When he says that "their elders have fabricated all this," he hardly refers to the Jewish elders of his own time, but it is also not necessary to assume that this happened in the dim and distant past. Quite the contrary, in fact, as the Jewish writings that Agobard refers to all took shape in the centuries around Agobard's time: most scholars agree now that the Hekhalot literature (the *literature*, not all of its *traditions*) is a post-Talmudic phenomenon, and this is certainly also true for *Shi'ur Qomah* as an edited work⁵⁴ as well as for *Seder Rabba di-Bereshit*.⁵⁵ *Sefer*

⁴⁹ Origen, *Contra Celsum* I:28; I:32.

⁵⁰ *b. Shabbat* 104b and *b. Sanhedrin* 67a.

⁵¹ In Celsus he is a Roman soldier; in our Hebrew recension he is an 'arma'i – a "gentile, Roman."

⁵² In our Hebrew recension he is his mother's father; in the Bavli he is considered as Miriam's husband.

⁵³ On the question of whether Jewish converts were involved, see Langenwaller, *Agobard of Lyon*, 172 f.

⁵⁴ Peter Schäfer et al., *Übersetzung der Hekhalot-Literatur* (4 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), 4:XXXVIIff.

⁵⁵ The most comprehensive treatment of *Seder Rabba di-Bereshit* is still the monograph by

Yetsirah, despite certain attempts to date it much earlier,⁵⁶ is firmly embedded now in an Islamic context, probably in the ninth century,⁵⁷ and *Otiyyot de-Rabbi Aqiva* (or the Alphabet of R. Aqiva) is in fact first mentioned by Agobard – if it is indeed this work that he refers to – and then again in the tenth century by the Karaites Salmon b. Yeruham⁵⁸ and Jacob Kirkisani.⁵⁹ Altogether, it becomes ever more apparent that the “coagulation” of this kind of literature took place during, at the earliest, the two centuries before, and, at the latest, during the one century after Agobard.

But the fact that Agobard knew of these writings and quotes from them seems to indicate that the Jews of his time were particularly active in disseminating them, not least such a controversial and polemical work as *Toledot Yeshu*. Or, to put it differently, they not only made no secret of their possession and use of these books but seemed to have aggressively publicized them – this at least is the message Agobard wants to convey. And this fits in very well with what he has to say about the Jews in general. His letters and treatises over and over again make clear that the Jews, in his view, have secured for themselves a much too prominent and safe place in the Carolingian society, that they even boast of their rights and privileged treatment by the King, Louis the Pious. I will briefly summarize the most important aspects:

Agobard's first two missives are concerned with the problem that occupies him most, the question of Jewish slaves in Jewish households that express their desire to convert to Christianity. Such conversions, he complains in his first letter of 823 (*De baptismo mancipiorum Iudaeorum*), are made ever more difficult because the King supports the Jewish point of view in this matter: although the Jews are offered the price they had originally paid for the slave who wants to convert, they refuse to accept it because they believe that they are favored by the palace (*putantes sibi favere magistratus palatii*).⁶⁰ Things are made worse by the fact, Agobard adds, that the *Magister Iudaeorum*, appointed by the King to ensure and enforce the imperial laws protecting the Jews, constantly sides with the Jews. (This “Master of the Jews” – his name was Evrard – was among Agobard's

Nicolas Sed, *La mystique cosmologique juive* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études, 1981).

⁵⁶ Yehudah Liebes, *Torat ha-Yetsirah shel Sefer Yetsirah* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 2000).

⁵⁷ See Steven M. Wasserstrom, “Sefer Yetsira and Early Islam: A Reappraisal,” *Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 3 (1993): 1–30 (p. 21); idem, “Further Thoughts on the Origins of *Sefer Yetsirah*,” *Aleph* 2 (2002): 201–220; Klaus Herrmann, *Sefer Jetsira. Buch der Schöpfung* (Frankfurt a. M.: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2008), 184 ff.

⁵⁸ See Israel Davidson, ed., *The Book of the Wars of the Lord Containing the Polemics of the Karaite Salmon ben Yeruham against Saadia Gaon* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1934): 113; and cf. Graetz, “Die mystische Literatur,” 69.

⁵⁹ See the brief reference in Adolf Neubauer's review of Abraham Harkavy's *Remarks of the Qaraite Abu-Yusuf Yaqub al-Qirqisani*, *JQR* 7 (1895): 356.

⁶⁰ Van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, 116.

main culprits for the desolate state of the Church under Louis the Pious.)⁶¹ In his second letter regarding the baptism of Jewish slaves (*De baptismo Judaicorum mancipiorum*) of 826, he gives the concrete example of a Jewish woman who, having converted *gratia Christi* from Judaism to Christianity, had to suffer severe persecutions from the Jews. The Jews regard her conversion as illegal and refer to an imperial precept that a Jewish slave must not be baptized without the consent of his or her master (*ut mancipium Iudaicum absque voluntate domini sui nemo baptizet*).⁶² This would indeed have been a major infringement of what Agobard perceives as the legitimate rights of the Church sanctioned by an avalanche of canonical decrees. He feels caught between the King's legislation favoring the Jews and the mandate of the Church, all the more so as the "Master of the infidel Jews" constantly threatens him with severe punishment if he doesn't obey the imperial precepts.⁶³

The treatise *De Judaicis superstitionibus* and the personal letter to Louis accompanying it (*De insolentia Judaeorum*) of 826 are Agobard's most detailed missives about the Jews. The subject of the slaves returns now from the point of view of Christian slaves in Jewish households: Christians should not sell Christian slaves to Jews because Christian women may then be put in the intolerable situation of being forced to work on Sundays and to eat meat during Christian fast days.⁶⁴ He explicitly refers to a canonical decree according to which Christians are prohibited from serving Jews, and Christians have the right to redeem Christian slaves from Jews for the amount of 12 *solidi* (gold coins).⁶⁵ Moreover, he accuses the Jews of stealing Christian children and selling them as slaves.⁶⁶ The Jews – this is his main complaint presented ever more forcefully – are not impressed by his and his fellow bishops' arguments. On the contrary, they appeal to the generous imperial precepts in their favor and the King's envoys sent to Lyons to enforce the precepts (with Evrard, the *Magister Iudaeorum*, at their helm), boasting themselves in their "odious insolence" and threatening that they will take revenge on the Christians.⁶⁷ Evrard's biased mission in particular, he stresses, pleases the Jews and saddens the Christians because it bolsters the Jews in their resolve to preach disrespectfully to the Christians what they are supposed to believe and hold true (*ut auderent irreverenter praedicare Christianis, quid potius credendum esset ac tenendum*), "blaspheming in front of them our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ" (*blasphemantes coram eis Dominum Deum ac Salvatorem nostrum Iesum Christum*).⁶⁸ The latter, that the Jews revile (*maledi-*

⁶¹ Van Acker, *ibid.*, 116.

⁶² Van Acker, *ibid.*, 185.

⁶³ Van Acker, *ibid.*, 188.

⁶⁴ Van Acker, *ibid.*, 192 f.

⁶⁵ Van Acker, *ibid.*, 203.

⁶⁶ Van Acker, *ibid.*, 195.

⁶⁷ Van Acker, *ibid.*, 192.

⁶⁸ Van Acker, *ibid.*, 192

cant) Jesus daily and openly, Agobard pretends to know not only from Church Fathers such as Jerome but from his own direct contact with Jews.⁶⁹

Over and over again, Agobard calls upon his Christian flock to avoid any dealings with the Jews, the “synagogue of Satan”⁷⁰ and embodiment of the Antichrist.⁷¹ More precisely, they should not share their meals with the Jews⁷² or live closely together with them – his last letter to bishop Nibradius of Narbonne is fully devoted to this subject – nor should they buy meat or wine from them. Christians buying Jewish meat or wine must have been an everyday affair. Agobard explains at great length that the Jews sell meat to the Christians that they regard as non-kosher, calling these animals “with the insulting name ‘Christian cattle’” (*et insultario vocabulo Christiana pecora appellentur*).⁷³ Similarly, they sell wine that they regard as impure to the Christians; even wine that has been spilled on the floor and contaminated with dirt, they collect from the floor, put it in vessels, and then sell to Christians.⁷⁴

The Jews do, and boast about, all of these abominable things, precisely because they can be sure of the support of the King and his court. Unabashedly, they pride themselves on being the descendants of the patriarchs,⁷⁵ and their Christian protectors indeed believe that the Jews need to be honored because of the patriarchs and because they are better than the Christians (*patriarcharum causa honorandos eos putant, and Christianis dicere audent meliores*).⁷⁶ Even the most distinguished among the Christians long for their sermons and blessings and wish they had a legislator of such kind as the Jews have (*quod excellentissimae personae cupiant eorum orationes et benedictiones, et fateantur talem se legis auctorem habere velle*), whereas the more simple-minded Christians claim that the Jews preach better than their own priests.⁷⁷ Moreover, the Jews not only proudly show the imperial decrees benefitting them, they even display the clothes that the female relatives of the King and the women at Court had given their women as presents.⁷⁸ No wonder then, that because of this predilection for the Jews in the highest circles, the Jews are allowed, contrary to all the canonical

⁶⁹ Van Acker, *ibid.*, 193.

⁷⁰ Van Acker, *ibid.*, 219. In the letter to Nibradius the Jews are called “sons of the devil” (*diaboli filii*); van Acker, *ibid.*, 232.

⁷¹ Van Acker, *ibid.*, 214, 218.

⁷² Van Acker, *ibid.*, 202, 203.

⁷³ Van Acker, *ibid.*, 193.

⁷⁴ Van Acker, *ibid.*, 193.

⁷⁵ Van Acker, *ibid.*, 194. See also the letter to Nibradius, where the “sons of the devil” proudly claim that they are the descendants of the patriarchs and the prophets; van Acker, *ibid.*, 232.

⁷⁶ Van Acker, *ibid.*, 215.

⁷⁷ Van Acker, *ibid.*, 194. In his letter to Nibradius, Agobard goes a step further and argues that the common folk and the peasants confess that the Jews “alone are the people of God” (*ut hunc solum Dei esse populum*); van Acker, *ibid.*, 232.

⁷⁸ Van Acker, *ibid.*, 232.

laws, to build new synagogues, and that the market day has been changed from Saturday to Sunday to help them observe their Sabbath.⁷⁹

Much ink has been spilled over the question of whether or to what degree Agobard can be taken at his word in his attacks on the Jews: does he refer to “real” events that appropriately reflect the situation of the Jews in the Carolingian empire, the “golden age” of the Jews as it has been called, or has he invented much or at least some of his case studies in order to sharpen his argument? Scholars are divided on this question, with the older research taking more or less for granted what Agobard reports⁸⁰ and more recent research being skeptical about the realistic nature of his descriptions.⁸¹ Without going into detail here, it has become clear now that it is not the Jews who are the primary target of Agobard’s missives. Agobard did not write his letters and treatises because of the Jews, setting out once again to define the theological status of the Jews in the Carolingian society. To be sure, he did in fact define the status of the Jews, but he did so within the framework of a much broader conflict – the conflict between *ecclesia* and *imperium*, that is, the rights of the Church as he saw them and the rights of the State as the King tried to implement them, a conflict that jeopardized the unity of Church and Empire. This conflict became apparent most prominently in the quarrel about lay possession of Church property⁸² and about Louis’ succession – between his son from his second wife Judith, later to be called Charles the Bald, and his three sons from his first marriage – in which Agobard sided with Louis’ older sons.⁸³ The Jews were just a means to an end in this power struggle and not its cause. One should also take into consideration that the King’s protection of the Jews and his charters of protection issued for individual Jews (never Jewish communities)⁸⁴ were certainly not motivated by theological considerations but by economical necessities.⁸⁵

We should be very careful, however, not to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Much as the peculiar political and economical conditions of his time dictated Agobard’s concerns and the style of his writings, we must not conclude from this that what he has to say about the Jews serves only this purpose and hence cannot be taken seriously. (This has become a trend particularly in recent

⁷⁹ Van Acker, *ibid.*, 232.

⁸⁰ Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, 5:234 ff.; Boshof, *Erzbischof Agobard von Lyon*, 102 ff.; Cabaniss, “Agobard,” 58 ff.

⁸¹ Zuckerman, “Political Uses of Theology,” 23 ff. (theological arguments are inextricably linked with political and economic considerations); Battenberg, *Das europäische Zeitalter*, 55 f. (Agobard draws an image of Lyons’ Jews that “is highly unlikely to correspond to the reality”); Heil, “Agobard,” 40 ff.

⁸² Emphasized by Heil.

⁸³ Cabaniss, “Agobard,” 63 ff.

⁸⁴ Battenberg, *Das europäische Zeitalter*, 52 ff.

⁸⁵ Battenberg, *ibid.*, 56.

German scholarship.)⁸⁶ True, Agobard's letters and treatises are full of theological stereotypes taken from the Church Fathers and the legislation of the councils and synods, but they are much more than this: they are brimming with concrete details and examples from the everyday encounter between Christians and Jews. No doubt that Agobard uses this information for his greater purposes and that he may even exaggerate certain details in order to make his point, but this does not mean that the picture he draws "in no way reflects the reality."⁸⁷ The Jewish pride in their patriarchs and prophets, for example, and certain Christians' response to it is too much of a constantly recurring motif in his writings to be attributed to his imagination. And we must ask why he would have invented in his letter and treatise to the King Evrard's, the Master of the Jews, allegedly biased behavior, as this could easily be verified by the authorities.⁸⁸ And, as for the presents that noble women at the court gave to their Jewish friends, it would have been quite counter-productive to invent such concrete details in his missives to the King.⁸⁹

An important element in judging the picture that Agobard draws of the status of the Jews in Louis the Pious' Carolingian society is the case of the royal chaplain Bodo who, in 839, converted to Judaism. (He fled to Saragossa, had himself circumcised and married a Jewish woman.)⁹⁰ This dramatic event, which seems to have had no repercussion vis-à-vis Louis' attitude toward the Jews, nevertheless throws light on the attractiveness the Jews must have exerted on the Christian Carolingian society. It happened not long before Agobard's death, and we have no reaction from his side, but it clearly confirms what he tells us about the status of the Jews and their influence on the Christians at Louis' court (and presumably also on the more simple minded Christian flock of which he tells us that they were attracted by Jewish sermons). In light of Bodo's conversion, Agobard's observations about Christians being attracted by Judaism seem all the more credible. Or, to put it differently, Bodo's conversion reflects a certain *Zeitgeist* of the Carolingian society that finds its expression also in Agobard's writings.⁹¹

⁸⁶ Battenberg, *ibid.*, 55 f.; Heil, "Agobard," *passim*.

⁸⁷ Battenberg, *ibid.*, 56; see also Heil, *ibid.*, 64.

⁸⁸ The fact that Evrard possessed considerable Church property in the county of Lyons certainly explains much of Agobard's rage against him (Heil, "Agobard," 60 ff.), but from this insight does not necessarily follow that Evrard's favorable treatment of the Jews, supported by the King, belongs to the realm of fantasy.

⁸⁹ Heil, *ibid.*, 52, distinguishes arbitrarily between "facts" (such as building new synagogues and shifting the market day from Saturday to Sunday) and "unverifiable episodes and rumors" (such as presents of court women to Jewish women). Why are the latter less verifiable for Agobard's contemporaries (and the King in particular) than the former?

⁹⁰ Heil, *ibid.*, 66, n. 118, with the relevant literature.

⁹¹ This is also Langenwaller's conclusion who writes (pace Heil): "What created problems, from Agobard's perspective, was that Jews and Christians had become too unified, that Jews were entwined into the fabric of the empire. This discomfiture at close relations combined with the swift and negative reaction from Louis and his *missi* helps explain the number and increas-

Amulo

Amulo, Agobard's successor, ascended to the bishop's see of Lyons in 841. A few years later, in 846, he published his *Contra Iudaeos*, a theological treatise against the Jews in the real sense of the word rather than a missive provoked by actual political circumstances as was the case with Agobard's writings.⁹² He does refer, however, to the affair of Bodo's conversion in 839, which must have caused a major stir in Church circles. He calls him a Palatine Deacon of noble birth, who, enticed by the diabolic persuasions of the Jews, forsook the palace, his native land, and his parents. Now he lives in Spain among the Jews, denying Jesus Christ as the son of God, desecrating his baptism and accepting circumcision, even changing his name from Bodo to Eliezer, and – sporting a beard and being married – blaspheming Christ and his Church together with the Jews.⁹³

According to Amulo, Bodo's conversion was clearly a dramatic event; with him the Jews caught a big fish – after all, he was Louis' personal confessor. Amulo does not mention any other conversion from Christianity to Judaism, but the larger context in which he puts Bodo's conversion is revealing. Amulo is primarily concerned with conversions from Judaism to Christianity that seem to have been less successful than the Church might have wished, since the Jews, “wickedly and cunningly,” don't give up on Jewish converts to Christianity. There is nothing wrong with you believing in Christ, he has the Jews tell their apostates, because Christ does not really detract from God's superior position – there is no one who is like God or his equal.⁹⁴ Some Jews, Amulo continues, even go so far as to admit that there exists a major and a minor God (*Deum esse majorem, et Deum minorem*). To them, this dual Godhead doesn't pose a problem, as long as it remains clear that Jesus is subordinate to the Father and a human being.⁹⁵ Unfortunately, Amulo doesn't give more details about these Jews who distinguish between a major and a minor (or lesser) God, but it is tempting to see here an echo of Jewish speculations about Metatron, the human being Enoch who was transformed into the “lesser God” (*YHWH ha-qatan*). This leads us again into the realm of the Hekhalot literature, more precisely the Third Book of Enoch that may well have taken shape around Amulo's time.⁹⁶

ingly harsh rhetoric of Agobard's anti-Jewish writings” (*Agobard of Lyon*, 132; see also *ibid.*, 161 f., 216 f.).

⁹² Amulo, *Liber contra Iudaeos* (PL 116:141–184); cf. Boshof, *Erzbischof Agobard von Lyon*, 311 ff.; Heil, “Agobard,” 65 ff.

⁹³ Amulo, *Liber contra Iudaeos* 42 (PL 116:171b–c).

⁹⁴ Amulo, *ibid.* (PL 116:171a): *Quid mali est si credis in Christum? Hoc tantum tene, quia similem sibi et aequalem Deus non habet.*

⁹⁵ Amulo, *ibid.* (PL 116:171a–b).

⁹⁶ See Schäfer, *Übersetzung der Hekhalot-Literatur*, 1:Lff.

It doesn't come as a surprise, then, that Amulo's treatise betrays some definite knowledge of the *Toledot Yeshu*.⁹⁷ I quote the first reference:

They (the Jews) blaspheme that we believe in him of whom the Law of God says that he is suspended from a tree (*in lingo suspensum*) and accursed by God. Therefore, on the same day that he was suspended, it was decreed that he should be buried, lest he remain on the gallows (*in patibulo*) over night and their land become polluted by him. ... And their teacher Joshua cried out and ordered that he be quickly taken down from the tree, and he was cast into a grave in a garden full of cabbage (*horto caulibus plena*), lest their land be contaminated.⁹⁸

This is an obvious reference not only to the *Toledot Yeshu* but again to the recension of the *Toledot* as preserved in the Aramaic fragments, just as it was the case with Agobard. The "Law of God" that Amulo mentions is a direct quotation of Deut. 21:22 f. ("When someone is convicted of a crime punishable by death and is executed, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse must not remain all night upon the tree; you shall bury him that same day, for anyone hung on a tree is accursed by God. You must not defile the land that the Lord, your God, is giving you for possession"), and this quotation – as well as the problem that it alludes to – plays an important role (only) in the Aramaic fragments. Moreover, what has been translated above as "gallows" (*patibulum* in Latin) is a fork-shaped yoke, similar to the *furca* in Agobard. And it is also (only) in the Aramaic fragments that Joshua – in the Aramaic text his full name is mentioned: Yehoshua ben Perahyah – gives the order to take him down from the tree (= cross) and to bury him. The only difference between the Aramaic recension and Amulo is that, according to Amulo, Jesus is buried in a garden full of cabbage, whereas, in the Aramaic fragments, he is buried in a channel of water (similar to Agobard's "next to an aqueduct"). But the cabbage appears also in the Aramaic fragments – as well as in many of the later Hebrew versions – namely as the "stalk of cabbage" (*kannah di-keruva*) on which Jesus was crucified.⁹⁹ Amulo's garden full of cabbage echoes Tertullian's gardener, who is so concerned about his lettuces,¹⁰⁰ and it seems likely that Amulo, together with Agobard, reflect a version of the *Toledot Yeshu* that doesn't know yet of the cabbage stalk as Jesus' cross. In other words, although Agobard's and Amulo's *Toledot Yeshu* come closest to the Aramaic recension, they certainly were not identical with the Aramaic fragments that have been preserved.

The second reference to the *Toledot Yeshu* in Amulo reads as follows:

⁹⁷ Pace Heil, "Agobard," 65 with n. 112. Heil's conclusion "der Schluß, Amulo habe die *Toldot* selbst gekannt, muß nicht gezogen werden, denn seine Kenntnisse beschränken sich auf ganze zwei, dazu nicht einmal zentrale Motive der *Toldot*-Tradition" is not just overly cautious but simply wrong. Heil relies on second-hand and incomplete evidence of the *Toledot Yeshu*.

⁹⁸ Amulo, *Liber contra Judaeos* 25 (PL 116:158a).

⁹⁹ Ms. Cambridge T.-S. Misc. 35.87, fol. 2a, line 7.

¹⁰⁰ See above, p. 27.

And they say, according to their ancestors, that when he was taken down from the tree and buried in a grave, in order that all should know him to be dead and not revived, he was removed again from the grave and dragged back through the entire city and thus thrown away¹⁰¹ (*iterum de sepulcro extractum, et retorta per totam civitatem tractum, sicque projectum*). Therefore, till today his sepulcher stands empty and is fouled with stones and full of filth, which they are in the habit of throwing in. ... However, not completely satisfied with blasphemies of this kind, they have fallen into such a deep abyss of misfortune that they are convinced of and zealously observe (the custom) that no prayer of them could be accepted by God unless they curse in it our Lord Jesus Christ, confessing that he is impious and the son of an impious (*eum esse impium et filium impii*), namely, (someone) of uncertain origin (*nescio cuius ethnici*), whom they call Pandera (*quem nominant Pandera*): with whom they say the mother of (our) Lord committed adultery (*a quo dicunt matrem Domini adulteratam*), and in this way he, in whom we believe, was born.¹⁰²

Here we learn that Jesus' corpse, after it was buried, was taken out of the grave and dragged through the city in order to demonstrate that Jesus was indeed dead and hadn't risen from the dead. This is clearly an abbreviated version of the full story as we have it again in the Aramaic *Toledot Yeshu*. There, Jesus is buried in a channel of water in the garden of R. Yehudah the gardener, and when his followers cannot find him in his grave (remember that according to Agobard the aqueduct was flooded), they believe that he was indeed resurrected and had ascended to heaven. But R. Yehudah, knowing the location of his grave in the channel of water, "brought him out of his grave, cast a rope around his legs and dragged him through all the streets of Tiberias," proclaiming: "This is Yeshu bar Pandera the wicked."¹⁰³ This makes more sense than Amulo's somewhat unmotivated removal of Jesus' corpse from the grave, just to demonstrate that he was dead. But most conspicuously, the dragging of the corpse through the city is found only in the Aramaic version and in Amulo (who doesn't bother to mention the name of the city or leaves it out because he knew only too well that Jesus was buried in Jerusalem). That Jesus' grave is empty, of course harks back to the empty grave of the New Testament (but we know now that it is not empty because Jesus was resurrected, but because the Jews took him out of his grave and disposed of him);¹⁰⁴ and that the Jews throw stones into his empty grave refers to the Jewish custom of putting stones on top of graves.

Finally, Amulo tells us that Jesus was the son of someone of uncertain origin with the name Pandera, with whom his mother committed adultery. The later *Toledot Yeshu* recensions elaborate in great detail on this information and offer a full-fledged birth story of Jesus as a bastard and as the son of a menstruating woman. Amulo doesn't seem to know the full story, but he knows a bit more

¹⁰¹ Or "abandoned."

¹⁰² Amulo, *Liber contra Iudaeos* 40 (PL 116:168b–169d).

¹⁰³ Ms. Cambridge T.-S. Misc. 35.87, fol. 2a, lines 23–25.

¹⁰⁴ In the Aramaic text Pilate orders Jesus' corpse to be reburied in a graveyard (fol. 2a, lines 27–28).

than the Aramaic version, which mentions only the name of Jesus' father (Yeshu bar Pandera), and certainly knows more than Agobard, who doesn't refer at all to Jesus' family background.¹⁰⁵ Although we cannot know whether Amulo had access to Celsus (through Origen) or – admittedly less likely – to the Babylonian Talmud's brief reference to Pandera as Miriam's lover, one thing seems clear: Amulo's *Toledot Yeshu* was focused on Jesus' death and not on his birth and life.

Unlike Agobard, the *Toledot Yeshu* seems to be the only Jewish work that Amulo is aware of – apart, of course, from the Old Testament that he quotes over and over again. There is, however, one notable exception: in chapter 22 of his treatise he argues at great length against the Jewish idea of a Messiah ben Ephraim, that is, a Messiah from the tribe of Ephraim.¹⁰⁶ At first glance, this looks like the well-known midrashic tradition of the Messiah ben Ephraim, who is supposed to die in the eschatological battle and to pave the way for the true savior, the Messiah ben David. But what is conspicuous here is the fact that Amulo doesn't say anything about the Messiah ben Ephraim's death and the fulfillment of his mission through the Messiah ben David. Quite the contrary, he portrays the Messiah ben Ephraim as a rival of the true Messiah ben David (who, of course, is Jesus Christ), as if the Jews had invented the Messiah ben Ephraim in order to compete with the Christian Messiah ben David. This is a story very different from the tradition of the Messiah ben Ephraim as we know it from the rabbinic sources – except for one tradition preserved in the *Pisqaot* 34, 36, and 37 of *Pesiqta Rabbati*.¹⁰⁷ There, a Messiah Ephraim (not *ben* Ephraim) appears as the only redeemer, and this Messiah Ephraim bears a number of quite remarkable characteristics that are otherwise known from the Christian tradition (or, more precisely, from the Jewish tradition – the Suffering Servant in Isaiah – that has been usurped by the Christians and accordingly suppressed by the Jews): a Messiah who takes upon himself the sins of the people of Israel and who, because of this, endures almost unbearable suffering until ultimately God vindicates him.¹⁰⁸ An important role in this Messiah Ephraim tradition is played by Jer. 31:9, “for I (God) have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn,” and it is precisely this verse that Amulo quotes and the messianic interpretation of which he attacks.¹⁰⁹ The *Pisqaot* about the Messiah Ephraim are very different from the bulk of *Pesiqta Rabbati*, and scholars tend to date them now between the seventh and the ninth centuries (probably rather the

¹⁰⁵ See above, p. 36–38.

¹⁰⁶ Amulo, *Liber contra Iudaeos* 22 (PL 116:155c–156d).

¹⁰⁷ Rivka Ulmer, ed., *Pesiqta Rabbati: A Synoptic Edition of Pesiqta Rabbati Based upon all Extant Manuscripts and the Editio Princeps* (3 vols.; Lanham, ML: University Press of America, 2009), 2:816–21, 830–36, 837–45.

¹⁰⁸ On this, see Peter Schäfer, *Die Geburt des Judentums aus dem Geist des Christentums* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 133–78; expanded English version in preparation.

¹⁰⁹ Amulo, *Liber contra Iudaeos* 22 (PL 116:155d).

former than the latter).¹¹⁰ This means – if indeed Amulo refers to the Messiah Ephraim tradition in *Pesiqta Rabbati* – that we are confronted with yet another example of a very peculiar group of works that took shape in the post-rabbinic period and that Agobard and Amulo know and attack because they challenged core Christian values.

In sum, there can be hardly any doubt, first, that both Agobard and Amulo refer to a certain recension of the *Toledot Yeshu* and, second, that this *Toledot Yeshu* recension must have been very similar to the version preserved in the Aramaic fragments from the Cairo Genizah. This means that the version of the Aramaic fragments was known and used in the first half of the ninth century C.E. It is impossible to determine how long before this date it took shape, but the fact that it belongs to a body of literature that seems to have crystallized between the seventh and the ninth centuries C.E. casts into doubt the possibility that it appeared as a coagulated and well defined work long before the seventh century. In any case, the Jews in the Carolingian Empire under Louis the Pious made public and even aggressive use of it, public and aggressive enough that the authorities of the Church became aware of it and felt provoked by it. Since we don't have earlier evidence of other written versions of the *Toledot Yeshu*, it may well be that the Aramaic fragments-Agobard-Amulo recension is not only the *earliest* recension that has been preserved but, indeed, the *first* recension that was ever put into writing.

¹¹⁰ Schäfer, *Geburt*, 174 ff.

The Strasbourg Text of the *Toledot*

William Horbury

The Strasbourg text is among the best-known of all presentations of the *Toledot Yeshu*. Samuel Krauss placed it first in the series of texts printed in his *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (1902), and it was the only text which he illustrated with running series of variant readings and also of references to other relevant literature outside the *Toledot Yeshu*.¹ Correspondingly, it was the main text translated into English by Hugh J. Schonfield in his book on the Toledot, *According to the Hebrews* (1937), and the text chosen for translation into Italian by Riccardo Di Segni in his substantial study *Il vangelo del ghetto* (1985) to illustrate the first and probably oldest type of what he called the “Helen Group” of texts.²

Krauss himself had written that this text stands out for its Aramaisms on the one hand, and its agreement with the Oxford Yiddish text edited by Erich Bischoff on the other; the one or two scattered Aramaic phrases and sentences, viewed together with other features, had inclined him to see it as in essence particularly old.³

It presents a shorter version of the type of *Toledot Yeshu* first made fully known in the scholarly world through an edition, translation and study by J. C. Wagenseil.⁴ The narrative of the Strasbourg text may be summarized as follows. Mary is betrothed to John, but Yeshu’s father is Joseph son of Pandera; the Wise find this out, and Yeshu flees to Jerusalem, learns the Shem ha-mephorash, gathers disciples and works wonders before queen Helen, claiming to be messiah and son of God. The Wise accuse him as a sorcerer, at first in vain, but they eventually prevail when Yeshu is brought down from his aerial flight by their agent Judas Iscariot, bound to a pillar and crowned with thorns in Tiberias. He is rescued by his followers and taken to Antioch, but finally arrested again in the temple when he comes to Jerusalem. He is hanged on a cabbage-stalk, his body

¹ Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1902; repr., Hildesheim: Olms, 1977), 20–21, 38–64.

² Hugh J. Schonfield, *According to the Hebrews* (London: Duckworth, 1937), 35–61; Riccardo Di Segni, *Il vangelo del ghetto* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1985), 33, 51–66.

³ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 20–21, 247, referring to Erich Bischoff, *Ein jüdisch-deutsches Leben Jesu* (Leipzig: W. Friedrich, 1895).

⁴ “Liber Toldos Jeschu” and “Confutatio Libri Toldos Jeschu” each separately paginated, in Johannes Christophorus Wagenseil, *Tela Ignea Satanae* (Altdorf: Joh. Henricus Schonnerstaedt, 1681).

disappears but is retrieved and displayed, and his followers, in continual dispute with other Jews for thirty years, are eventually separated by the Wise through their agent Elijah, a great *hakham* who pretends to be Christian and is known by the turbulent followers of Yeshu as Paul. Later on Nestorius brings many of them back to a more Jewish outlook and way of life, and their conflict with Jews continues. It is ended when they press another disciple of the Wise, Simeon Cepha, to join them; he agrees on condition that they no longer molest Jews, but like Elijah he remains secretly Jewish, and unbeknown to the Christians he carries on his activities as a great *payyetan*.

The story in this form occupies only twelve pages of about thirty lines in the Strasbourg manuscript (ff. 170a–175b) described by Samuel Landauer.⁵ Even so, its narrative shape suggests considerable antecedent redaction; thus, not to speak of details, the passages on Nestorius and Simeon (Peter) look like additions. In any case, since Krauss's book this text has probably become the most familiar Hebrew *Toledot Yeshu* for many, as the treatments by Schonfield and Di Segni may suggest. Yet perhaps the Strasbourg text still deserves further notice, partly because one or two doubts have overshadowed it, but more especially because Krauss's judgment of its importance can be confirmed in various ways, and it raises the question of the origins of the *Toledot Yeshu* tradition particularly clearly.

1.

The later modern series of editions of *Toledot Yeshu* texts by scholars was heralded by Adolf Jellinek's publication of extracts on Simeon Cepha, under the heading "Petrus-Legende."⁶ It began fully, however, when Erich Bischoff edited the Yiddish text just mentioned in 1895. Krauss in his 1902 book suggests that Bischoff's Yiddish was translated from a Hebrew *Toledot Yeshu* akin to the Strasbourg text.⁷ Bischoff himself now, in 1902, contributed to Krauss's book a classification of types of *Toledot* texts which later students have repeatedly reconsidered; but therein he recalled that when he had inquired about the Strasbourg text in 1894 the chief Librarian, Professor Barack, had expressly denied to him that any manuscript of this kind existed in the library.⁸ This of course

⁵ It forms the tenth main item in Strasbourg, Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire Ms. 3974 (Héb. 48), as described by Samuel Landauer, *Katalog der hebräischen, arabischen, persischen und türkischen Handschriften der kaiserlichen Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek zu Strassburg* (Strassburg: K. J. Trübner, 1881), 68–70.

⁶ *Bet ha-Midrash. Sammlung kleiner Midraschim und gemischter Abhandlungen aus der ältern jüdischen Literatur* (ed. Adolph Jellinek; 6 vols., Vienna: Brüder Winter, 1853–77; third ed.; Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1967), 5: xxvi–xxviii, 60–62; 6: ix–xiii, 9–14, 153–6.

⁷ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 20–21.

⁸ Bischoff in Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 30.

was surprising in view of its description in the 1881 Strasbourg catalogue, cited above, and Krauss's own sight of it. Any doubts on this head were settled, however, in 1928, when Robert Eisler received confirmation from the then librarian that it was and had been available in the library.⁹ Some doubt of another kind still remained, however, for although Krauss saw the Ms. himself he based his edition on a copy, and the copyist had every so often been baffled by what lay before him. A later transcription made by the present writer from the manuscript in 1982 has helped with gaps and seeming slips in the printed edition.

Before moving to signs of the importance of this text in the attestation of the *Toledot Yeshu* I note what might almost seem at first to suggest its unimportance, namely the modern European origins of the copy presented in the Strasbourg manuscript. Yet it is indeed significant for our knowledge of the currency and *Sitz im Leben* of the *Toledot Yeshu* that this particular copy can be located in a setting more precisely than is often the case, thanks especially to scribal notes of family births and deaths, and S. Landauer's full description in his catalogue.

This text was probably copied in the eighteenth century. A scribal note at the end (f. 175b) gives the copyist's name as Moses. The *Toledot Yeshu* is one item in a miscellaneous compilation much of which, later in the volume, was copied towards the end of the century by Joseph, the second son of Moses, as his notes on f. 276b and later show. His father Moses was a *hazzan* and died, as Joseph mentions in a later note (f. 314a), in 1793; Joseph's elder brother Samuel, also *hazzan*, died in 1802. The father Moses seems likely to have been the copyist of the *Toledot Yeshu*. Father and sons were members of a family which for a long time provided *hazzanim* and *hakhamim* for the Karaite community among the Jews of Halicz on the river Dniester in south-eastern Galicia, in the area of the former Ruthenia, and now in western Ukraine, seventy miles south-east of Lemberg/Lviv.¹⁰

Many of the items brought together in this compilation are of specifically Karaite authorship or interest. They include Caleb Afendipulo and other Karaite authorities on the laws of *shehitah*, and extracts from moral and pious works, with some translations from Hebrew into Tartar, the language retained by Karaites in these parts. According to their own tradition their forefathers had migrated from Byzantium to the Crimea, and had then been resettled in Troki near Wilna/Vilnius and places further south, including Halicz, by the Grand Duke Witold of Lithuania after his 1392 victory over the Tartars.¹¹

⁹ Robert Eisler, *Iesous Basileus ou Basileusas* (2 vols.; Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1929–30), 1:516, n. 1.

¹⁰ The family records inserted by the main copyist, Joseph b. Moses, are summarized by Landauer, *Katalog*, 70; on the succession of *hazzanim* from this family among the Halicz Karaites see Nathan M. Gelber, "Halicz," *EncJud* (Berlin: Eschkol, 1928–1934), 7: 870–71.

¹¹ An 1838 responsum of Abraham Leonowicz of Halicz, cited by Majer Balaban, "Karäer," *EncJud* (Berlin: Eschkol, 1932), 9: 923–54 (936–37). See further Mikhail Kizilov, *The Karaites of Galicia* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

The *Toledot Yeshu* is the only polemical or midrashic item in the manuscript. It fits in a general way with the interest in communal instruction and the maintenance of Jewish education and ways of life which is evident in much of the compilation. Joseph ben Samuel, an ancestor of the eighteenth-century Moses and his sons Samuel and Joseph, had migrated to Halicz from Lithuania at about the beginning of the eighteenth century; at this period the Lithuanian Karaites had produced literary controversy against both Rabbanites and Christians. Jedidiah Solomon b. Aaron of Troki about 1700 wrote with these aims, and was preceded a hundred years earlier by the more famous Isaac of Troki, author of the *Hizzuq 'emunah*. The general conditions which had evoked these apologetic works still prevailed later and further south, and concern with Christian pressure might have been sharpened in mid-eighteenth-century Galicia by the Frankist movement; Jacob Frank and many of his followers accepted baptism in the aftermath of the rabbinic-Frankist disputations held under ecclesiastical auspices in Lemberg in 1757 and 1759.

There is no indication whether the *Toledot Yeshu* was copied from a text belonging to a Rabbanite or a Karaite. It is tempting to ask if the text was mediated ultimately through Karaite contacts with Jerusalem and the east – the Karaite David Hazzan had migrated from Jerusalem to Galicia in 1640. The attestation of similar texts in Europe at an earlier date makes caution advisable, but the contacts with oriental texts noted below at least bring the question to the fore.

In any case, it is of interest that the manuscript provides a relatively late but clear instance of the reading of the *Toledot Yeshu* by Karaites; one other possible case of a Karaite copying a *Toledot Yeshu* text was pointed out by G. B. De Rossi, and old Karaite authors including Qirqisani and Judah Hadassi show knowledge of its contents, but as far as I know attestations of *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts in use by Karaites are rare.¹² The text is also notable as an instance of the copying of the *Toledot Yeshu* by a communal official and instructor; comparably, at about the same time in Italy the *Toledot Yeshu* appear to have been appended by Joshua Segre, rabbi in Scandiano, near Reggio Emilia, to his polemical work *Asham Talui*.¹³ Later on, in Baghdad in 1846, during missionary activity there by the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, a copy of the *Toledot Yeshu* was made by the Hakham Isaac b. Mordecai

¹² Giovanni B. De Rossi, *Mss. Codices Hebraici Bibliothecae I. B. de Rossi* (3 vols., Parma, 1803), no. 96, pp. 60b, 62b, on the basis of correspondence with Elia Morpurgo, who described a copy of the works in this Ms. formerly in the possession of a Karaite.

¹³ Ms. Oxford, Bodleian Library Opp. Add. 4^o 145, comprising *Asham Talui* Part II and the *Toledot Yeshu*, with a letter of Segre of 1787, described by Adolf Neubauer in A. Neubauer & Arthur E. Cowley, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library* (2 vols., Oxford, 1886, 1906), 1: 845a, no. 2407; Malachi Beit-Arie, ed. R.A. May, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library: Supplement of Addenda and Corrigenda to Vol. 1* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 469a.

b. Sason.¹⁴ Those trends and external pressures which helped to promote such copying by communal officers or teachers at the same time of course had an opposite effect; they encouraged the criticism or discrediting of the *Toledot* by Jewish authors who were communal representatives deeply engaged with the non-Jewish world, like Leone Modena in the seventeenth century or Moses Mendelssohn at the end of the eighteenth.¹⁵

2.

The Strasbourg text was thus copied for use in an eighteenth-century Galician Karaite milieu. Yet, to turn now to its importance for the history of the *Toledot Yeshu* narrative, it is notable first of all that the text reproduced bears signs of greater age. The same is of course true of many other modern copies of the *Toledot Yeshu*. Krauss brought this point out implicitly for the Strasbourg text by noting in his textual apparatus readings suggested by the Latin translation of parts of a *Toledot Yeshu* text given by Raimundus Martinus in his *Pugio fidei*, compiled in Spain by c. 1278. Some further indications bear out the view that the Strasbourg copy substantially represents a text already current in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

First, it begins in satirical style with the phrase *tehillat beriyyato shel Yeshu*, “the beginning of the creation of Yeshu,” modelled on the midrashic *tehillat beriyyato shel ’olam* (Ber. R. i 6, etc.). This is a palpable hit at the clause of the Nicene Creed, *credo in ... Christum ... genitum non factum*, “begotten not made,” and with its literary as well as polemical character looks like one of those reworkings of the introduction of the *Toledot Yeshu* to which the text was repeatedly liable. In this case, however, the reworking is of respectable age, for the same opening of the text is attested in Latin translation in the anthology of texts compiled by the Dominican Theobald of Saxony under the heading *Extractiones de Talmut* in the mid-thirteenth century, in connection with the long-drawn-out public examination of the Talmud in the university of Paris initiated in 1239; in a section illustrating blasphemies against Christ and the Virgin it is stated that the Jews have a book which begins *initium creacionis ihesu nazareni*.¹⁶ No

¹⁴ David S. Sassoon, *Ohel Dawid. Descriptive Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the Sassoon Library, London* (2 vols., London: Oxford University Press, 1932), no. 793, pp. 426, 920; Albert A. Isaacs, *Biography of the Rev. Henry Aaron Stern, D. D.* (London: J. Nisbet & co., 1886), 24–74 (on the Baghdad mission of which Stern was a member, 1844–52).

¹⁵ Leone Modena, *Magen va-herew: hibur neged ha-Natsrut* (ed. Shlomo Simonsohn, Jerusalem: Mekitse nirdamim, 1960), 3.9, p. 43 (*ha-kol sheqer ve-kazav*); Moses Mendelssohn, letter to J. C. Lavater in Moses Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1930), 7: 362 (“eine Misgeburt aus den Zeiten der Legenden, und ihrer würdig”).

¹⁶ On the *Extractiones* see Heinz Schreckenberg, *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos Texte und ihr literarisches und historisches Umfeld (13.–20. Jh.)* (Frankfurt a. M.: P. Lang, 1994),

title is quoted, and it may be that the text in question simply began and ended without a title, as is the case in the Strasbourg text. The Hebrew text of the Paris Disputation of 1240 indeed correspondingly includes, as Isidore Loeb noted, two allusions to the *Toledot Yeshu*, both noting features of the "Helen group" found in copies including the Strasbourg text: Mary's betrothed husband was called John, and Jesus lived in the days of queen Helen.¹⁷

Secondly, the Strasbourg Hebrew text corresponds verbally with Hebrew quotations of the *Toledot Yeshu* by Abner of Burgos, who had received the baptismal name Alfonso, in his Hebrew anti-Jewish polemic, before 1349. Arguing that Christ's miracles are well known to Jews, he quotes two books, one *Toledot Yeshu* in Hebrew and another in Aramaic. Corresponding Aramaic texts are now known once again through Genizah fragments, and the story which they present can be seen often to be echoed in the Jewish statements reported by the ninth-century Lyonnais bishops Agobard and Amulo. Here Yeshu uses magic and is tried by judges including Pilate, whereas in the Hebrew group represented by the Strasbourg text Yeshu uses the Ineffable Name and appears before queen Helen. Abner's quotations from the Hebrew book can be seen, through comparison with the Strasbourg text, to be five separate extracts, brought together in the order of the narrative to form a summary of what is important for Abner's argument. Abner indicates that the title was *Ma'aseh shel Yeshu ha-Notsri*. Abner's polemic was reproduced in the answer to it issued by Shem Tob ibn Shaprut as an addition to his own apologetic work the *Touchstone* (*'Eben Bohan*) in 1400, and this passage from it was published from a Ms. of ibn Shaprut by Krauss; but he did not point out the agreement of the quotations with the Strasbourg text.¹⁸

These verbal correspondences in the Incipit and a series of extracts confirm that that the Strasbourg text is identical in important particulars with lost texts which were current in France and Spain in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This observation can now be set beside Krauss's indication of agreements between the Strasbourg text and other texts which were still extant. One was the Oxford Yiddish text, but in fact this does diverge sometimes in both language and content from the Strasbourg text, as G. Schlichting pointed out.¹⁹ Another,

101-3; the *Toledot Yeshu* reference is cited from Ms. Paris Lat. 16558, f. 14c, by Chenmelech Merchavia, *The Church versus Talmudic and Midrashic Literature, 500-1248* (Jerusalem: Mosad Beyalikh, 1970 [in Hebrew]), 305, 328-30.

¹⁷ Isidore Loeb, "La controverse religieuse entre les chrétiens et les juifs au moyen âge," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 17 (1888): 311-37 (329, n. 3); 18 (1888): 134-56.

¹⁸ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 146-7, from a Breslau Ms.; I have verified the quotation in two other Mss. of the *Touchstone*, Cambridge University Library, Add. 1175 and Bodleian Library, Mich. 137. For the date and presentations of Ibn Shaprut's quotation and rebuttal of Abner see William Horbury, "The Revision of Shem Tob Ibn Shaprut's *Eben Bohan*," in *Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy* (ed. William Horbury; Edinburgh: T. & T Clark, 1998), 261-75 (264) (= *Sefarad* 44 [1983]: 221-37).

¹⁹ Gunter Schlichting, *Ein jüdisches Leben Jesu: Die verschollene Toledot-Jeschu-Fassung Tam u-Mu'ad* (WUNT 24, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1982), 42.

however, was a probably nineteenth-century Hebrew fragment, a single leaf with the beginning of the story, which E. N. Adler had purchased in Bokhara in 1897.²⁰ It has the title *Ma'aseh Yeshu ha-Notsri*, begins with a corrupt form of the Strasbourg Incipit, and throughout corresponds fairly closely with the Strasbourg text.

This agreement with a text found in central Asia is open to many explanations. Thus among the printed books which Adler saw in Bokhara were some originating ultimately with refugees from Spain, including a copy of the Ixar Pentateuch of 1490 and some pages from a Catalonian prayer-book printed at Salonika in 1523.²¹ A manuscript copy of the *Toledot Yeshu* text known to Abner of Burgos could have travelled in the same way, and Adler's leaf could come from a much later copy of it. Yet the nineteenth-century Bokharan Jews were also in touch with Lithuania and Jerusalem, both possible sources of *Toledot Yeshu* texts; and given the remarkable mobility of books in general, speculation is probably futile.

In any case, this agreement was later paralleled by agreements over a longer portion of text with at least five other eastern manuscripts, mainly from the Yemen. Among the earliest of these is a copy in a seventeenth-century Yemenite hand (formerly Ms. Sassoon 902) corresponding to nine pages of the printed text in Krauss (40 line 2–48 line 6).²² It begins with the discovery of Yeshu's paternity, and ends in the story of Elijah-Paul. Another, less close verbally, a Yemenite text printed by Krauss, runs (with what seem to be abbreviations) from the conception of Yeshu to the separation of the Christians by Elijah, and retains a little of the Aramaic which in the Strasbourg text gives verisimilitude to one or two remarks by speakers who claim learning.²³

The Strasbourg text therefore has links in its opening with the lost text cited in the thirteenth century by Theobald, and with the probably nineteenth-century fragment bought by Adler in Bokhara. In the body of its narrative it is close to the lost texts quoted in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries by the Christian controversialists Raimundus Martinus and Abner (Alphonsus) of Burgos, respectively, but also to texts which circulated in the Middle East, especially the Yemen, at least from the seventeenth century onwards. Thus it is an instance in which, despite the individuality of almost every single *Toledot Yeshu* manuscript, the possibility of discerning a group of texts which are verbally as well as thematically close seems real, and in which some encouragement for the idea of a synoptic presentation can be found. Again, it is one of many instances in which a relatively modern copy has clear links with texts which were already current

²⁰ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 21, 140–41; Bischoff in Krauss, *ibid.*, 30–31.

²¹ Elkan Nathan Adler, *Jews in Many Lands* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1905), 221.

²² Sassoon, *Ohel Dawid*, 920–21, no. 902.

²³ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 21, 118–21; Bischoff in Krauss, *ibid.*, 31.

in the Middle Ages. Now, finally, two further aspects of the text raise questions about its contacts with ancient and early mediaeval times.

3.

One much-discussed aspect has been the presentation in this text of the names of the new Christian festivals which Elijah-Paul causes to be substituted for Jewish ones. These appear quite widely in *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts (thus the Baghdad 1846 copy just mentioned has a somewhat fuller form) but, as Krauss put it, they are seen at their best in the Strasbourg text, where they are given in the Syriac used by eastern Christians; the names of the Jewish festivals are also given in Aramaic.²⁴ Krauss's discussions of this passage as a sign of early date have been developed by later writers, most fully in a recent investigation by Daniel Stökl ben Ezra which shows that the list of festivals probably reflects Palestine or Syria in the fourth or early fifth century.²⁵ Here it need only be noted in addition that the last item in the list, Kalendae, substituted for Hanukkah, was also a loan-word and liturgical term in Syriac, and that the emphasis in the context of the list on the separation of Christians from Jews and the good treatment of Jews by Christians is not peculiar to the *Toledot*, but, with some broadly comparable references to festivals, is likewise a feature of apocryphal Christian accounts of early apostolic councils.²⁶ In general, the *Toledot* presentation of ecclesiastical events after the crucifixion is close to Christian narrative of these (including pious fraud by the apostles Peter and Paul, as well as commandment to eschew Jewish customs) as it was developed by the fourth and fifth centuries.²⁷

A second striking feature of the Strasbourg text, this time not paralleled in the manuscripts mentioned above, is its presentation of a form of the Talmudic narrative of the trial and execution of five disciples of Yeshu (*b. Sanhedrin* 43a). In the *Toledot Yeshu* text this passage appears when Yeshu is captured for the second time, in the temple. The Wise ask him his name, and he gives a series of four cover-names – Matthai, Naqi, Buni and Netzer. These are four of the five names allotted in the Talmud to the five disciples (although in part of the Tal-

²⁴ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 272; idem, "Neuere Ansichten über 'Toldoth Jeschu,'" *MGWJ* 76 (1932): 586–603; 77 (1933): 44–61 (46–7).

²⁵ William Horbury, *A Critical Examination of the Toldoth Jeshu* (Ph. D. diss.; Cambridge University, 1970), 275–81; Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, "An Ancient List of Christian Festivals in *Toledot Yeshu*: Polemics as Indication for Interaction," *HTR* 102 (2009): 481–96.

²⁶ So for example canons 15 and 16 in the Syriac Teaching of the Apostles translated by Benjamin Plummer Pratten, *Syriac Documents attributed to the first three centuries* (Ante-Nicene Christian Library 21; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871), 41.

²⁷ William Horbury, "The Depiction of Judaeo-Christians in the *Toledot Yeshu*," in *The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature* (eds. Peter J. Tomson and Doris Lambers-Petry; WUNT 158, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 284–85.

mudic textual tradition, represented in Haggadot ha-Talmud, there are likewise only four); but they read like names derived from the Christological proof-texts which Yeshu then quotes (Ps. 42:2, 24:7; Exod. 4:22; Isa. 11:1), only to be rebutted by other nearby texts on the principle *teshuvatan be-ziddan* (enunciated in respect of answers to Minim in *b. Sanhedrin* 38b, *Bereshit Rabbah* viii 9). The messianic and Christological character of the proofs was emphasized by students including H. J. Schonfield.²⁸ Hence it was suggested by Ernst Bammel that, as this text of the *Toledot Yeshu* might indicate, originally the names were simply envisaged as names referring to Yeshu; and Peter Schäfer somewhat similarly argues that the author or editor of the trial-scene in the Babylonian Talmud is giving a rebuttal of Christian claims for Christ under the guise of an account of the trial of the disciples.²⁹

At present, however, the focus of interest is not so much the interpretation of the Talmudic passage, as its incorporation into a Hebrew text of the *Toledot Yeshu* – something which is in fact typical not of the other texts of the Strasbourg or “Helen” type, but of the Aramaic texts and their Hebrew and Judaeo-Arabic congeners, in which either five or twelve disciples are brought and tried.³⁰ It may be suggested that the Strasbourg text has contact here with a form, perhaps early, of the story given in the Aramaic texts, in which Yeshu did indeed apply the names to himself. In this connection it is at least noteworthy that the passage on Simeon Cepha in the Strasbourg text, itself probably an addition, gives the Christian authorities Hebrew equivalents of the titles which in the Aramaic texts we find given to Roman or Jewish ones: *hegemon* and *yashish gadol*.³¹ In the Strasbourg text we then have a possible link between the Hebrew text in the “Helen Group” form which is the most familiar of all, and the story given typically in the Aramaic texts.

The Strasbourg text thus presents both a well-marked form of the passage on festivals which forms one of the internal associations of the “Helen group” with the fourth and fifth centuries, and also, in the passage on the names of Yeshu and in the titles given to authorities, material suggesting that this text has had contact during its transmission and development with the story as current in Aramaic texts of the “Pilate group.” Can more be said on the pre-thirteenth-century history of the narrative attested in the Strasbourg text?

The beginning of the Strasbourg text, with its tinge of literature and satire, is probably an elaboration of a *Toledot Yeshu* which was already current. This

²⁸ Schonfield, *According to the Hebrews*, 153–7.

²⁹ Ernst Bammel, “What is thy Name?,” in *Judaica. Kleine Schriften* (ed. idem; 2 vols.; WUNT 37, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986; repr. from *NT* (1970) 12:223–28), 1: 210–15; Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 75–81.

³⁰ Yaacov Deutsch, “New Evidence of Early Versions of *Toldot Yeshu*,” *Tarbiz* 69 (2000): 177–97 (186–89).

³¹ Hebrew text (f. 175a) in Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 49.

particular opening is first attested in the early thirteenth century, and may of course be earlier; but in any case a closely similar Hebrew text, with or without this opening sentence, probably circulated earlier in the Middle Ages. Yet clear earlier attestations of the narrative as it is presented here as a whole are lacking, and the divergence from it of those forms of narrative which are indeed attested earlier in Aramaic – Di Segni’s “Pilate group” – is striking not only for the difference in the principal governing authorities concerned, but also for the lack of the birth story in the published texts of the “Pilate group” – and indeed also in an early witness to the “Helen group” like that of Raimundus Martinus (here Jesus is of illegitimate birth, but the story of his birth is not told in the text, at least as far as it is translated by Raimundus). Hence it has been suggested that the birth story as it is found at the beginning of the Strasbourg text represents a mediaeval addition to the *Toledot Yeshu* narrative, from the thirteenth century or later.³²

The intensive study of texts which is under way will surely throw more light on the whole question of the pre-thirteenth-century antecedents of the “Helen group,” but some tentative remarks can be made on the basis of evidence already available. The importance of the *Toledot Yeshu* for the Jewish statements reported by Agobard and Amulo in the ninth century was underlined, now with the suggestion that it formed a significant factor in Carolingian conversions to Judaism, by Bernhard Blumenkranz.³³ Of special note for the Strasbourg text, with its narrative of the conception of Yeshu, is Amulo’s *Liber contra Iudaeos*, issued in 846. Here a connected narrative of the type known from Aramaic texts concerning deposition from the cross at the request of Joshua (ben Perahiah), entombment, and the dragging of the body through the city is followed by a report that Jews call Jesus “the impious son of an impious father, that is of some gentile (*nescio cuius ethnici*) whom they call Pandera; they say that this man committed adultery with the Lord’s mother and that thence he in whom we believe was born.”³⁴ This statement implies knowledge not just of the Talmud, which lacks the specification of Pandera as a gentile, but also of a form of the *Toledot* conception narrative. In the context of Amulo’s reproduction of a connected account of events after the crucifixion, it suggests a *Toledot Yeshu* of the Pilate group as known from Aramaic texts, but beginning with a birth story.³⁵

³² Di Segni, *Il vangelo del ghetto*, 33, 113, 127–29, 218 (not mentioning the thirteenth-century attestation of the Incipit of the Strasbourg text).

³³ Bernhard Blumenkranz, *Juifs et chrétiens dans le monde occidental, 430–1096* (Paris: Mouton, 1960), 169–71, 258.

³⁴ Wagenseil, “Confutatio Libri Toldos Jeschu,” 12–13; Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 13 (both follow the old attribution of the book to Hrabanus Maurus); the relevant passages are reprinted from Pierre-François Chifflet, *Scriptorum Veterum de Fide Catholica Quinque Opuscula* (Dijon, 1656), 289–534 in Hermann Leberecht Strack, *Jesus, die Häretiker und die Christen nach den ältesten jüdischen Angaben* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1910), 17*.

³⁵ Blumenkranz, *Juifs et chrétiens*, 258 envisaged a recension like, but a little different from, that attested by Agobard.

The view expressed here that Pandera was a gentile was later assumed by Maimonides, and it reappears in *Toledot Yeshu* texts, for example in the Yemen (possibly now in turn influenced by Maimonides) in Ms. Sassoon 902, the seventeenth-century text cited above for its closeness to the Strasbourg copy.³⁶ The Strasbourg text itself represents a widespread form in which “Joseph ben Pandera” is simply a Jewish neighbour, but Wagenseil’s text among others retains with this a vestige of the old assertion that he was a soldier, which is found in the second century in the statements on Christian origins attributed by Celsus to a Jew.³⁷ Probably at an early stage the descriptions “soldier” and “gentile” were sometimes found together, for the suggestion that the father was non-Jewish already appears in another form in St John’s Gospel.³⁸

A conception narrative could then reasonably be envisaged for the “Helen” as well as the “Pilate” form of narrative in the ninth century, given that much internal evidence suggests that the “Helen” form had already developed in the fourth and fifth centuries. Krauss dated the story in the Strasbourg text probably to the fifth century.³⁹ A date near this time is suggested by the character of the account of Nestorius as an addition to an existing narrative; the figure of Helen herself (apparently conflating Helena Augusta, the mother of Constantine, with Helen of Adiabene), in the light of the proliferation of Christian legend on St Helen and the Jews in the fourth and fifth centuries; and the contacts of the Elijah-Paul narrative noted already with Christian accounts, from the fourth century onwards, of apostolic preaching by pious fraud and apostolic instruction to separate from Jewish ways.

The Pilate form, it may be suggested, represents a still earlier narrative; it has links with the anti-Christian Acts of Pilate which circulated in the late third century, and, like the probably later “Helen” form known from the Strasbourg text, it is related ultimately (but more closely than the “Helen” form) to the second-century stories which are attributed by Celsus to a Jewish source, and are not without some reflection in rabbinic tradition.⁴⁰

³⁶ Abraham Halkin, ed., *Moses Maimonides' Epistle to Yemen* (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1952), 12–13.

³⁷ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1:32 (Mary turned out by her betrothed, for she had been convicted of adultery and had a child by a soldier called Panthera); Wagenseil, “Liber Toldos Jeschu,” 3 (Joseph Pandera a *gibbor milhamah*), discussed with other attestations of “soldier” and “gentile” by Horbury, *A Critical Examination*, 405–6.

³⁸ John 8:48 “you are a Samaritan,” cf. 8:41 “we were not born of fornication.”

³⁹ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 246.

⁴⁰ For rabbinic passages as suggesting an early form of narrative on Jesus related to the *Toledot Yeshu* and current in both Judaea and the east see William Horbury, “Rabbinic Perceptions of Christianity and the History of Roman Palestine,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 165 (2010): 353–76 (= *Rabbinic Texts and the History of Late-Roman Palestine* [eds. Martin Goodman and Philip Alexander]).

Observations on the Huldreich Manuscripts of the *Toledot Yeshu**

Adina M. Yoffie

“*Diese Recension gibt uns schwere Probleme auf.*”¹ With those words, Samuel Krauss, author of the seminal work *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (1902), encapsulated the challenges posed by the “Huldreich” version of the *Toledot Yeshu*. Johann Jacob Huldreich, a Christian scholar from Zürich about whom little is known, first published a manuscript of the version in 1705, along with a Latin translation and annotations.² Huldreich’s manuscript differs substantially from earlier manuscripts of the *Toledot* in both content and style, it combines some of the earliest and some of the latest *Toledot* traditions, and its origin remains almost completely obscure: Huldreich said only that a Jew had given it to him. Building on the work of Krauss, his colleague, Erich Bischoff, and scholars recently researching the *Toledot*, this article closely examines the Huldreich version, exploring its unique narrative and its rewritings of earlier versions. It also offers some thoughts about dating the manuscripts.

Krauss delineates some of the unique features of the Huldreich version, which this article will discuss in some detail, but, in short, there are many. It is thus surprising, at least at first glance, that the Huldreich manuscripts have not received more scholarly attention relative to the other versions than they have. There are a number of ways to explain this comparative neglect, including: the paucity of manuscripts; the lack of significant differences between the manuscripts, which led Krauss, Riccardo Di Segni, and others to believe – in my view, correctly – that they are all copies of each other; and the sheer number of dissimilarities

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¹ Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: S. Cavalry, 1902; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1977), 16.

² Johann Jacob Huldreich (Huldricus), *Sefer Toledot Yeshua ha-Notsri/Historia Jeschuae Nazareni: à Judaeis blasphemè corrupta/ex manuscripto hactenus inedito nunc demum edita, ac versione et notis (quibus Judaeorum nequitiae proprius deteguntur, et authoris asserta ineptiae ac impietatis convincuntur), illustrata a Joh. Jac. Huldrico* (Leiden: J. du Vivie, 1705).

between the Huldreich version and all the others, which makes it very difficult for the scholar to put it in context.³

This article aims to situate the Huldreich manuscripts in their historical and geographical contexts, in light of the manuscripts' unique features. The parts of the Huldreich that reference earlier versions often echo the earliest extant Hebrew manuscripts, at least one of which is a translation of an even earlier Aramaic manuscript. But there are much later elements in the Huldreich as well. The Huldreich's description of Mary's grave is nearly identical to that in a Yiddish manuscript. Another account, about Jesus playing ball, is similar to a story common in the latest, "Slavic," versions of the *Toledot*. Since the author or authors of the Huldreich were familiar with some of the earliest and some of the latest manuscript traditions, the Huldreich version may be dated to the fifteenth or sixteenth century, if not even later. The Huldreich is most likely an early modern synthesis of a number of *Toledot* traditions, with some prominent high medieval features, and with references to microforms approximately half a millennium older than the core text.

The Manuscript Evidence and Implications for Authorship

Every scholar who has attempted to catalog the more than 150 Hebrew *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts has done so slightly differently and has given the manuscripts different names and numbers. Riccardo Di Segni, author of a 1985 work on the manuscripts, calls the Huldreich group "Herod," after the arbiter of Jesus's trial. This is his general classification scheme, with what Krauss calls the "Wagenseil" type being called "Helena," etc.⁴ The Princeton University *Toledot Yeshu* project, unlike earlier cataloguers, has access to digital copies of at least three-quarters of the extant manuscripts. That has made it possible to check the classifications of Krauss and Di Segni against both the manuscripts and Huldreich's text and, in some cases, to eliminate manuscripts from the Huldreich group. The project has identified five manuscripts so far that are nearly identical to the Hebrew text published by Huldreich in 1705. They are: Frankfurt Hebrew 8.249 (Frankfurt 249); Amsterdam Hs. Ros 442; Amsterdam Hs. Ros 504; Princeton Firestone Library 24 (Princeton 24); and Manchester Gaster 1989 (so called because it was once owned by Krauss's friend, the Reverend M. Gaster of London). The rest are likely to be either copies or translations of those five, which are nearly identical to each other. Krauss's book lists only three Huldreich manuscripts, one of which

³ Riccardo Di Segni, *Il vangelo del ghetto* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1985), 225–36.

⁴ Di Segni, *Il vangelo del ghetto*, 29–42, 216–19, cited by Hillel I. Newman, "The Death of Jesus in the *Toledot Yeshu* Literature," *JTS* 50 (1999): 59–79, 59, n. 5.

was the text published by Huldreich.⁵ Di Segni lists a total of ten manuscripts of the “Herod” (*i. e.*, Huldreich) type; that number does not include Princeton 24, of which he was not aware, or Amsterdam 504, which he classifies as belonging to the “Elena” (*i. e.*, Wagenseil) type. Of those ten, he classifies five as copies of the Herod/Huldreich version and four as translations of it. Three of the translations are to Judaeo-German; one is to Judaeo-Spanish.⁶ Citations of the text of the Huldreich manuscript in this article will be to Frankfurt 249 (called “Fr. 1” on Di Segni’s 1985 list), unless otherwise noted. It is the most complete manuscript of the five, although Princeton 24 is almost as complete.

Another problem with the manuscript evidence is that it is very late.⁷ The manuscript of the *Toledot Yeshu* that Huldreich used to publish his annotated Latin-Hebrew edition of the *Toledot* has been lost.⁸ About that manuscript, Huldreich said, in his introduction to the reader, only that he got it from a Jew.⁹ He used no adjectives to describe the Jew, and he gave no indication that his source was a Jewish convert to Christianity, as were the informants of Johann Christoph Wagenseil (1633–1705), the other early modern Christian scholar to publish a Hebrew text of the *Toledot Yeshu* with a Latin translation and commentary (1681).¹⁰ There was no “Huldreich” before Huldreich; that is, there are no extant manuscripts of the Huldreich type before Huldreich published his book in 1705. All of the subsequent manuscripts appear to have been copied from Huldreich’s book, or perhaps from other manuscripts that were copied from it.

Although Huldreich neither said nor implied that his source was a convert, the possibility that the Huldreich was authored by converts must be considered. Jewish converts to Christianity were often involved in telling Christians about the existence of the *Toledot*, and, as was just mentioned, Wagenseil had a number

⁵ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 33–35. Dr. Erich Bischoff is the author of the “Klassifizierung der Texte” section of *Das Leben Jesu* (27–37). Pages from the section will be cited as “Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, PAGE (Bischoff).”

⁶ For Di Segni’s manuscript list (the most recently published one, although Princeton University’s *Toledot Yeshu* project is in the process of producing a newer one), see the “Bibliografia” section of his *Il vangelo del ghetto*, 225–36.

⁷ Krauss points out that this is the case for almost all *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts (*Das Leben Jesu*, 19).

⁸ Krauss, *ibid.*, 33 (Bischoff).

⁹ Huldreich, *Sefer Toledot Yeshua ha-Notsri*, 4r: “*Obsecutus ergo fui, atque aggressus sum libellum scelerate impium, quem Manuscriptum à Judaeo olim nactus sum.*” (I, therefore, complied, and I guiltily undertook the impious little book, whose manuscript [is] from a Jew I once met).

¹⁰ Johann Christoph Wagenseil, *Tela ignea Satanae, hoc est: Arcani et horribiles Judaeorum adversus Christum Deum et Christianem religionem libri anekdoti: Sunt vero: R. Lipmanni Carmen Memoriale. Liber Nizzachon Vetus Autoris Incogniti. Acta Disputationes R. Jechielis cum quodam Nicolao. Acta Disputationis R. Mosis Nachmanidis cum Fratre Paulo Christiani, et Fratre Raymundo Martini. R. Isaaci Liber Chissuk Emuna. Libellus Toldos Jeschu/Johann Christophorus Wagenseilius ex Europae Africaeque latebris erutos, in lucem protrusit ...* (Altdorf: Johann Heinrich Schönnerstädt, 1681).

of apostate informants.¹¹ Another feature of the Huldreich that could point to a Christian author (or authors) is its many allusions to the story of Jesus's life in the Gospels, and particularly the Gospel of John.¹² In both texts, Herod is the King at Jesus's birth.¹³ Both have a flight to Egypt (2v) and a slaughter of the innocents (2v–3r). Jesus is both a student and a critic of the rabbis (3r), and he has five disciples (3r), as in the Gospel of John, Chapter 1. The disciples' leader is Peter (Petrus). John the Baptist (Yehonos) is the first to be killed for following Jesus (3v). In most of the versions in which John is mentioned (primarily the Aramaic fragments and the early Hebrew manuscripts), he is killed together with Jesus, after the disciples are executed.¹⁴ Jesus wanders in the dessert (although with the disciples), meets people, and makes pithy remarks to them (3v). The ruler (in this case, Herod) agrees to execute Jesus after some delay (4v). His executing is by hanging, with no stoning (although his disciples are stoned [4v]), in a marked departure from many other versions, and from the Talmud.¹⁵

Perhaps the most famous seventeenth-century convert connected with the *Toledot* is Samuel Friedrich Brenz of Bavaria. In his *Jüdischer abgestreifter Schlangenbalg* (*The Jewish Serpent's Skin Stripped*; 1614), Brenz wrote that, on Christmas Eve, the Jews read a book called *Maase Thola* (*Tale of the Hanged One*, one of the alternative titles for the *Toledot*).¹⁶ In that book, Jesus is called

¹¹ Krauss believed that many *Toledot* manuscripts were written by converts (*Das Leben Jesu*, 17), on account of what he considered to be their poor Hebrew (16–17) and their utter hostility to Christianity. He cited Johann Wülfer's idea that converts manufactured the entire *Toledot* in order to incite Christians to harm the Jews. Krauss thought that Wülfer went a bit too far but did not dismiss his argument (17). I think that Krauss went too far in crediting Wülfer's claims. While converts were involved in the transmission, and likely to some degree in the composition, of some manuscripts of the *Toledot Yeshu*, there is no reason not to see the *Toledot* as an internal Jewish response to the Gospels and to Christianity.

¹² In the Huldreich, Jesus is called "Yeshua" at his birth and then "Yezush" after his excommunication. In the other Hebrew *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts, he is usually called "Yeshu" (or "Yishai," which is probably the result of a transcription error) after his excommunication, while at birth he may be called "Yeshua," "Yehoshua," or "Yeshu." For the sake of clarity, and for ease of comparing with other manuscripts and with the New Testament, this article always refers to him as "Jesus."

¹³ *Toledot Yeshu* (Ms. Frankfurt 249), 2v. For the remainder of this article, pages from the Huldreich (Ms. Frankfurt 249) will be cited in internal citations in the body of the text.

¹⁴ For a transcription of, and introduction to, one of the most complete Aramaic manuscripts, Cambridge 35.87, see Yaacov Deutsch, "New Evidence of Early Versions of *Toledot Yeshu*," *Tarbiz* 69 (2000): 177–97 (in Hebrew).

¹⁵ On the execution of Jesus in the Huldreich, see also Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 34 (Bischoff). On Jesus's execution by stoning in the Talmud, see Mishnah (m.) Sanhedrin 6:1 and Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin (b. *Sanhedrin*) 43a, quoted in Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 63–65.

¹⁶ Elisheva Carlebach, "The Anti-Christian Element in Early-Modern Yiddish Culture," *Braun Lecture in the History of the Jews in Prussia* 10 (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2002): 1–20, 9. Carlebach cites Marc Shapiro, "Torah Study on Christmas Eve," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 8 (1999): 319–53, 332–34.

a bastard and the son of a whore and a menstruating woman.¹⁷ He added that the book was a secret among Jews, and that they were forbidden to print it.¹⁸ Brenz went on to give a number of details of the book, focusing particularly on the Ineffable Name (“*Schem Hamephorasch*”), which the Jews claim that Jesus stole from the Holy Temple in order to perform his miracles.¹⁹ Bischoff, citing Johann Christoph Wolf, said that the lost Huldreich codex was “consistent with the manuscript from which Brenz (sic) in his ‘Jüd(isches) Schlangenbalg’ directly or indirectly drew.”²⁰ It is, therefore, tempting to speculate that Brenz could have been involved in the writing of the Huldreich, but, *contra* Bischoff, his accounts include a number of episodes that appear in many *Toledot* texts of the Wagenseil and Slavic types, but not in the Huldreich. Those include Jesus stealing the Name, Judah later learning the Name at the behest of the rabbis, and Judah engaging in a flying contest with Jesus in which Judah renders Jesus impure.²¹ In the Huldreich, Jesus learns the “secret of the Ineffable Name” from his teacher, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perahia (3r); he does not have to steal it. There is no flying contest in the Huldreich, and although Judah does deprive Jesus of the power to use the Name (4r), Judah never learns the Name.

So Brenz is not a credible candidate for the authorship of the Huldreich. Perhaps another convert, or a group of converts, wrote it, but there is another, more tantalizing, possibility, *i. e.*, that Huldreich wrote it himself. He would not be the first publisher of a “found” manuscript who was actually its author. Huldreich’s annotations to the manuscript, however, suggest that he could not have written it. There is no evidence from his book that Huldreich had regular contact with living Jews or Jewish converts, as Wagenseil did. When Huldreich discusses Jewish customs, he cites Wagenseil or Johannes Buxtorf the Elder (1564–1629), Professor of Hebrew at Basel and author of *Juden Schul* (1603), rather than his own observations of, or conversations with, Jews.²²

Then there is the question of Huldreich’s knowledge of Hebrew. He is a capable translator, but the author of the Huldreich was also a talented writer of Hebrew who likely had read a number of different versions of the *Toledot* before synthesizing and rewriting them to create the final manuscript. Huldreich’s annotations do not appear to be the work of a talented Hebraist. There is very little

¹⁷ Samuel Friedrich Brenz, *Jüdischer abgestreifter Schlangenbalg*, 1680 ed., reprinted in Johann Wülfer, *Theriaca judaica ad examen revocata* (Altdorf: Andreas Knorzus, 1681), 2.

¹⁸ The *Toledot Yeshu*’s status as a secret book made it both suspicious and tantalizing to medieval and early modern Christians. See Elisheva Carlebach, “Attribution of Secrecy and Perceptions of Jewry,” *Jewish Social Studies* 2 (1996), 115–36.

¹⁹ Brenz, *Jüdischer abgestreifter Schlangenbalg*, 2.

²⁰ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 33 (Bischoff, citing Johann Christoph Wolff, *Bibliotheca Hebraea*, II, #740): “Der (nicht mehr vorhandene) Codex Huldreich’s ... übereinstimmend mit dem Ms., aus dem Brenz in seinem ‘Jüd. Schlangenbalg’ direkt oder indirekt schöpfte.”

²¹ Brenz, *Jüdischer abgestreifter Schlangenbalg*, 2–3.

²² See, e. g., Huldreich, *Sefer Toledot Yeshua ha-Notsri*, 3, annotations 1 and 2.

Hebrew in them, and his statements about what the Talmud says could have been taken from Wagenseil, Buxtorf, or an author of a Latin compendium of Talmudic statements about Jesus. (Such compendia circulated in the early modern western European scholarly world). The picture of Huldreich that emerges is one of a fairly conventional, bookish, early modern scholar, with good Hebrew and Latin, who sprinkled his notes on the *Toledot* manuscript with references to the many books he read.²³ Nowhere is the creativity or linguistic skill of the Huldreich author evident. With the existing evidence, therefore, the identity of the author or authors of the Huldreich remains a mystery.

Preliminary Efforts at Dating the Huldreich

Despite all of these difficulties, it is possible to date the Huldreich, at least approximately, by gleaning clues from close readings of the manuscripts. A significant portion of the manuscript seems to have originated in a high medieval, western European milieu. The manuscript's echoes of other western European manuscript types, including the Wagenseil, de Rossi, and Slavic, and, in one case, a Yiddish version, indicate that the Huldreich is an early modern creation comprised of disparate elements from a series of *Toledot Yeshu* traditions.

Krauss suggests an origin date of the twelfth or thirteenth century.²⁴ He notes that, during Jesus's trial, the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem sent letters to the community of Gormiza or Germiza, also known as Wermiza, in the Land of the Caesar (*be-'erets qisra*); the community advised against the execution. In the High Middle Ages, a number of Jewish communities, including Worms and Regensburg, had letters that their leaders claimed proved their long-ago opposition to Jesus's execution.²⁵ Krauss thus argues that the city of Wermiza must be Worms, Germany, in the Holy Roman Empire, a city that did not even have a Jewish community until the tenth or eleventh century.²⁶ His conclusion

²³ On early modern "bookish" learned culture, see Ann M. Blair, *The Theater of Nature: Jean Bodin and Renaissance Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 49, 71, 96.

²⁴ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 18 (thirteenth century), 247 (twelfth century). As Sid Z. Leiman has pointed out, even within *Das Leben Jesu*, Krauss demonstrated a fair amount of "equivocating" regarding the provenance of the Huldreich. He admitted thinking, in large part because of its "wretched" (*erbärmlichen*) Hebrew, that the text had been created by a Christian or Jewish "renegade" (16). He then changed his mind, because all of the manuscripts' Hebrew was pretty wretched, and especially because he saw traces in the text of very old traditions (17, n. 1). Over 200 pages later, he argued that the manuscript that Huldreich published could be dated to the twelfth century (247). See Sid Z. Leiman, "The Scroll of Fasts: The Ninth of Tebeth," *JQR* 74 (1983): 174–95, 190, n. 48.

²⁵ Krauss, *ibid.*, 18 (on Worms), 247 (on Regensburg).

²⁶ Krauss, *ibid.*, 16–18.

is that the Huldreich version must have developed in Germany no earlier than the thirteenth century.²⁷

Another piece of evidence brought by Krauss is the use of Latin in the Huldreich, which would place its author in a high medieval (or later) European milieu. Krauss says that the new alphabet written for the Christians (5r) is a Latin one, which I have also found to be the case.²⁸ Krauss and Bischoff note the use of Latin in proper names in the Huldreich, the most prominent of which is 'Ay ('ע), which is short for 'yr (י"ר; city, metropolis), and thus for Rome.²⁹ In most of the versions of the *Toledot Yeshu*, Jesus is called Yeshu (י"ש), an anagram for "May his name and memory be erased" (*yimah shemo ve-zikhro*). In the Huldreich, the anagram is "May his memory and his name be erased" (*yimah zikhro ve-yimah shemo*), resulting in the name of Yezush (ש"יז), which is very close to both the Latin and German pronunciations of "Jesus."

Krauss's origin date is too early, for reasons that will be discussed below, but the manuscript has a prominent element that may be described as high medieval. In addition to the Latin and the reference to Worms, another indication of this high medieval European segment of the Huldreich is the strong anti-Marian strain running through it. The Huldreich is the only manuscript type that portrays Miriam as totally complicit in her adultery. She is clearly a suspect character even to her husband, here called Pappos, as in the Talmud, rather than Yochanan or Yoseph/Joseph, as in most other versions containing an account of the birth of Jesus.³⁰ Pappos locks her in the house so that the *peritsim* (men of violence, an allusion to Daniel 11:14, here a reference to Joseph Pandera and his family members) cannot engage in acts of harlotry (*znur*) with her (2v).³¹ When Joseph Pandera comes along, she eagerly assents to his plan to carry her off (2v). She lives an apparently happy life with him, first in Egypt and then in Nazareth, bearing him additional bastard children (2v–3r). After Miriam dies, Herod has Jesus's siblings hanged, and mother and children (except for Jesus) buried together under a headstone saying, "Here were hanged children of harlotry, and their mother is buried beneath them; your (Ms. Princeton 24, 10v: their) mother is a disgrace" (5r). Jesus's relatives and followers then knock down the marker and put up a different one, indicating that she had ascended to Heaven.³² Herod orders its destruction and the killings of over 100 of Jesus's relatives (5r–5v).

²⁷ Krauss, *ibid.*, 18.

²⁸ Krauss, *ibid.*, 18–19. The alphabet is very close to the Latin one, although there is also a bit of Greek in it, such as "tav" or "tau" for "t."

²⁹ Krauss, *ibid.*, 22, 34 (Bischoff).

³⁰ Krauss, *ibid.*, 34 (Bischoff).

³¹ On the word *peritsim* and Daniel 11:14, see William Horbury, "The Depiction of the Judaeo-Christians in the Toledot Yeshu," in *The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature* (eds. Peter J. Tomson and Doris Lambers-Petry; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 280–86, 283.

³² See below for further discussion of this tombstone.

Anti-Marian sentiment among Jews in the West also dates to the High Middle Ages. It arose in response to the cult of the adoration of Mary and its anti-Jewish elements. The veneration of Mary, which was visible in the doctrine of the Eastern Church as early as the fifth century, became increasingly vibrant in Latin Christendom in the tenth and eleventh centuries and reached its peak in the twelfth, especially in France.³³ Peter Schäfer has traced a number of popular eastern Christian stories of Jewish maltreatment of Mary to the West. While the stories were initially the province of monks and lay Christians with the means to buy illustrated books of hours, they soon reached a wider audience by being represented in church windows. One account, of the Jews attempting to disrupt Mary's funeral and knock her body to the ground, was depicted in stained glass in the second half of the thirteenth century in southwest Germany.³⁴ Another story, in which Mary saved a Jewish boy who was thrown into a furnace by his father after taking the Eucharist, appeared in stained-glass church windows in France (as early as 1241) and in England.³⁵ Schäfer shows that even if it cannot be proven that Jews were familiar with Christian literary representations of those anti-Jewish stories, they must have seen the windows of the churches of their towns, just as they would have witnessed the processions of venerators of Mary walking through the streets.³⁶ In light of the negative images of Jews promulgated by Christians in Mary's name, Schäfer has expressed surprise that most versions of the *Toledot Yeshu* do not cast her in a more negative light.³⁷ The dominant *Toledot Yeshu* manuscript type circulating in high medieval western Europe was the Wagenseil, which portrays Mary as the victim of a rapist she thought was her husband.³⁸ That the Huldreich manuscript, also a product of western Europe, does depict Mary as an adulterer and whore is much less remarkable. It suggests a date of origin, at least for those parts of the manuscript involving Mary, in the twelfth or thirteenth century, when the Marian cult, and thus the need to respond to it, would have been most salient for Jews.

In the style of its narrative, the Huldreich is sometimes more reminiscent of medieval Europe than first-century Palestine. Sid Z. Leiman has said that it "abounds with anachronisms and reads much like a late medieval romance."³⁹ He is probably referring to Joseph Pandera's placing a ladder against Mary's window in order to free her from captivity in Pappos's house (2v), Jesus giving romantic advice to a shepherdess (3v), and Jesus outsmarting Peter and Judah out of a goose at a desert tavern (3v). The latter story, as has been noted by

³³ Peter Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God from the Bible to the Early Kabbalah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 147–48.

³⁴ Schäfer, *ibid.*, 189.

³⁵ Schäfer, *ibid.*, 204.

³⁶ Schäfer, *ibid.*, 179–80, 239.

³⁷ Schäfer, *ibid.*, 211–12.

³⁸ On the prevalence of the Wagenseil, see Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 27 (Bischoff).

³⁹ Leiman, "The Scroll," 187. On the Huldreich's romantic style, see also Krauss, *ibid.*, 12.

scholars, is also in the *Decameron*. None of these stories appears in any of the other manuscripts.

The role of Worms as a major Jewish city in the Huldreich manuscripts, the Latin names and alphabet in the text, as well as the prominent anti-Marian sentiment, point to a twelfth, or, most likely, thirteenth-century context for at least a significant part of the Huldreich. But there are later elements still. When Mary dies in the Huldreich, Herod wants to have her buried under a monument describing her as the mother of “children of whoredom.” Her family’s response is to steal the monument and replace it with one saying “*Hinneh sulam mutsav 'artsah ve-ro 'sho magy'a hashamaymah ve-hinne malakhe 'elohym 'olym ve-yordyn bo. 'Em habanym smeha, halleluyah*” (5v). The first sentence’s words are those describing Jacob’s ladder in Genesis 28:12. This account is in none of the Hebrew manuscripts, but, as Michael Stanislawski has shown, there is an almost identical incident in a Yiddish manuscript, JTS 2221, owned by the Jewish Theological Seminary. The manuscript was written in the seventeenth century, but, as with the manuscripts of the Hebrew *Toledot*, the composition dates of surviving manuscripts are not accurate indications of the text’s origins. That being the case, the European Yiddish manuscripts are generally later than the European Hebrew manuscripts. It is possible that the Yiddish author could have been familiar with the Huldreich, rather than the other way around, but that would still put the Huldreich manuscript in the world of Central and Eastern European Jewry before Huldreich published it in the eighteenth century.

There is also one similarity between the Huldreich and the elaborate “modern-Slavic” version, which Krauss and Bischoff consider to be the latest manuscript type.⁴⁰ As will be discussed in the next section, the rabbis get a number of clues that Jesus is a bastard. The most common is that Jesus does not cover his head in front of them. The Huldreich also has him playing ball inappropriately close to the Holy Temple. In at least eight Slavic manuscripts, Jesus also attracts the attention of the rabbis by playing ball, in those cases in a way that violates the Sabbath.⁴¹

The Huldreich is so unique that it is tempting to say that it has no parallels in any manuscript types, except perhaps the earliest ones that draw heavily from the Talmud. But such a statement would be too rash, as it ignores the type Krauss and Bischoff call “de Rossi.”⁴² The de Rossi is also quite unusual; perhaps its most noteworthy characteristic is that Miriam’s husband is called Joseph and her

⁴⁰ Krauss, *ibid.*, 35–37 (Bischoff).

⁴¹ There are seven manuscripts, all Slavic, in which Jesus violates the Sabbath by throwing the ball in the public domain more than the allotted four cubits: Amsterdam Hs. Ros 467 (page 15); Jerusalem JNUL b 263–8 228 (14); Jerusalem Yad Ben Zvi 961 (16v); Leeds University Library Ms. Roth (3r); New York JTS 2503 (8v); Princeton Firestone Library 22 (21); and St. Petersburg OI 244 (11r). Jerusalem JNUL b 242–8 65 (4v) also has him throwing the ball in the public domain but just says that he threw it “too far.”

⁴² Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 31–33 (Bischoff).

rapist is called Yochanan, rather than the other way around. The de Rossi's narrative, while not precisely echoing the Huldreich, at least contains some similar elements.⁴³ The de Rossi also mentions Herod (in addition to Tiberius Caesar) as one of the rulers at Jesus's birth (50r). In the de Rossi, Jesus learns magic in Egypt (60r) after he loses the power of the Divine Name (57v); in the Huldreich, he spends his childhood in Egypt before learning "*sod Shem Hamephorash*" in Jerusalem (3r). The figure attempting to split the Judaeo-Christians from the Jews, called "Elijah/Eliahu" in the de Rossi, aims to separate the two peoples linguistically as well as religiously: "The main thing that Jesus wants from you is for you to separate from the Jews, in Torah, in language (*be-lashon*), in community, in Sabbaths, and in festivals" (65v). Eliahu does not specify how this should be done and does not offer an entirely novel alphabet, as Shimon Haqalpus does in the Huldreich (5r), but the theme of linguistic separation appears in both versions. Dating the de Rossi is beyond the scope of this paper, although Krauss considers it earlier than the Huldreich, but no earlier than the tenth century.⁴⁴

Some scholars before Krauss dated the Huldreich to the Reformation or later.⁴⁵ One scholar currently working on the *Toledot*, Yaacov Deutsch, has suggested an origin date of the fifteenth century. I have found no evidence of anything particularly Protestant in the Huldreich. But I argue that the author of the Huldreich was aware of the dominant European *Toledot Yeshu* manuscript type, the Wagenseil, as well as the earlier, eastern manuscripts, with their many Talmudic allusions and corresponding maltreatment of Mary, the de Rossi manuscript type, and, possibly, a considerably later Yiddish manuscript and a Slavic tradition. The fact that the Huldreich brings together so many different *Toledot* traditions from a wide variety of manuscript types, with a significant part of it originating as late as the thirteenth century, indicates that the Huldreich very likely dates from at least the fifteenth, and probably the sixteenth, century, if not even later.

The Uniqueness of the Huldreich: Rewriting Old Traditions

What is really striking about the Huldreich is the fact that, as Krauss and others have pointed out, its text incorporates older traditions about the life of Jesus (some of them pre-*Toledot*) into a largely new, *i. e.*, high medieval/early modern narrative framework. Krauss says, "The content of the H(uldreich) turns back

⁴³ In this article, I will cite pages from one particular de Rossi manuscript, Parma 2083 de Rossi 96, and I will use internal citations in the body of the article.

⁴⁴ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 31 (Bischoff), 247.

⁴⁵ Leiman, "The Scroll," 189–90, and 190, n. 48. Leiman mentions J. Basnage, *History of the Jews* (London, 1708), 375–81; Sabine Baring-Gould, *Lost and Hostile Gospels* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1874), 115; and William Henry Burr, *Revelations of Antichrist Concerning Christ and Christianity* (New York: Arno Press, 1879), 394–407.

to old sources (Huldreich has in common with the Cairo, the indubitably older version, for example, that a Caesar is arbiter, as in the Acts of Peter, etc).⁴⁶ This article has already discussed the story of Miriam's romantic escape with Joseph Pandera and the tale of the innkeeper and the goose, but those are not the only elements that are found in the Huldreich and not in any other Hebrew manuscripts. Unique incidents include: the rabbis soaking Jesus's head in *me bolet*, some kind of water that prevents hair from growing (3r), a practice his disciples then voluntarily adopted (3v); Jesus killing his father, Joseph Pandera, when he finds out about Miriam's harlotry (3r); Jesus wandering through the desert with his disciples (3r); the new alphabet and Scriptures written by Simon as a means of further separating the Jews and Judaeo-Christians (5r); and the mourning of Simon's death on 9 Tevet (5v). This list is not exhaustive, but it gives a sense of the level of divergence from other versions.

Despite the significant differences in the details, the Huldreich is thematically similar to the rest of the Hebrew manuscripts of the *Toledot*. All of the Hebrew *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts follow the same general storyline, except for the fact that the earliest ones do not have the story of Jesus's birth. They start amidst his heresies or his interrogation or trial on account of those heresies. In all of the manuscripts with the birth story, Jesus is conceived through some kind of forbidden sexual contact between Mary, who is menstruating, and a man not her husband or fiancé. After Jesus is born, Mary sends him to be educated in the Jewish community, where his strange and impudent behavior leads the rabbis to suspect he is a bastard. Mary admits to the rabbis that Jesus is a bastard, and he is excommunicated. Jesus gains disciples by performing various "miracles," which are made possible because of his mastery of sorcery and/or the Ineffable Divine Name. The Jews, upon hearing of Jesus's exploits, seek cooperation from the authorities to put Jesus on trial for sorcery and heresy. Jesus claims that he is the son of God and/or the Messiah, using proof-texts from the Hebrew Bible. After one or more trials, Jesus is executed by the Jews according to Jewish law. He is buried, but his body is stolen and reburied somewhere else by a Jew concerned about the disciples' behavior. The disciples, in turn, complain to the authorities, who begin to wonder if, perhaps, Jesus ascended to Heaven, as he had prophesized. The Jews discover the reburial and produce the body, at which point the authorities realize that Jesus was a fraud and concede the Jews' victory over him. Many manuscripts, including the Huldreich, have other sections after this, explaining how, through a Jewish agent masquerading as a messenger of Jesus, the Jews successfully separate the Judaeo-Christians from their community.

⁴⁶ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 17, n. 1: "(D)er Inhalt von H(uldreich) auf alte Quellen zurückweist. (Huldreich hat z. B. mit Cairo die unzweifelhaft ältere Fassung gemein, dass ein Kaiser Schiedsrichter ist, wie in den Acta Petri u.s.w)."

Those general similarities are not the only ones between the Huldreich and other *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts. Parts of the Huldreich are close to some of the earliest extant Hebrew manuscripts. Those earlier manuscripts, in turn, are similar to the Babylonian Talmud (Bavli)'s small number of stories about Jesus. The Bavli's accounts of Jesus's life are linked to the early Hebrew manuscripts by even earlier *Toledot Yeshu* fragments, which are in Aramaic. (The Aramaic fragments were discovered in the Cairo Geniza and have been dated to approximately the ninth or tenth century, although there is no great consensus about the dating). The Bavli's sections about Jesus are echoed, sometimes word-for-word, in the Aramaic fragments, and at least one of the earliest surviving complete Hebrew manuscripts, JTS 8998 (Middle Eastern, from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, or earlier), is a word-for-word translation of an Aramaic manuscript. Two other early Hebrew manuscripts, St. Petersburg 274 and JTS 6312, have no birth story, but they are not complete, so it is impossible definitively to conclude that they never had one. The Hebrew manuscripts travelled to western Europe after the year 1000 (little is known about the process of textual transmission) and were edited there. Extra sections, including the birth story and the account of the Christian separation, were added, and the western European manuscripts increasingly diverged from their Middle Eastern counterparts, although they retained older microforms. The Huldreich, by contrast, contains many of the Bavli's names, places, and events, but there are no sections that are produced word-for-word. Everything was rewritten by the Huldreich's author(s).

In the Aramaic fragments, which do not have the birth story of Jesus, his mother, Miriam, is a hairdresser, her husband is called Pappos, and Jesus's father is Pandera or ben Pandera, as in the Bavli (*Shabbat* 104b). Jesus performs miracles using sorcery, and he has five disciples, who are executed soon before he is. In St. Petersburg RNL EVR 1.274 (St. Petersburg 274), one of the earliest Hebrew manuscripts, Jesus admits under questioning from the rabbis (another feature common to the Bavli and the Aramaic fragments) that his mother, Miriam, is a hairdresser, and her father's name is Pappos (23v). His disciples are executed in myriad ways (24v–25r), and then he is first hanged and then stoned for sorcery (26r). The section on the interrogation of the disciples in St. Petersburg 274 (24v–25r), which is very close to the Bavli's description of the event (*b. Sanhedrin* 43a–b), is translated into Hebrew from accounts in the Talmud and the Aramaic fragments, although parts of the section remain in Aramaic. St. Petersburg 274, like almost all of the rest of the Hebrew manuscripts, also has other sections not in the Aramaic fragments, such as the birth story of Jesus. The birth story, in which Miriam is raped by the wicked Joseph while her husband, Yochanan, is at the house of study (*bet midrash*), takes place during Herod's reign (21v). But the interrogation of the disciples is also approved by "Pilate the governor" (Pilatus Hegemon; 24r–24v), a key figure in Jesus's interrogation in the Aramaic fragments as well.

The two different rulers in St. Petersburg 274 and the text's switch from Hebrew to Aramaic and back again both reveal that St. Petersburg 274 is a transitional text between the eastern and western versions of the *Toledot*. By the twelfth century in western Europe, the dominant version of the *Toledot Yeshu* was the so-called "Wagenseil" or "Helena" type, in which the seam between the Hebrew and the Aramaic had become almost invisible. There is much less Aramaic, although words and phrases remain. The birth story, with Yochanan the husband and Joseph the rapist (in the de Rossi manuscripts, as noted above, the names are reversed), is in every manuscript of that version. Miriam is described as a beautiful, modest woman who refuses Joseph's advances until he pretends that he is her husband/fiancé, and even then most manuscripts have him forcing himself upon her, since she is menstruating and will not violate the rules against sexual contact. There is only one ruler, Queen Helena, often further described as the wife of Constantine. Jesus's disciples are called *peritsim*, an allusion to Daniel 11:14, but they are only very rarely named, and they are not executed as a group.

It is a bit surprising, then, that the Huldreich, a western European manuscript in a form that is later than at least most of the Wagenseil, would be more similar to the Talmud's stories of Jesus than the Wagenseil is. There are, however, a number of similarities between the Huldreich and the Bavli. Miriam is a hairdresser in both the Bavli (*Shabbat* 104b) and in the Huldreich (2v); the profession is, for some reason, disreputable.⁴⁷ In both texts she is also a *sotah*, an adulterous woman (*b. Shabbat* 104b). The story in the Huldreich of Rabbi Akiva coming to her Nazareth house to ask about the circumstances surrounding Jesus's birth (3r) appears to be based on *Masekhet Kallah* 15b–16a.⁴⁸ Although the *Kallah* version names neither mother nor child, the story later, according to Louis Ginzberg and others, came to be associated with Jesus. Jesus is buried in a sewage ditch, as opposed to a water channel, the text announces, "in order to fulfill the words of the Sages: Everyone who mocks the words of the Sages is judged in boiling excrement."⁴⁹ This is not just an allusion, but, rather, a quotation from the Bavli (*b. Gittin* 56b–57a), which tells the stories of the punishments of the worst Jewish and Gentile sinners. Jesus (in some versions, the "sinners of Israel") is forced to spend eternity in boiling excrement (4v).⁵⁰

With the exception of the quotation just cited, the Huldreich almost always incorporates Talmudic stories and *Toledot* traditions by rewriting them, at least slightly. As has been discussed, the forbidden sexual relationship that produces Jesus is voluntary adultery, rather than rape or mistaken identity. Jesus per-

⁴⁷ Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 16–18.

⁴⁸ *Kallah* is a minor tractate with only a gemara (no mishnah), and the numbering of it varies by edition. Bischoff cites *Kallah* 18b (Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 33 [Bischoff]).

⁴⁹ Ms. Princeton 24 has "*Razal*" instead of "*Hakhamim*" (8r).

⁵⁰ Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 83–86.

forms miracles using the Ineffable Name (2r–3v), but he does not steal it from the Temple, which is by far the dominant story in the other manuscript types. Instead, he learns *ma'aseh merkavah* and *sod Shem Hamephorash* from Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perahia, his teacher (3r). The rabbis capture him not by depriving him of the Name, but by tricking him into drinking the “waters of forgetfulness” (*me shokhehah*; 4r), not by ritually contaminating him or cutting the parchment containing the name out of his body. In addition to assigning Jesus’s followers new holidays, the post-Jesus “prophet” in the Huldreich takes the unusual step of writing an entirely new alphabet and Scriptures for them. Not content merely to separate them from the Jewish people, he murders a group of them, by offering to give them a ride on his flying cloud and then throwing them from it in mid-air (5r).

In order to show how the Huldreich rewrites texts and traditions, two brief, adjacent sections of the Huldreich will be analyzed. Of all the sections in the Huldreich, these two are closest, in terms of wording, to comparable sections in the other versions.

I. Jesus Uncovers His Head, and the Rabbis Declare Him a Bastard

In nearly every western European *Toledot Yeshu* manuscript, from the Wagenseil onward, one of the ways in which Jesus reveals that he is a bastard is by ignoring the custom to cover his head in the presence of the Sages of Israel. He does this not by accident but, rather, purposely and arrogantly. In a fairly typical Wagen-seil manuscript, Harvard Houghton Library Ms. 57, the story goes as follows:

One day, the boy passed before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. And it was the custom in those days that everyone who passed before them would cover his head and kneel and bow to them. And this boy, when he passed before them, uncovered his head and, insolently, bowed to his rabbi alone. And everyone answered and said, “Since he is singularly contemptuous, one may deduce that he is a bastard.” And one of them answered and said, “Surely he is a bastard and the son of a menstruant” (23r).

The expression “since he is singularly contemptuous, one may deduce that he is a bastard” (*midehatsif kule ha'e shemma' minah mamzer hu'*) is a slight modification of a sentence that appears in the *Bavli*, *Bava Metzi'a* 83b: “Since he is singularly contemptuous, one may deduce that he is a wicked man” (*midehatsif kule ha'e shemma' minah rasha' hu'*). The motif of the rabbis concluding that a young boy is a bastard and the son of a menstruant based on whether he covers his head is in *Masekhet Kallah*, 15a–16b. The “*mamzer*” version of the quote (with or without the *kule ha'e*) is in nearly every Wagenseil manuscript, as well as in the Slavic manuscripts.⁵¹

⁵¹ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 35–36 (Bischoff).

The analogous Huldreich passage is slightly different. Jesus does two things to convince the rabbis that his legal status in the community must be suspect. First, he plays ball near the Temple. (In the other manuscripts that have him playing ball, which are all Slavic, his sin is playing on the Sabbath and throwing the ball in the public domain outside the allotted four cubits). He is wearing priestly garments, and, when his ball goes astray, he becomes despondent and throws his mitre onto the ground. The boys playing with Jesus say to him, "Cover your head," to which he responds, "And is it not true that Moses did not command that (head-covering) in the Torah, and that the words of the sages are worthless?" The rabbis are not directly involved in this conversation, but three of them, Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, and Rabbi Akiva, are sitting nearby, and they hear the exchange. Rabbi Eliezer suggests that Jesus is the son of a menstruant (*midehatsif kul* [sic] *ha'e shemma' minah ben niddah hu'*), to which Rabbi Joshua responds that he is the son of a prostitute. Rabbi Akiva says that he is a bastard (3r).

In order to capture the Huldreich's melding of different texts, it is necessary to take a close look at the *Masekhet Kallah* text. In the *Kallah* passage, the primary sin of the young boy (later identified with Jesus) is, as in most of the *Toledot Yeshu* texts, but not in the Huldreich, failing to cover his head in front of great rabbis. In the Huldreich, but not in the other versions of the *Toledot*, the rabbis in question are the same three named in the *Kallah* text. In the *Kallah* passage, Rabbi Eliezer suggests that the boy is a bastard, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says that he is the son of a menstruant, and Rabbi Akiva, bringing their charges together, concludes that he is a bastard and the son of a menstruant. In the Huldreich, however, the charges are that Jesus is the son of a menstruant, the son of a prostitute, and a bastard, with the result that the symmetry of the *Kallah* text is lost. There is no clear narrative reason for this change, and the change is even stranger in view of the fact that the Huldreich, unlike the rest of the *Toledot* versions, continues with the story, as the *Kallah* passage does. In both the Huldreich and the *Kallah*, Rabbi Akiva approaches the boy's mother for confirmation of the manner of her son's conception. He swears to her that if she tells him the truth, she will be granted a share in the World to Come. But Rabbi Akiva, we are told, did not mean his vow: "he swore with his lips/mouth and nullified (the vow) in his heart."⁵² The mother admits the truth to him. In *Masekhet Kallah*, it is that, without her knowledge, her husband's friend slept with her on her wedding night, while she was menstruating. In the Huldreich, Miriam admits sleeping

⁵² The Huldreich reads: "'And, behold, I put you under oath (*mashbi'akh*) by God, the Lord of the Heavens: Tell me what your deeds have been, and I am a surety (*arev*) for you for the World to Come' ... And Rabbi Akiva swore with his mouth and nullified in his heart" (3r). The *Kallah* reads: "'My daughter, if you tell me the thing I am asking you, I will bring you to the life of the World to Come (*haye 'Olam Haba*)' ... Rabbi Akiva swore with his lips and nullified in his heart" (15a-16b).

with another man without divorcing her husband. The Huldreich text is more elaborate than the short *Kallah* passage. Rabbi Akiva goes to Nazareth and talks to Miriam, who has changed her name to Karahat (a play on the word for “bald,” which Jesus soon will be, because of the *me bolet*).⁵³ After he swears falsely to her, and she admits that Jesus is a bastard, he excoriates her (3r).

For this section, then, the Huldreich weaves together three texts: the passage from the Bavli (*Bava Metzi'a* 83b), which appears, with the substitution of “bastard” for “wicked one,” in most *Toledot* manuscripts; the account of Jesus not covering his head in front of the sages, leading them to conclude that he is a bastard, which is in *Masekhet Kallah* and also in most *Toledot* manuscripts; and the longer *Kallah* narrative of Rabbi Akiva securing confirmation of the fact that the boy is a bastard from his mother. It also adds new material: Jesus dressing in priestly clothes and the story of Rabbi Akiva’s visit to Nazareth. The result is an account of the discovering of Jesus’s status that is similar to, yet also noticeably different from, the dominant one in the *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts.

II. “The Words of the Sages Are Worthless”: Jesus and Moses

After being urged by his peers to cover his head, Jesus replies, “And is it not true that Moses did not command that (head-covering) in the Torah, and that the words of the sages are worthless?” (3r). This statement, one of the strongest possible critiques of rabbinic authority – and the final confirmation the rabbis need that Jesus is a bastard – is a simple one in comparison to the speech attributed to Jesus in many of the manuscripts. In most de Rossi and Slavic manuscripts, Jesus critiques the rabbis’ claim to having the ultimate authority over sacred texts with a clever midrashic analysis of the comparative intelligences of Moses and Jethro. Here is a fairly typical text, from Parma 2083, the de Rossi manuscript from which I cited above:

Afterwards, his rabbi went to his study-house and was teaching his students from Tractate *Nezikin*. And the bastard came to the house of study and began to teach law to the students. One of them answered and said to him, “Did you not learn that ‘everyone who teaches law in the presence of his teacher is liable for death?’ (*b. Berakhot* 31b). And you are teaching law in the presence of your rabbi like a bastard and the son of a menstruant!” The wicked one answered insolently, “You are the wicked ones, offspring of falsehood, ‘children of whoredom’ (Hosea 2:6). You see a book and do not know a thing about it, not who is the rabbi and who is the student, who is righteous and who is wicked, who is the scholar and who is the ignoramus. And if you have knowledge, tell me, Who was wiser, Moses or Jethro? If you say to me, ‘Moses,’ you are giving false testimony, since Moses learned practical knowledge and good counsel (from Jethro). And if you say ‘Jethro was wiser than Moses,’ Moses’s greatness is nullified and his prophecy is de-legitimized, for the Scriptures said about him, ‘He is faithful in all of my house’ (Numbers 12:7); ‘And

⁵³ On Miriam, *Karahat*, and baldness, see Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 23. On the same page, Krauss speculates on the origins of the term “*me bolet*” but comes to no firm conclusion.

there never again arose a prophet like Moses in Israel' (Deuteronomy 34:10); 'I speak to him face to face'" (Numbers 12:8).

This clever reply appears, with slight variations, in at least 50 Hebrew *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts, mostly of the de Rossi and Slavic types. It is far more sophisticated than the Huldreich's "And is it not true that Moses did not command that (head-covering) in the Torah, and that the words of the sages are worthless?" I would argue, however, that that sentence constitutes a re-writing of Jesus's longer speech. Manuscripts that do not have this speech generally contain no discussion at all about the rabbis' understanding of texts as compared to the commandments of Moses. The rabbis' only indication that Jesus is a bastard is his failure to cover his head in front of them. The Huldreich's treatment of this matter, though different and far more brief than the dominant one, indicates that the author was probably aware of the *Toledot* tradition that Jesus questioned the rabbis' authority to interpret the Torah and impose their interpretations on the Jews.

Conclusion

The Huldreich version of the *Toledot Yeshu* is both unique and problematic. The paucity of manuscript evidence, even by the standards of the *Toledot Yeshu*, the unusual narrative elements, and the combination and recasting of old and newer traditions have made it difficult for scholars to date the work or otherwise put it in context. These difficulties probably explain the comparative neglect of the Huldreich version in the scholarship so far on *Toledot Yeshu*. This article has tried to address some of the problems by comparing and contrasting the Huldreich to other *Toledot* versions, examining Huldreich's own notes to the manuscript he published, and offering close readings of sections of the most complete manuscript. The Huldreich echoes, in some parts, the earliest Hebrew manuscripts, and, by extension, the even earlier Aramaic fragments. In other parts, it has high medieval themes, including anti-Marian sentiment, and still others show awareness of the later, Slavic, tradition of Jesus throwing the ball too far on the Sabbath and of the Yiddish account of Miriam's two tombstones. Based on this evidence, it seems most likely that the Huldreich was composed in the fifteenth or sixteenth century, at the earliest, by an unknown author, or group of authors. The author(s) knew many *Toledot Yeshu* traditions and combined and rewrote them, thus creating a recognizable, but unique, *Toledot* version.

A Preliminary Study of a Yiddish “Life of Jesus” (*Toledot Yeshu*): JTS Ms. 2211

Michael Stanislawski

My research into the Yiddish versions of the *Toledot Yeshu* stems from my continuing fascination with the popular religion of early modern Ashkenazic Jewry, especially as reflected in the plethora of unstudied Yiddish texts from this period. In previous studies,¹ I have focused on Yiddish translations of Hebrew originals, teasing out of them what I have semi-playfully termed their “Ashkenization,” i. e., the conscious and unconscious inclusion of cultural markers which clearly reveal their imbrication in the religious universe of early modern Central and Eastern European Jewry, and the transformation both by commission and omission of aspects of the Hebrew originals deemed unsuitable for the audience of Yiddish translations – presumed to be meant for, as the texts themselves claim, “women and unlearned men.” In this study, I will attempt to adapt this approach to the early modern Yiddish manuscripts of the *Toledot Yeshu*, taking my cue from my colleague Elisheva Carlebach, who so aptly argued that “deep within its structure (early modern Ashkenazic Jewish) culture had built in strategies of internal resistance to the religious narrative of Christian society, trenchant polemic in the guise of folklore.”²

My analysis, I must emphasize from the start, is not only preliminary, but beset by several fundamental problems: first, we do not possess an accurate list of extant Yiddish manuscripts of the *Toledot Yeshu* – something I hope to redress in a tentative manner below; secondly, until we have a reliable bibliography and analysis of all the extant *Hebrew* versions of the texts, it is impossible to discern to what extent the Yiddish manuscripts differ from their presumptive Hebrew sources;³ thirdly, despite all the scholarship that has been produced on the To-

¹ See my “The Yiddish ‘Shevet Yehudah’: A Study in the ‘Ashkenization’ of a Spanish-Jewish Classic,” in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory. Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi* (eds. Elisheva Carlebach, John M. Efron, David N. Myers; Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998), 134–149; and “Toward the Popular Religion of Ashkenazic Jews: Yiddish-Hebrew Texts on Sex and Circumcision,” in *Mediating Modernity; Challenges and Trends in the Jewish Encounter with the Modern World. Essays in Honor of Michael A. Meyer* (eds. Lauren B. Strauss and Michael Brenner; Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008), 93–106.

² Elisheva Carlebach, “The Anti-Christian Element in Early Modern Yiddish Culture,” *Braun Lectures in the History of the Jews in Prussia* 10 (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2003), 9.

³ Only two of the extant Yiddish manuscript that I know of, that in the Valmadonna collec-

ledot Yeshu in the last century, there has been virtually no scholarly work done on the Yiddish versions: even Erich Bischoff's 1895 publication of *Ein jüdisch-deutsches Leben Jesu*⁴ – a more-or-less accurate transcription of the original and translation into German of a manuscript in the Bodleian Library at Oxford – contains a very minimal scholarly apparatus, and Günther Schlichting's excellent monograph on the Hebrew manuscripts contains only four paragraphs on one Yiddish manuscript held in Amsterdam.⁵

First things first: there are to my knowledge *fifteen* extant Yiddish manuscripts of the *Toledot Yeshu*, all but one of which have copies deposited in the Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in Jerusalem: three of these are from libraries in Amsterdam, two at JTS in New York; and one each to be found in Göttingen, Paris, Frankfurt, St. Petersburg, London, Zurich, Oxford, Prague, Harvard, and Jerusalem.⁶ Eight of these manuscripts date from the mid-to-late eighteenth and four from the nineteenth centuries, and hence do not interest me in this particular project. Thus, only three of the known manuscripts can be ascribed to the early modern period: the Oxford manuscript mentioned above is early eighteenth-century, but it is nearly identical to the Harvard manuscript dated by its scribe to 1652; and JTS 2211, to which I will return in depth below, is undated but clearly stems from the seventeenth century – probably the 1670's or 1680's.

Bischoff already determined that the Oxford manuscript belongs almost entirely to what he termed the “Wagenseil tradition” of the Hebrew *Toledot Yeshu*, though with elements of the “Typus de Rossi,” with virtually no discernable differences traceable to its having been translated into Yiddish. But this is definitely not the case of JTS 2211, which differs substantially and expansively from the Oxford/Harvard texts and does not adhere clearly to any heretofore defined Hebrew textual tradition or indeed any single or stable Hebrew text. As I shall explicate below, its scribe himself expounds on the fact that he had access to, and used, several different, and often contradictory sources for his tale, and the

tion and Jerusalem 8 228 are found in collections that include Hebrew versions, from which they seem to differ in minor, though interesting ways; but even here, I am loathe to speculate about the originality of these discrepancies until I feel more secure about the variations in the Hebrew manuscripts themselves.

⁴ Erich Bischoff, *Ein jüdisch-deutsches Leben Jesu. Zum erste Male nach dem Oxforder Manuskript herausgegeben* (Leipzig: Wilhelm Friedrich, 1895).

⁵ Günther Schlichting, *Ein jüdisches Leben Jesu: Die verschollene Toledot-Yeshu-Fassung Tam ū-mū'ad* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1982), 14–15.

⁶ 1) JTS 2211 (17th century); 2) Harvard (1652); 3) Oxford (early 18th-century copy of #2); 4) Valmadonna (18th century, Hebrew and Yiddish); 5) Zurich 18th century; 6) Amsterdam 233 (18th century); 7) JTS 2219 (18th century); 8) Prague 18th century; 9) St Petersburg (1756); 10) Amsterdam Ets Hayim (1764); 11) Frankfurt a.M. (1771); 12) Amsterdam 467 (19th century; Yiddish and Hebrew); 13) Jerusalem 8 228 (19th century); 14) Paris (1838); 15) Goettingen (1892).

result displays ample examples of "Ashkenization" and other deviations from the other Yiddish and Hebrew texts I have studied.

Before proceeding to this textual analysis, a few words are necessary about this manuscript as a whole: First, it is far longer than any of the others I have examined: 152 pages (the Oxford/Bodleian manuscript, in contrast, is 48 pages long – i. e. three times shorter), the length directly related to the already mentioned citation of different versions of the same tale, and the scribe's constant and self-conscious editorial hand at play throughout the work, in which he speaks to his readers in the first person: "In this chapter I shall recount the tale of ..." and enumerating – often inaccurately – which version of the "Miriam" or "Yeshu" story will follow. My very tentative hypothesis is that this narrative intervention is if not unique to, then certainly redolent of, its specific cultural context: it is common not only in the specific early modern Yiddish texts I have previously studied, but throughout the contemporary genre of *mayse bikher* – books of stories – whose most famous creations were the *Bova-Bukh*, first composed in Venice in 1501, a rhymed Yiddish version of the English romances of Bevis of Hampton, and most importantly for our purposes the anonymous *Mayse Bukh* first published in 1602 and then repeatedly through the next centuries, which purported to be a collection of *aggadot* and *midrashim* from works stretching from the Talmud to *Sefer Hasidim* and beyond. Indeed, since the most important alternate title to the *Toledot Yeshu* was *Mayse Tole*, (The Story of the Hanged One) it is no stretch whatsoever to include the Yiddish translations of the *Toledot Yeshu* into this *mayse bikher* genre and tradition. (To what extent this narrative strategy was borrowed from, or at least influenced by, the nascent genre of what we may call the "proto-novel" in European societies in the seventeenth century – witness, for example, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* first published in 1677, is not directly relevant here.)

For the sake of clarity and brevity, I will summarize here under separate rubrics – not following precisely the narrative order of the text – the most important and interesting characteristics that I have so far identified in JTS Ms. 2211.

1. The editor's knowledge and citation of different narrative traditions.

While there are many examples of this throughout the text, the most important pertains to the issue of Pandera's sexual intercourse with Mary. All the variants of the story identify Pandera, rather than Joseph, as the true biological father of Jesus, but the disagreement in the sources is about whether Pandera's intercourse with Mary was consensual or rape: Some say that the first time Pandera came to her to have sex she thought this was Joseph and screamed at him: "Get away from me since I am *pores niddah* – *ikh bin tome*" – I am menstruating and impure⁷ – while others present her essentially as a whore, either enticing Pandera or

⁷ All references to Ms. JTS 2211 will be cited by folio number f. 3a.

at the least succumbing to his entreaties; a fourth option tells us that *di varheit iz gevezn az zi hot nikhst gezogt tsu ir khosn*⁸ – the truth is that she said nothing to her betrothed – i. e. that she was herself guilty of having sex while in *niddah*, not just once, but twice, clearly implicating Mary in mortal sin – though this latter scenario makes little sense, since it is unclear then how Joseph learns about her earlier intercourse with Pandera, crucial to the rest of the story.

2. Talmud and trial of Jesus.

Almost as incendiary as the charge that Jesus was a bastard born in menstrual blood is this manuscript's repeated insistence that it was the Jews, and not the Romans, who ordered Jesus's death: at very start of our manuscript we read: *Eyn pilpul in di gemore sanhedrin iber dem Yeshu (un) zayn mitah ... vo di sanhedrin hobn den Yeshu lozn dan zayn kedas torasenu vi di roshe der velt derfir far zint*⁹ (A debate in the Talmud Sanhedrin over Jesus and his death and how the Sanhedrin judged him according to the law of our Torah since the Evil One misled the world through his sins); and our scribe, as is his wont, returns to give a longer version of the verdict of the Sanhedrin that Jesus be put to death according to Jewish law. These references to the Talmud are not found in the Oxford/Harvard manuscripts, nor in the Hebrew versions I have read.

3. Historical inaccuracy.

In analyzing the Yiddish *Shevet Yehudah*, I noted that that book began with historical errors – an inaccurate account of the story of Anthony and Cleopatra and a conflation of the destruction of the First and Second Temples.¹⁰ Here the basic historical error pertains to the year of Jesus's birth: our narrator begins the text with *Tsvey un fertsikise yor vi nokh regirt hot der Keyser Augustus un zayn kenigen*¹¹ – “in the forty-second year of the reign of Emperor Augustus and his queen”; however, since Augustus became emperor in 27 BCE, the 42nd year of his reign was 15 CE, a date without (at least any obvious) significance in the Jesus narrative.¹² Similarly, the entire (and odd) story of Queen Helena's reign in Judea is presented in different versions that contradict one another in dating and in regard to the extent of her power, and, perhaps more significantly, in regard to Pontius Pilate's appointment and functions as procurator in Judea, and most importantly, to his role in the trial of Jesus. Due to the multiplicity of sources available to and used by our scribe, this is presented in even more confusing

⁸ f. 3b.

⁹ f. 1a

¹⁰ See Stanislawski, “The Yiddish ‘Shevet Yehudah,’” 139.

¹¹ f. 1a–b.

¹² The Zurich manuscript has this as the 52nd year of Augustus's reign. This calculation is shared, however, by the Harvard manuscript – though not in the Bodleian variant. I have not found other differences between the Harvard and the Oxford Mss. shared with JTS 2211.

and contradictory versions than in the other versions of the *Toledot Yeshu* I have thus far examined, not to speak of the contradictions in the Gospels themselves; indeed, whether there is any correlation between the dichotomy on this count between the Passion narratives in Mark, Matthew and Luke and the different versions of *Toledot Yeshu* from antiquity on is an important desideratum in scholarly analyses of this work.

4. Linguistic markers of the distinctions between Jews and Gentiles.

As opposed to the other Hebrew and Yiddish texts of the *Toledot Yeshu* I have thus far examined, our narrator frequently employs the traditional usage of the term *le-havdil* to distinguish between Jews and Gentiles – or sometimes, good Jews and bad Jews. This first occurs, interestingly, in the genealogy of Jesus in which we read: *un le-havdil di Miriam iz der Yohanan iz gevezn fun der geshlekht fun beys-dovid* – i.e. Joseph was from the House of David, as opposed to (*le-havdil*) Mary – thus indicating not simply the hoary theological conundrum of Mary's lack of relationship to the Davidic dynasty but more subtly, her apostasy, later described in detail in the text.¹³ Later, Jesus himself is distinguished from other Jews by the term *le-havdil*, as are, quite naturally, his followers after they are termed *nozrim* – i.e., Christians, and thus we often read variations on "*yehudim un lehavdil nozrim*; and our text reads "*Pilatus un lehavdil di Sanhedrin*."¹⁴

In the same vein, when Jesus himself decides that he could no longer learn anything more from the rabbis and so begins to act derisively towards them, he is described as acting *vi eyn goy*¹⁵ – like a Gentile; and a strange story is told that one of his derisive acts was playing with a ball in the presence of the Sanhedrin and throwing it up and down in the air – an act characterized *vi eyn goyishe kind* – like a Gentile child.

5. Halachah.

In a different vein, our narrator is clearly troubled by the contradiction between Jewish law in his time and in ancient Palestine regarding sexual intercourse between *'erusin* and *qiddushin*: on the one hand, he writes: "at that time the rule was in all of Israel that when a virgin became betrothed to a man they could have sex like a husband and wife,"¹⁶ while, on the other hand, in a passage again not present in the Oxford/Harvard version, Mary immediately realized that it was Pandera and not Joseph who was attempting to (and then succeeding in) having

¹³ Parenthetically, in the Valmadonna manuscripts, it is Mary who is described as descended from the House of David – a fascinating claim I cannot deal with in this paper.

¹⁴ f. 2a.

¹⁵ f. 8b.

¹⁶ f. 2a

sex with her since the latter was so *frum* that he refused to have intercourse with her before they were married;

6. Attitude to Kabbalah.

In my study of early modern Yiddish translations of Hebrew manuals on sex and circumcision, I noted a persistent excision of all the references to kabbalistic sources abundant in, and crucial, to the originals – and this in the decades immediately preceding the spread of Lurianic kabbalah throughout Ashkenazic Jewry. Thus, we might have expected our translator here to have been wary of repeating some of the magical acts attributed to members of the ancient rabbinate, including most provocatively the astonishing scene in which Judas defeats Jesus in their celestial battle by rendering him impure through anal sex. But this scene is preserved in our manuscript and the other Yiddish texts I have thus far examined. Indeed, our text refers to the magical acts performed by the rabbis as *groyse khokhme be-kabole*¹⁷ – “great wisdom and Kabbalah,” and goes so far as to state that Jesus was *boki in kol ha-toyre kulo un in kabole*¹⁸ – an expert in the entire Torah and in Kabbalah; this claim is not made in the other Yiddish manuscripts I have examined. On the other hand, there is a hint, I think, of a negative attitude to some aspects of early modern kabbalistic practices disapproved of by the rabbis, attributed to the Sabbatean heresy and its later offshoots already in the late seventeenth century, and then again a century later in regard to the emergence of East European Hasidism: Jesus and his followers are described in clearly derogatory terms as engaging in *shpringn un zingn un tanzen*¹⁹ – “jumping up and down, singing and dancing during prayers” – customs associated with what the popularization of kabbalah and its antinomian potential;

7. Ashkenization.

Far more abundant in our manuscript are examples of the transposition of the story as a whole from first-century Judea to early modern Central/Eastern Europe. Here I will cite only a few of the relevant examples:

a) many cases of what I would term “pure” or “simple” Ashkenization: when Jesus begins to sprout his heresies he is referred to a *groyse treyfe melamid* (a very unkosher teacher) and the schools in which Jewish children study are referred to as *khadorim*;²⁰

b) our scribe does not follow the (strange) tradition of rendering Armenia (one of the places to which the apostles are sent) as “Deutschland.” He seems to know, if not where Armenia is, that he is living in something called Deutschland;

c) other examples have, I would argue, far more profound cultural referents:

¹⁷ f. 15a

¹⁸ f. 7a

¹⁹ f. 7b.

²⁰ Ibid.

Joseph is described as remaining *in besmedresh mamesh mishabes leshabes*²¹ – in the study hall really from one shabbat to the next – again, not only a linguistic change but connected to the resonant claim that Joseph was so dedicated to his Torah studies that he had no interest in, or lust for, Mary, during the week and came to have sex with her only on Friday nights – and only because that was required by Jewish law;

d) perhaps with even more specific cultural resonance: after the Christians begin to persecute the Jews our text reads: *azoy hobn di Sanhedrin geshikt iri shamoshim in ale bote-midrashim un kleyne khadorim um di rabonim mazhir tsu zayn dos kleyne bekhurim un betules zoln iber di gasn geyen*²² – and so the Sanhedrin sent their sextons to all the study halls and small *heders* to warn the rabbis and the young boys and girls (!) not to go out on the streets. This seems to be a clear anachronistic retrojection of the fear of letting Jews in general and children in particular out on the street on Christian holidays, and particularly on Easter night, for fear of attacks by Christians. Indeed, we may here have a hint of the alleged practice of reading *Toledot Yeshu* on Christmas eve, as reported in 1614 by the former Jew and now Christian Samuel Friedrich Brenz;²³

e) after the split between the Christians and the Jews (covertly led, of course, by Paul and Peter) many Jews saw the errors of their way, did *teshuvah*, committed themselves again to *halachah* and died *frume yidn*.²⁴ Again, the issue here is not simply the obvious linguistic change, but the connection to a very complex issue: the interjection here of early modern Ashenazic notions of *kiddush hashem*: when Saul/Paul accepts his mission he is not only promised – as in the other versions – eternal life, but he is described as performing an act of *kiddush ha-shem*,²⁵ just as the successful search for Jesus's corpse after it disappears from its grave (thus raising the dangerous veracity of the claim of resurrection), is also accorded the status of an act of *kiddush ha-shem*.²⁶

8. Differences in narrative itself.

a) After Mary gives birth to Jesus and has him circumcised, the narrator first relates the standard account that he was named after her brother, but then adds that she chose Yeshu (aka Yishai) to emphasize that *she* was from the House of David, not Joseph – thus solving – as it were – the profound genealogical

²¹ f. 2b

²² f. 20a

²³ Samuel Friedrich Brenz in his *Jüdischer abgestreifter Schlangenbalg* (Nuremberg: self-published, printed by Andreas Knorzus, 1681), 2. On this see Elisheva Carlebach, *Divided Souls: Converts from Judaism in Germany, 1500–1750* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 213–214, and Marc Shapiro, "Torah Study on Christmas Eve," *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 8 (1999): 319–53.

²⁴ f. 39b.

²⁵ f. 30b.

²⁶ f. 59b.

conundrum that led to so many reams of Christian exegesis; moreover, that in so doing, she wanted to protect him, since she knew in advance that he would die a *mise mishune* – “a horrible death” since he would be termed a *mamzer ben niddah*. Thus, in our manuscript, it is Mary, not the rabbis, who raise this claim first, i. e., far earlier than in the Harvard/Bodeleian manuscripts and the Hebrew texts of the Wagenseil tradition, and not because of his behavior toward rabbis. This version challenges, if not subverts the – I think correct – overarching and far-reaching reading of the original link in the earliest and later accounts between Jesus’s disrespect towards the rabbis and his obvious characterological, if not ontological, status as a *mamzer ben niddah* (and thence all the crucial analyses of the deep structure of the mysogynist rabbinical view of menstrual blood). Here, Jesus’s status as a *mamzer ben niddah* is merely a genealogical truth first articulated by Mary herself;

b) Pontius Pilate – as noted above, he is presented in several different guises in the various traditions of the *Toledot Yeshu*. Here he appears as a benevolent ruler, indeed to some extent a proto-Jew who “learns how to love God from the Children of Israel”;²⁷

c) in the list of calendrical changes introduced by Christianity, in our manuscript Shemini Azeret is added to the list of holy days abolished by the Christians – a festival omitted in the Bodleian/Harvard Yiddish version;²⁸

d) the central issue of the Christian abandonment of circumcision is explained here as stemming not from Paul, but from Jesus himself, and specifically (though hardly logically) from the fact that he hated Jewish children, so instead of *milah* he introduced baptism – though that is done with *mayim tome* (sic);

9. Portrayal of Mary.

a) Mary’s role in the narrative is fundamentally different from the “standard” *Toledot Yeshu* version: here, e. g., it is she who informs Jesus after he returns from his missions abroad about the rabbinic proclamations and *shofarot* which have broadcast his illegitimacy throughout Palestine; and when he does learn the truth, he goes so crazy that even Mary is shocked and pleads with him to calm down, they will find a *refuah*. When he still continues his manic fit, Mary deliberately shuts a door on her own breasts to hurt herself to get sympathy from him. The question then poses itself, I think, of whether this story was influenced in any way by the highly popular practice of self-mortification in medieval and early modern European Catholicism, and particularly among women – indeed, as my colleague Caroline Bynum has argued, constitutive of a highly original gendered form of female Christianity;²⁹

²⁷ f. 47b.

²⁸ f. 72a.

²⁹ See, e. g. her *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

b) Mary herself engages in a Christological interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 – she herself is the *'almah harah yoledet ben*, but crucially, she explicitly defines *'almah* as meaning a virgin;³⁰

c) she compares herself to Miriam the prophet after crossing the Sea: she cites Exodus 15:20, *Va-tikah Miriam ha-neviah*, but substitutes *'ahot Aharon* with *'em Yeshu*;³¹

d) finally, and perhaps most bizarrely, we have here a very strange description of Mary's death missing in the other manuscripts I have examined: her death is described in the words of Genesis 28:12: *Va-yishkav Miriam ba-maqom ha-hu ve-hinneḥ sulam mutsav 'artsa ve-ro'sho magia' ha-shamayma ve-hinneḥ mal'akhe 'elohim 'olim ve-yordim bo*³² – and Miriam lay down in that place and behold there was a ladder resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. But then, in sharp contrast to the Jacob story, the Sanhedrin had her grave destroyed.

From the last two stories one is tempted to ponder to what extent this portrayal of Mary as a prophetess gone wrong, absolutely parallel to the basic narrative of the *Toledot Yeshu* – Jesus the *talmid-hakham* gone wrong – is a time-bound subversion of the Marian cult exceedingly prevalent in the Christianity of Central and East Europe in the period in which this manuscript was written. The counter-claim, that the Jews did not know enough about the religion of the Christians among whom they lived is, to say the least, itself subverted by the intimate knowledge of Christianity demonstrated by the scribe of JTS 2211 as well as the Harvard and Bodleian Mss., and it seems very safe to assume that they were not alone in passing on “built in strategies of internal resistance to the religious narrative of Christian society, trenchant polemic in the guise of folklore.”

³⁰ ff. 31a–32b.

³¹ Ibid.

³² f. 63a.

The *Toledot Yeshu* and Christian Apocryphal Literature: The Formative Years

Pierluigi Piovanelli

This book is not now common, though at one time it had a wide circulation (...) in Hebrew and Yiddish among the simpler minded Jews, and even more educated Jews used to study the book during the nights of *Natal* (Christmas). (...) Our mothers knew its contents by hearsay – of course with all manner of corruptions, changes, omissions and imaginative additions – and handed them on to their children. Different versions of the book exist in Ms., some expanded to greater length and others abbreviated. (...) But though such changes are sometimes great, as a rule they affect only details, especially names; some versions added longer or shorter episodes, while in others certain episodes are omitted. But the general tenor of the story, its general spirit, and the outstanding features remain the same in all.*

The Discovery of a Strange Jewish Anti-Gospel in 1985

It was through the pages of *Yeshu ha-Notzri*, the seminal monograph by the Israeli scholar Joseph Klausner (1874–1958), that I became aware, in 1985, of the existence of a strange and fascinating Medieval Jewish anti-gospel known as the *Toledot Yeshu*, or “Stories about Jesus.”¹ At the time I was carrying out extensive research on the *Paralipomena of Jeremiah* (also called *4 Baruch*), a 2nd century Christian reworking of a Jewish haggadic *midrash* on the destruction of the First Temple and the Babylonian captivity. In particular, I was preparing a new critical edition of the Ethiopic version of the *Paralipomena of Jeremiah*, which was initially published in 1866 by August Dillmann, and subsequently translated into Modern Hebrew in 1901, within the pages of Ahad Ha’am’s periodical *Ha-*

* Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth: His Life, Times, and Teaching* (trans. Herbert Danby; New York: Bloch, 1989 [first edition, 1925; original Hebrew edition, 1922]), 48. I would like to thank Peter Schäfer and Yaacov Deutsch for inviting me to participate in an intellectual adventure as stimulating as the first international conference ever organized on the *Toledot Yeshu*.

¹ Klausner, *Jesus*, 47–54, provides an accurate summary of the evidence available in his day, mainly on the basis of Samuel Krauss’s admirable edition and commentary, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1902; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1977). On Klausner’s critical attitude concerning the historical value of the few traditions about Jesus found in rabbinic sources, see John P. Meier, *The Roots of the Problem and the Person*. Vol. 1 of *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 95–8; Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 5 and 147.

Shiloah, by Klausner himself.² Aside from the philological aspects of my quest, I must confess that I was naively curious to uncover the motivating factors that had pushed a young Zionist historian to investigate such an obscure text. It took me years of study and experience to realize what Klausner had already brilliantly understood, that is to say, that the *Paralipomena of Jeremiah* is one of the most important 2nd century texts for the history of Jewish Christian relations and the construction of a specifically Christian identity.³ Returning to 1985, even if I quickly forgot those bizarre *Toledot Yeshu*, the reading of Klausner's book helped me to better appreciate the Jewishness of Jesus⁴ and this new awareness left a deep and durable mark on every aspect of my research on antique and late antique religions and cultures.

The Rediscovery of a Strange Christian Gospel in 1998

In 1998 I began studying and translating the Ethiopic version of the *Book of the Cock*, a Christian apocryphal text from Late Antiquity, that was originally written in Greek, probably in a monastery close to Jerusalem, between the years 451

² August Dillmann, "Liber Baruch," in idem, *Chrestomathia Aethiopica* (Leipzig: Weigel, 1866), viii-x and 1-15; Joseph Klausner, "The Book of Baruch in Ethiopic Language," *Ha-Shiloah* 8 (1901): 236-52 (in Hebrew), reprinted in idem, *Mehkarim Hadashim u-Meqorot 'Atiqim* (Tel-Aviv: Masada, 1957), 90-117. For a new critical edition of the Ethiopic version, see Pierluigi Piovanelli, *Ricerche sugli apocrifi veterotestamentari etiopici* (Tesi di Laurea; Florence: Università degli Studi di Firenze, 1986), 109-231.

³ My major contribution was the Italian translation and commentary, "Paralipomeni di Geremia (Quarto libro di Baruc) - Storia della cattività babilonese (Apocrifo copto di Geremia)," in *Apocrifi dell'Antico Testamento* (5 vols.; ed. Paolo Sacchi; Biblica, Testi e Studi 7; Brescia: Paideia, 1999), 3:235-381. Also see Pierluigi Piovanelli, "Le sommeil séculaire d'Abimélech dans l'*Histoire de la captivité babylonienne* et les *Paralipomènes de Jérémie*. Textes - intertextes - contextes," in *Intertextualités. La Bible en échos* (eds. Daniel Marguerat and Adrian H. W. Curtis; Le Monde de la Bible 40; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2000), 73-96, and idem, "Abimelec in visita da Eusebio: Eugenio Montale lettore di un frammento dei *Paralipomeni di Geremia*" (in collaboration with Claudio Zamagni), *Studi e Problemi di Critica Testuale* 61 (2000): 157-88.

⁴ It is not by chance that Klausner is hailed as one of the most significant forerunners of the present day quest for the Jewish Jesus. Thus, for example, according to Ed Parish Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 53, "(t)he general line followed by Geza Vermes ... is in important respects similar to Klausner's." Concerning Klausner's perspective on Jesus, special attention should be given to Donald A. Hagner, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus: An Analysis and Critique of Modern Jewish Study of Jesus* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock, 1997 [first edition, 1984]), passim; Clinton Bennett, *In Search of Jesus: Insider and Outsider Images* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 261-63; Dan Jaffé, *Jésus sous la plume des historiens juifs du XX^e siècle. Approche historique, perspectives historiographiques, analyses méthodologiques* (Patrimoines, Judaïsme; Paris: Cerf, 2009), 56-72 and 338-39; as well as David Fox Sandmel's unpublished Ph.D. thesis, *Into the Fray: Joseph Klausner's Approach to Judaism and Christianity in the Greco-Roman World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2002).

and 479 of the Common Era.⁵ In the *Book of the Cock* we encounter a text that is easily as fantastic as the *Toledot Yeshu* – one has only to think of the astonishing episode that gives the work its title: the resurrection of the cooked rooster from the last supper that Jesus sends to spy on Judas' clandestine activities in Jerusalem! It should be obvious that, such stories – the narratives that we find in the *Toledot Yeshu*, the *Paralipomena of Jeremiah*, the *Book of the Cock*, and many other ancient writings that did not (always) make into the official canons – are neither weird, ridiculous, creepy, or disgusting.⁶ In any case, they are no more odd or shocking than some of their canonical counterparts.⁷ They simply need to be taken with a minimum of professional seriousness and placed within the context of their ancient and late antique environments.

It was in doing so, that I realized that the *Book of the Cock* was, so to speak, at the center of a complex web of intertextual connections shared not only with other late antique Christian apocryphal texts such as the Greek and Latin *Acts of Pilate* (or *Gospel of Nicodemus*), the Arabic and Ethiopic *Lament of Mary* (improperly called the *Gospel of Gamaliel*), or the Coptic *Book of the Resurrection of Jesus-Christ by Bartholomew the Apostle*,⁸ but also and especially with the

⁵ See the French translation and commentary by Pierluigi Piovaneli, "Livres du coq," in *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens* (2 vols.; eds. Pierre Geoltrain and Jean-Daniel Kaestli; Bibliothèque de la Pléiade 516; Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 2:135–203, as well as idem, "Exploring the Ethiopic *Book of the Cock*, An Apocryphal Passion Gospel from Late Antiquity," *HTR* 96 (2003): 427–54, and idem, "The *Book of the Cock* and the Rediscovery of Ancient Jewish Christian Traditions in Fifth Century Palestine," in *The Changing Face of Judaism, Christianity and Other Greco-Roman Religions in Antiquity* (eds. Ian H. Henderson and Gerbern S. Oegema; Studien zu den Jüdischen Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit 2; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006), 308–22.

⁶ As Janet E. Spittler, *Animals in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles: The Wild Kingdom of Early Christian Literature* (WUNT 2.247; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 133–40, makes sufficiently clear, besides the illustrious examples of Balaam's ass (Num 22:20–35) and Achilles' horse (*Il.* 19.404–18), talking animals were not uncommon in ancient literature. (In this connection, one should not forget the speaking eagle in *4Bar.* 7.)

⁷ This is especially evident in the case of apologetic readings of the Bible, both ancient and modern. Thus, Josephus preferred to omit some embarrassing episodes such as the Judah-Tamar affair (Gen 38) from the volumes he wrote for a non-Jewish audience. For a list of such passages, see Louis H. Feldman, "Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* and Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities*," in *Josephus, the Bible, and History* (eds. Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata; Leiden: Brill; Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 59–80 (at 74), reprinted in idem, *Studies in Hellenistic Judaism* (AJECAGJU 30; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 57–82 (at 78–79). As for the passages that are perceived by the standards of present day sensibility as politically incorrect, one could refer to, e.g., John Shelby Spong, *The Sins of Scripture: Exposing the Bible's Texts of Hate to Reveal the God of Love* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2005).

⁸ On these and other Christian apocryphal texts, see, in general, Maurice Geard, *Clavis Apocryphorum Novi Testamenti* (Corpus Christianorum; Turnhout: Brepols, 1992); Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha*, (trans. Robert McL. Wilson; 2 vols.; Cambridge: Clarke; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991–92 [based on the sixth German edition, 1989–90]); J. Keith Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993 [revised and newly translated edition of Montague Rhodes James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*

Toledot Yeshu. With respect to this connection, the reading of Hillel I. Newman's study on "The Death of Jesus in the *Toledot Yeshu* Literature"⁹ was particularly enlightening. In his article Newman argues, with reason, that one of the goals of the narrators of late antique Christian passion gospels was also to respond to and neutralize polemical Jewish stories about Jesus similar to those found in the *Toledot Yeshu*. Thus, for example, the character of Philogenes the Gardener in the *Book of the Resurrection of Jesus-Christ by Bartholomew the Apostle* can be considered to be a narrative reply to the figure of Rabbi Yehuda Ganina (i. e., "the Gardener") in the *Toledot Yeshu*.¹⁰

A few examples taken from the *Book of the Cock* will help to confirm the soundness of Newman's judgment. In the *Book of the Cock* as in the *Toledot Yeshu* – and here I will be referring primarily to the Old Cairo Genizah fragments in Aramaic¹¹ – Jesus' adversaries explain his extraordinary powers as the result

(Oxford: Clarendon, 1924)); Hans-Josef Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction* (trans. Brian McNeil; London and New York: T. & T. Clark, 2003 [original German edition, 2002]).

⁹ Hillel I. Newman, "The Death of Jesus in the *Toledot Yeshu* Literature," *JTS* 50 (1999): 59–79. Other useful readings include Stephen Gero, "The Nestorius Legend in the *Toledoth Yeshu*," *OrChr* 59 (1975): 108–20; idem, "Jewish Polemic in the Martyrium Pionii and a 'Jesus' Passage from the Talmud," *JJS* 29 (1978): 164–68; idem, "The Stern Master and His Wayward Disciple: A 'Jesus' Story in the Talmud and in Christian Hagiography," *JSJ* 25 (1994): 287–311; Clemens Thoma, "Jésus dans la polémique juive de l'Antiquité tardive et du Moyen-Âge," in *Jésus de Nazareth. Nouvelles approches d'une énigme* (eds. Daniel Marguerat, Enrico Norelli and Jean-Marie Poffet; Le Monde de la Bible 38; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1998), 477–87; Robert E. Van Voorst, *Jesus outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 104–29.

¹⁰ Newman, "The Death of Jesus," 67–68, who concludes, "'Bartholomew' reads like a Christian rejoinder to the antagonistic claims of *Toledot Yeshu*: after the Jews turn [the Gospel of] John on his head, 'Bartholomew' tries to right him again, though not quite as he was before" (68). Such a connection was originally made by Hugh J. Schonfield, *According to the Hebrews: A New Translation of the Jewish Life of Jesus (the Toldoth Jeshu), with an Inquiry into the Nature of Its Sources and Special Relationship to the Lost Gospel According to the Hebrews* (London: Duckworth, 1937), 127–28.

¹¹ For the extremely complex textual history of the *Toledot Yeshu*, see the classification proposed by Riccardo Di Segni, "La tradizione testuale delle Toledoth Jéshu: manoscritti, edizioni a stampa, classificazione," *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 50 (1984): 83–100, who singles out a "Pilate" (comprising the Aramaic fragments and Agobard of Lyons's testimony, in the 9th century), a "Helene" (including the large majority of mediæval versions), and a "Herod" group (consisting of the single Huldreich manuscript, edited in 1705). The Aramaic fragments have been translated by William Horbury, *A Critical Examination of the Toledoth Jeshu* (Ph. D. diss.; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1970), 75–151; Jean-Pierre Osier, *L'Évangile du ghetto. La légende juive de Jésus du I^{er} au X^e siècle* (L'autre rive; Paris: Berg International, 1999 [first edition, 1984]), 121–28; Riccardo Di Segni, *Il vangelo del ghetto* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1985), 45–50; Herbert W. Basser, "The Acts of Jesus," in *The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume* (2 vols.; ed. Barry Walfish; Haifa: Haifa University Press, 1993), 1:273–82. An extremely late representative of the "Helene" group, originally published in Breslau, in 1824, has been edited by Günter Schlichting, *Ein jüdisches Leben Jesu. Die verschollene Toledot-Jeschu-Fassung Tam ū-mū'ād. Einleitung, Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar, Motivsynopse, Bibliographie* (WUNT 1.24; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1982), and summarized by Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 211–20. The English translations of the Wagenseil text and the Strasbourg manuscript,

of the practice of black magic.¹² Thus, when Jesus has Judas' felony denounced by a flying and speaking stone pillar, Judas accuses him of being a magician (1:19–20). At the moment of Jesus' interrogation in the palace of the high priest, the servant Balāsīdā, daughter of Balādi, identifies Peter as one of the followers "of the Galilean magician" (5:26). Finally, the Jewish leaders attribute the benevolence that Procla, Pilate's wife, shows toward Jesus to "the action of Jesus' magic" (8:11). In the *Book of the Cock* as in the *Toledot Yeshu* Judas Iscariot is the person chiefly responsible for Jesus' arrest – even if, in the case of the Aramaic fragments of the *Toledot Yeshu*, Rabbi Yehuda Ganina seems to be someone other than the Iscariot (at least in Ca 3 [manuscript T.-S. new ser. 298.56]), while in the *Book of the Cock*, Saul of Tarsus plays a considerable role as well.¹³ In the *Book of the Cock* as in the *Toledot Yeshu* Jesus escapes from his persecutors for a short time and runs into the Temple (as in the Strasbourg manuscript), under the portico of Solomon, before once again being captured by Rabbi Yehuda in the *Toledot Yeshu*, while in the *Book of the Cock* (6:8–14) he is betrayed by a relative of Judas that he immediately transforms into a rock.

With respect to this connection, it is also striking that, according to the Aramaic fragment Ca 1 (manuscript T.-S. Misc. 35.87) of the *Toledot Yeshu*, the runaway Jesus transforms himself at first into a bird, and then into a rooster who flies up onto Mount Carmel; but Rabbi Yehuda Ganina, who has followed him into the air, seizes him by the *shushifa* – not the "comb," as per the usual translation, but the "scarf"¹⁴ – just as Judas, at the moment of the betrayal, "seized the *fiqār* (in Ethiopic, "girdle, belt, cowl, vestment of a priest") that was around the

two other witnesses of the "Helene" group, originally published in 1885 and 1903, have been reprinted as Appendix A and B in Frank R. Zindler, *The Jesus the Jews never Knew: Sefer Toldoth Yeshu and the Quest of the Historical Jesus in Jewish Sources* (Cranford, N.J.: American Atheist Press, 2003), 347–450.

¹² On this accusation, see Graham N. Stanton, "Jesus of Nazareth: A Magician and a False Prophet Who Deceived God's People?" in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ. Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* (eds. Joel B. Green and Max Turner; Carlisle: Paternoster Press; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 164–80.

¹³ See Piovanelli, "Exploring the Ethiopic *Book of the Cock*," 445–46; idem, "Ancient Jewish Christian Traditions," 311–13; idem, "'L'ennemi est parmi nous.' Présences rhétoriques et narratives de Paul dans les *Pseudo-clémentines* et autres écrits apparentés," in *Nouvelles intrigues pseudo-clémentines – Plots in the Pseudo-Clementine Romance: Actes du deuxième colloque international sur la littérature apocryphe chrétienne, Lausanne–Genève, 30 août–2 septembre 2006* (eds. Frédéric Amsler, Albert Frey, Charlotte Touati and Renée Girardet; Publications de l'Institut romand des Sciences bibliques 6; Prahins, C. H.: Zèbre, 2008), 241–48.

¹⁴ Following the advice of Louis Ginzberg, the first editor of Ca 1 in *Ginzei Schechter: Genizah Studies in Memory of Doctor Solomon Schechter* (3 vols.; New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1928), 1:324–38 (at 326), the Aramaic *shushifa* is rendered as "comb" by Osier, *L'Évangile du ghetto*, 126 ("la crête"), and Di Segni, *Il vangelo del ghetto*, 49 ("la cresta"); as "crop" by Basser, "The Acts of Jesus," 279 ("his crop"); but correctly as "cloak" by Samuel Krauss, "Neuere Ansichten über 'Toldoth Jeschu,'" *MGWJ* 76 (1932): 586–603; 77 (1933): 44–61 (at 48–49 ["Mantel!"]), and Horbury, *A Critical Examination*, 85 ("his cloak"), even if the latter acknowledges that a translation with "crest" is also possible "by analogy with

neck of our Savior” in the *Book of the Cock* (4:14; 5:11–12).¹⁵ Then, Ca 1 carries on with Rabbi Yehuda who brings Jesus back to Rabbi Joshua ben Perahiah in order to have him hung up and crucified (reading with William Horbury *keruva*, as in Ca 2 [manuscript T.-S. Misc. 35.88], and not *berosha*) “on a cabbage stalk.”¹⁶ Needless to say, the speaking rooster of the *Book of the Cock* is more the Christian antithesis of the Jewish Ziz (Psalm 50:11) or *tarnegol bara*, the “wild rooster” of the Jewish legendary traditions, than Jesus’ alter ego.¹⁷ However, it is this kind of reasoning that is presupposed in the *Toledot Yeshu* – that is, Jesus, the deceiver who claimed that he would ascend to heaven, has been caught and killed like vulgar poultry, or, as Jean-Pierre Osier maliciously puts it, “the one who would like to fly as an eagle, but who is not an eagle, will end his flight as a chicken”¹⁸ – and it is exactly this type of reasoning that is at the origin of the beautiful story found in the *Book of the Cock* and the parallel versions of the *Book of the Resurrection of Jesus-Christ by Bartholomew the Apostle* (manuscript A, 1:1–3) and the Greek B recension (forms B² and B³) of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* (1:3).¹⁹

Thus, it seems to me that the new evidence provided by the *Book of the Cock* serves to demonstrate that a more or less well developed first edition of the *Toledot Yeshu* was already circulating at the end of the 4th or the beginning of the 5th century. Since the publication of Ca 1, in 1928, by Louis Ginzberg,²⁰ it has

the two meanings of *karbalta*” (ibid., n. 1). Also see Willem F. Smelik, “The Aramaic Dialect(s) of the Toldot Yeshu Fragments,” *Aramaic Studies* 7 (2009): 39–73 (at 67).

¹⁵ I would like to thank Michael Sokoloff for pointing out the exact meaning, in this context, of the Aramaic *shushifa*. This made possible the discovery of such a new and extraordinary parallel between the *Toledot Yeshu* and the *Book of the Cock*, a detail – the seizing of Jesus by his own stole, cloak, or *keffiyeh* – that is completely unattested elsewhere.

¹⁶ Horbury, *A Critical Examination*, 86 and 90. Also see Smelik, “The Aramaic Dialect(s),” 68–69.

¹⁷ Both birds are similar to – or even identified with – the *sekwí*, the “rooster endowed with foreknowledge” according to Job 38:36, a verse that is traditionally repeated among the *Be-rakhot* at the beginning of the *Shaharit* morning service: “Blessed are you, O Lord, our God, King of the world, who gives the cock intelligence to distinguish between day and night.” See Piovanelli, “Exploring the Ethiopic *Book of the Cock*,” 442–44; idem, “Ancient Jewish Christian Traditions,” 314–15.

¹⁸ Osier, *L’Évangile du ghetto*, 21.

¹⁹ See Piovanelli, “Exploring the Ethiopic *Book of the Cock*,” 437–38. A new critical edition of the Greek B recension of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* has been recently published by Rémi Gounelle, *Les recensions byzantines de l’Évangile de Nicodème* (CCSA, Instrumenta 3; Turnhout: Brepols; Prahins, C. H.: Zèbre, 2008).

²⁰ See above, n. 14. Ca 1 was edited anew by William Horbury, “The Trial of Jesus in Jewish Tradition,” in *The Trial of Jesus: Cambridge Studies in Honour of C. F. D. Moule* (ed. Ernst Bammel; Naperville: Allenson, 1970), 103–21. Other fragments have been published by Abraham Harkavy, “Leben Jesu,” *Hebräische Bibliographie* 15 (1875): 15; Elkan Nathan Adler, “Un fragment araméen du *Toldot Yéschou*,” *REJ* 61 (1910): 126–30; Samuel Krauss, “Fragments araméens du *Toldot Yéschou*,” *REJ* 62 (1911): 28–37 (new edition of the fragments previously published by Adler and Krauss himself [*Das Leben Jesu*, 36–37 and 143–46]); Zeev W. Falk, “A New Fragment of the Jewish ‘Life of Jesus,’” *Tarbiz* 46 (1977): 319–22 (in Hebrew); idem,

become clear that the Genizah Aramaic fragments are the best witnesses to such an *Urtext*, even if I am not entirely certain that they have faithfully preserved all the details of the original cycle of stories – the plural is *de rigueur* here, the *Toledot Yeshu* being anything but a fixed and crystallized text.²¹ For example, does the narrator of Ca 1 explain why and how Rabbi Yehuda (not to mention Jesus) has learned the exact pronunciation of “the Explicit Name” that he uses to fly after Jesus? Or, what are the reasons given for the extraordinary use of “a cabbage stalk” as the support for Jesus’ body? But if the loss of some episodes and the omission of others make the recovery of that late antique first edition fairly difficult, what could we say, then, about a hypothetical prehistory of the *Toledot Yeshu* in the 2nd and 3rd centuries of the Common Era?²²

The Rediscovery of a Strange Gnostic Gospel in 2006–07

Ernst Bammel and William Horbury are the two scholars that have most strived, in my opinion convincingly, to demonstrate the existence and early circulation of some polemical proto-*Toledot Yeshu* traditions – or, as Riccardo Di Segni puts it, some of their original kernels.²³ As Horbury aptly summarizes it, “the outspo-

“A New Fragment of the Jewish ‘Life of Jesus,’” *Imm* 8 (1978): 72–79; Daniel Boyarin, “A Revised Version and Translation of the ‘Toledot Yeshu’ Fragment,” *Tarbiz* 47 (1978): 249–52 (new edition of the previous fragment [in Hebrew]).

²¹ Additional evidence about the missing sections of the Aramaic *Toledot Yeshu* can be found in the report of the apostate Avner Alfonso summarized by Shem Tov ben Isaac ibn Shaprut in his polemical treatise *‘Eben Bohan*, written at the end of the 14th century. On this Spanish rabbi, his work, and the sources he used, see George Howard, “A Primitive Hebrew Gospel of Matthew and the Tol’doth Yeshu,” *NTS* 34 (1988): 60–70; Basser, “The Acts of Jesus,” 273–74 and 280; Libby Garshowitz, “Shem Tov ben Isaac Ibn Shaprut’s Gospel of Matthew,” in *The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume*, 1:297–322; José-Vicente Niclós, *Shem Tob ibn Shaprut. “La piedra de toque” (Eben Bohan). Una obra de controversia judeo-cristiana. Introducción, edición crítica, traducción y notas al libro I* (Bibliotheca Hispana Bíblica 16; Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1997). Moreover, Yaacov Deutsch, “New Evidence of Early Versions of *Toldot Yeshu*,” *Tarbiz* 69 (2000): 177–97 (in Hebrew), has published a Hebrew version of the *Toledot Yeshu* from the manuscript Evr. I 274 of the Firkovitch collection in St. Petersburg, which is particularly close to the text of the Aramaic fragments.

²² As Newman, “The Death of Jesus,” 61, insightfully reminds us, “(i)n addressing the slippery question of the provenance of the ‘Pilate’ group, we must remember to distinguish between related but distinct problems: the pre-literary history of the narrative, a putative ‘original’ literary creation, and the version or versions found in extant manuscripts.”

²³ See especially Ernst Bammel, “Christian Origins in Jewish Tradition,” *NTS* 13 (1966–67): 317–35, reprinted in idem, *Judaica. Kleine Schriften* (2 vols.; WUNT 37; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986), 1:220–38; idem, “Origen *Contra Celsum* i:41 and the Jewish Tradition,” *JTS* 19 (1968): 211–13, reprinted in *Judaica*, 1:194–95; idem, “Der Jude des Celsus,” in *Judaica*, 1:265–83; William Horbury, “Tertullian on the Jews in the Light of *de spec.* xxx. 13,” *JTS* 23 (1972): 455–59, reprinted in idem, *Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), 176–79; idem, “Christ as Brigand in Ancient Anti-Christian Polemic,” in *Jesus and the Politics of His Day* (eds. Ernst Bammel and Charles F. D. Moule; Cambridge:

ken Jewish polemic in the *Toledoth Jeshu* appears to presuppose the importance gained by Tiberias under the Jewish patriarchs (i. e., in late Antiquity, from the 3rd century onwards), but its agreements with the speeches of the Jew of Celus in Origen, with Tertullian on Jewish claims, and with passages in the probably third-century Commodian, indicate the currency of Jewish anti-Christian traditions in the second century and later.”²⁴ But can we have at least an approximate idea of their contents?

I would like to suggest that one of their main features, even at this early stage, was the extremely positive depiction of Judas as the Jewish hero of the story. Such a hypothesis is indirectly corroborated by two facts. The first is that many of the traditions found in the 5th century *Book of the Cock*, including those about Judas, seem to be, or actually are, much older, and of Jewish Christian origin (as is certainly the case for the description of Paul as the most ruthless persecutor of Jesus).²⁵ The second is that the popularity, so to speak, of the Iscariot at least among 2nd century Gnostic (probably Sethian) Christians has been now fully vindicated by the recent rediscovery and publication, in 2006–07, of the famous *Gospel of Judas*.²⁶ It is not my intention to reopen the fiery debate that surrounds the interpretation of Judas’s figure in the gospel that bears his name. It is well known that the original editors and commentators of the *Gospel of Judas* perceive him as an extremely good guy, while the subsequent translators tend

Cambridge University Press, 1984), 183–95, reprinted in *Jews and Christians*, 162–75; idem, “Jews and Christians on the Bible: Demarcation and Convergence [325–451],” in *Christliche Exegese zwischen Nicaea und Chalcedon* (eds. Johannes van Oort and Ulrich Wickert; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992), 72–103, reprinted in *Jews and Christians*, 200–25; idem, “The Depiction of Judaeo-Christians in the *Toledot Yeshu*,” in *The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature* (eds. Peter J. Tomson and Doris Lambers-Petry; WUNT 1.158; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 280–86. Also see Di Segni, *Il vangelo del ghetto*, 216–19; Newman, “The Death of Jesus,” 61–63.

²⁴ Horbury, “Jews and Christians on the Bible,” 76–77 (203–4 of the reprint). Also see idem, *A Critical Examination*, 437: “It is submitted (...) that a compilation directly related to the later *Toledoth* existed in the third century, in written form. It formed the core of later texts, to which additions, especially in proper names, were made. The outline of the trial-scene of the third-century *Toledoth* is exhibited in the Aramaic texts” (emphasis added).

²⁵ See above, n. 13. In this connection, one should note that Marvin Meyer’s useful anthology, *Judas: The Definitive Collection of Gospels and Legends about the Infamous Apostle of Jesus* (New York: Harper One, 2007), is far from being either exhaustive or “definitive.”

²⁶ Initially translated by Rodolphe Kasser, Marvin Meyer and Gregor Wurst, *The Gospel of Judas from Codex Tchacos* (Washington, D. C.: National Geographic Society, 2006 [second edition, 2008]), then edited by Rodolphe Kasser et al., *The Gospel of Judas, Critical Edition: Together with the Letter of Peter to Philip, James, and a Book of Allogenes from Codex Tchacos* (Washington, D. C.: National Geographic Society, 2007), 177–252 and 341–70. Wurst’s preliminary transcription of some new, unpublished fragments, together with Meyer’s English translation, is available on line (http://www.kthf.uni-augsburg.de/de/prof_do/hist_theol/wurst/forschung_downloads/Neue_Fragmente_IV.pdf#Neue_FragmenteIV).

to see him as being, in April D. DeConick's words, "as evil as ever."²⁷ As far as I am concerned, I will simply say that the protagonist of the *Gospel of Judas* is neither "Dr. Judas" nor "Mr. Iscariot," on the contrary, he is a more "well rounded figure," the only disciple who is initiated by Jesus to the mysteries of the Kingdom, whose final and dramatic destiny will be to sacrifice his master without being allowed to ascend to the holy generation.²⁸ The only compensation for the terrible task he has to accomplish will be perhaps, in DeConick's opinion, to finally "join Ialdabaoth in his cloud becoming assimilated with Ialdabaoth in some way"²⁹ – the only ascent to heaven that the narrator of the *Gospel of Judas* could eventually grant to the wayward disciple.

Be that as it may, the triangular reading of the *Gospel of Judas* (before 180 C.E.), the *Book of the Cock* (third quarter of the 5th century), and the Aramaic fragments of the *Toledot Yeshu* (at least before the beginning of the 9th century) seems to confirm that some elements of the Judas traditions embedded in texts as late as the *Toledot Yeshu* and the *Book of the Cock* are, in fact, much earlier, even datable to the 2nd century.

Here and now: The Absence of a Strange Jewish Christian Gospel

Until recently, the simple possibility of identifying a series of older elements, motifs, or traditions in a given text, was immediately converted into the systematic study of its written sources. Even worse, the actual meaning of that text was generally neglected – especially if its narrative was deemed to be too repetitive, nonsensical, or simply distasteful – in order to give priority to the study of its original edition and its sources.³⁰ Now, we do not need to go back to Roland Barthes and French structuralism in order to acknowledge the basic fact that every text is, up to a certain extent, a tapestry of linguistic and literary echoes, or that biblical and parabiblical "memorial traditions" (to borrow Jean-Claude

²⁷ April D. DeConick, *The Thirteenth Apostle: What the Gospel of Judas Really Says* (London and New York: Continuum, 2009 [first edition, 2007]), 45–61 and 185–87. One can have an idea of the wide spectrum of interpretations from a reading of the different contributions published by Madeleine Scopello, ed., *The Gospel of Judas in Context: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Gospel of Judas. Paris, Sorbonne, October 27th–28th, 2006* (NHMS 62; Leiden: Brill, 2008), and April D. DeConick, ed., *The Codex Judas Papers: Proceedings of the International Congress on the Tchacos Codex Held at Rice University, Houston, Texas, March 13–16, 2008* (NHMS 71; Leiden: Brill, 2009).

²⁸ See Pierluigi Piovanelli, "Rabbi Yehuda versus Judas Iscariot: The *Gospel of Judas* and Apocryphal Passion Stories," in DeConick, ed., *The Codex Judas Paper*, 223–39.

²⁹ DeConick, *The Thirteenth Apostle*, 119.

³⁰ A simple survey of the literature on, e.g., the *Paralipomena of Jeremiah*, the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies and Recognitions*, or the "orthodox" *Apocalypse of Paul* will reveal many examples of such a scholarly proclivity to identify preexisting editions and sources at the expenses of the understanding of the available texts.

Picard's categories), especially when they are "open and subject to endless variations," as in the case of many Christian apocryphal stories and the *Toledot Yeshu*, constantly reperforming and rewriting themselves.³¹

Eighty years ago, however, it was only natural to expect that the publication of the Aramaic fragments Ca 1 and Ca 2 would encourage some specialists to engage in a new quest for other parallels in ancient literature in order to identify the sources or to understand the genesis of the *Toledot Yeshu*. Thus, in 1932–33, the great Samuel Krauss was able to compare the newly discovered episode of Jesus-the-rooster that Rabbi Yehuda Ganina seizes by the *shushifa*³² to one quotation of the presently lost *Gospel according to the Hebrews* found in the works of Origen (twice) and Jerome (three times): "(In the *Gospel according to the Hebrews*) the Savior himself says: A moment ago, my mother, the Holy Spirit, took me by one of my hairs and brought me to the great mountain Tabor" (Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 2.12).³³ According to Krauss, this episode was modeled after the description of Ezekiel's vision of the abominations in the sanctuary – "He stretched out the form of a hand and *caught me by a lock* of my head; and *the Spirit* lifted me up between earth and heaven *and brought me* in the visions of God to Jerusalem ..." (Ez 8:3) – which contains the Hebrew term *tsitsit* that means both "hair-lock," as in the patristic quotations, and "fringe," from which eventually developed the "cloak" of the Genizah fragment. In his opinion, the existence of such a strong connection, together with the presence of what he considered to be Syriac influences in the Aramaic language of the fragments, proved that the *Toledot Yeshu* was a parodic rewriting of the Jewish Christian *Gospel according to the Hebrews* that Jerome had translated from Syriac (*sic*) into Latin.³⁴

In spite of the objections immediately raised by Bernard Heller in the same volume of the *Monatsschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*,

³¹ See Jean-Claude Picard, "Les chemins de la mythologie chrétienne" (1993), in idem, *Le continent apocryphe. Essai sur les littératures apocryphes juive et chrétienne* (Instrumenta Patristica 36; Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 247–64, and for a most holistic and sensitive approach towards ancient texts, Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1996); idem, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

³² See above, n. 14.

³³ See the edition and commentary of Albertus Frederik Johannes Klijn, *Jewish-Christian Gospel Tradition* (VCSup 17; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 52–55 (even if he does not mention the possible parallel in the *Toledot Yeshu*), as well as Simon C. Mimouni, *Les fragments évangéliques judéo-chrétiens "apocryphés."* *Recherches et perspectives* (CahRB 66; Paris: Gabalda, 2006), 27–29.

³⁴ Krauss, "Neuere Ansichten," 54–55. Actually, Jerome was referring to a *Gospel according to the Hebrews* "written in the Chaldean and Syrian language, but in Hebrew characters, and used by the Nazoreans to this day" (*Pelag.* 3.2). These Nazoreans were the members of a Jewish Christian community living in Beroea, near Aleppo (*Vir. Ill.* 3), a region in which Western Aramaic dialects, not Syriac (a language that belongs to the Eastern branch of Aramaic), were spoken.

Krauss's fascinating theory managed to at least convince Hugh J. Schonfield, who defended it in the extremely well-documented monograph he published in 1937.³⁵ Today, the idea of any special connection between the *Toledot Yeshu* and the rather mysterious *Gospel according to the Hebrews* is rarely mentioned, and even so, with scepticism.³⁶ Krauss and Schonfield were certainly going beyond the evidence in concluding that the *Toledot Yeshu* is quoting from or even paraphrasing a written version of a Jewish Christian gospel. However, as the abundance of elements in the *Book of the Cock* that point to a Jewish Christian milieu could suggest, what if the earliest *Toledot Yeshu* stories were the oral product of Jewish communities that were living, probably in Syria-Palestine, in close contact and connection with a group, or multiple groups, of Jewish Christians?³⁷

Such a polemical debate between Jewish and Jewish Christian believers, carried out through the medium of popular, oral retellings of the gospels – both canonical and extra-canonical ones, this distinction being largely anachronistic and/or irrelevant in the milieus that were in conversation – was going to result, on the Christian side, into a series of “orthodox” apocryphal writings produced

³⁵ Bernhard Heller, “Über das Alter der jüdischen Judas-Sage und des Toldot Jeschu,” *MGWJ* 77 (1933): 198–210; Schonfield, *According to the Hebrews*, 256–69. Interestingly enough, Schonfield did not follow Krauss in his comparison between this quotation of the *Gospel according to the Hebrews* and the Ca 1 fragment of the *Toledot Yeshu*, but preferred to put it into relation with another passage – “And Jesus pronounced the great Name, and the Spirit came and set him up between heaven and earth” – found in the Wagenseil type of the *Toledot Yeshu* that does not include the detail of Jesus' transformation into a rooster (259).

³⁶ See Di Segni, *Il vangelo del ghetto*, 153–55 and 216–17. Nonetheless, as argued by Piovaneli, “Ancient Jewish Christian Traditions,” 315–16, intertextual echoes with the *Gospel according to the Nazoreans* and other Jewish Christian traditions are still detectable in the *Book of the Cock*.

³⁷ It is here that linguistic, social, and historical considerations come into play. Thus, according to Ginzberg, *Ginzei Schechter*, 325–26, the Aramaic language of the earliest Aramaic fragments of the *Toledot Yeshu*, with its mixture of Eastern (Babylonian) and Western (Palestinian) Aramaic elements, seems to be perfectly artificial. On the contrary, Boyarin, “A Revised Version,” 249, thinks that it could betray an imperfect Eastern adaptation of a text originally written in a Western Aramaic dialect. More recently, Smelik, “The Aramaic Dialect(s),” 69–73, has concluded that there are persistent Palestinian characteristics in the Aramaic language of, at least, Ca 2: “(t)his implies that the Toldot Yeshu has its provenance in Palestine in the third-fourth century CE,” while “(t)he preponderant Babylonian features of the remaining fragments indicate that the tradition was transmitted to Babylonia at some point in history in oral or written form” (71). For a different view, see Michael Sokoloff's contribution to the present volume. In any case, the fact observed by Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 113–22 and 181–85, that the large majority of the Rabbinic traditions about Jesus are preserved in documents that are, as in the case of the Babylonian Talmud, of Eastern origins, does not exclude the possibility that many other oral and/or written stories have been circulating in Syria-Palestine and elsewhere among more popular milieus. As for the interconnectedness of Jews and (Jewish) Christians in those regions until, at least, the end of the 4th century, one can refer to the evidence highlighted in, e. g., the volume edited by Adrian H. Becker and Annette Y. Reed, *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007 [first edition, 2003]), or the monograph of Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

in the 4th, 5th, and 6th centuries, during the period that I defined elsewhere as “the small globalization of Late Antiquity.”³⁸ If the sudden explosion of Christian apocryphal texts such as the *Acts of Pilate*, the *Lament of Mary*, or the *Book of the Resurrection of Jesus-Christ by Bartholomew the Apostle*, to which we can now add the highly instructive *Book of the Cock*, has any special meaning and any polemical *raison d'être*, to what kind of Jewish oral traditions, stories, and/or written texts were they responding?

³⁸ See Pierluigi Piovanelli, “Le recyclage des textes apocryphes à l’heure de la petite ‘mondialisation’ de l’Antiquité tardive (ca. 325–451). Quelques perspectives littéraires et historiques,” in *Poussières de christianisme et de judaïsme antiques. Études réunies en l’honneur de Jean-Daniel Kaestli et Éric Junod* (eds. Rémi Gounelle and Albert Frey; Publications de l’Institut romand des Sciences bibliques 5; Prahins, C. H.: Zèbre, 2007), 277–95; idem, “The Reception of Early Christian Texts and Traditions in Late Antiquity Apocryphal Literature,” in *The Reception and Interpretation of the Bible in Late Antiquity: Proceedings of the Montréal Colloquium in Honour of Charles Kannengiesser, 11–13 October 2006* (eds. Lorenzo DiTommaso and Lucian Turcescu; Bible in Ancient Christianity 6; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 429–39.

Toledot Yeshu: Folk-Narrative as Polemics and Self Criticism

Eli Yassif

Few Hebrew narratives from the Middle Ages have been the subject of such extensive and diverse research efforts as *Toledot Yeshu*. There are many reasons for the enormous interest in this work, not least of which is the mystery surrounding it in terms of time and place of origin. Moreover, the fact that more versions have been found for *Toledot Yeshu* than for any similar text has led to philological studies comparing the different versions, analyzing their language, and attempting to identify the period of their composition. The connection between *Toledot Yeshu* and the New Testament, as well as the responses to the text in medieval Christian society, has also attracted considerable research attention, as has the book as “counter-history” in Jewish historical memory and in the copious Jewish polemical literature against Christianity.¹ Yet despite the large body of research devoted to the work, its basic character as a Hebrew narrative from the Middle Ages has been largely ignored. Before being a polemic against Christianity, a parody of Christian myth, or a subject of philological study, *Toledot Yeshu* is first and foremost a long narrative, written in Hebrew, that was produced in the Middle Ages. This definition of its essential nature generates different questions than those raised thus far in the research literature. And the attempt to answer them may lead our investigation in new and unexpected directions, helping us to better understand the meaning of this fascinating work and its place in medieval Jewish society.

¹ A detailed description of research until 1970 in William Horbury, *A Critical Examination of the Toledoth Jeshu* (Ph. D. diss.; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1970), 1–37. On recent research compare: Yaacov Deutsch, ‘*Toledot Yeshu*’ in *Christian Eyes: Reception and Response to ‘Toledot Yeshu’ in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period* (MA thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997 [in Hebrew]). On the concept of “counter history” in regard to *Toledot Yeshu*, see: Amos Funkenstein, “Anti-Jewish Propaganda: Pagan, Medieval and Modern,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 19 (1981): 56–72; David Biale, “Counter-History and Jewish Polemics Against Christianity: The *Sefer Toldot Yeshu* and the *Sefer Zerubavel*,” *Jewish Social Studies* 6 (1999): 130–45.

Origin

Before we can even speak of the literary character and structure of *Toledot Yeshu*, we must first address the complex and controversial issue of the time and place in which it was created. The dates that have been suggested range anywhere from the fourth to the sixteenth century CE, and the places proposed for its composition reach from Islamic Babylonia in the east to Christian Europe in the west. Close examination of the various theories, however, reveals no reliable evidence of the existence of the *full* narrative before the beginning of the ninth century (motifs of the life of Jesus appear in much earlier Jewish sources, but they are sporadic and don't come in full narrative form). The direct testimony of Agobard of Lyon and his disciple Amulo in 826 is the first unimpeachable source we have.² The statements of the bishop and his follower, which appear together, indicate that his library had a copy of *Toledot Yeshu* as early as the first quarter of the ninth century. However, and here we enter the realm of speculation, from his comments it seems clear that Agobard was not referring to a new work, but to a familiar existing text which, most likely, was not written in France, but elsewhere. Thus, the latest date for the origin of *Toledot Yeshu* would appear to be the second half of the eighth century.

We must also remain within the realm of speculation, well-grounded though it may be, in the attempt to establish the earliest possible date for its composition. It is difficult to imagine that such a provocative work, with such major historical and theological implications, would have been totally ignored for very long. I am not referring here to the fragmentary episodes and distorted motifs from the Gospels which had been circulating in oral and written form since the period of early Christianity. Evidence of these tales can be found not only in Christian literature, but in the Talmud and early Islamic writings as well. But as Peter Schäfer's study of Jesus in the Talmud demonstrates, surviving evidence in the Babylonian Talmud and the few Palestinian references indicate a lack of familiarity with any complete narrative of the life of Jesus from birth to death, at least at the time of the Babylonian Talmud in the fifth-sixth centuries.³ None of the texts that can be identified with certainty as direct quotations from *Toledot Yeshu*, such as those recorded by Agobard and Amulo or found in similarly reliable surviving Geniza fragments, dates from before the eighth century. Thus, on the basis of solid evidence and judicious speculation, we can conclude that *Toledot Yeshu* was most likely written in the eighth century CE.

Further support for this conclusion comes from analysis of the narrative's place of origin. The little evidence we have in this regard, as well as simple logic, points to the Jewish community in Babylonia. The first indications of this

² On this most important evidence see Peter Schäfer's article in the present volume.

³ Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

origin can be found in the earliest textual references to *Toledot Yeshu*, the Geniza fragments. Ginzberg, Falk, and Boyarin, all of whom studied these manuscripts, were unable to determine with any certitude whether the Aramaic in which they are written was Palestinian or Babylonian, although all three seem to lean in the direction of either the Babylonian idiom or the synthesis of the two dialects typically used in Babylonia. However, Michael Sokoloff, whose analysis of the language of the Aramaic manuscripts in the present volume is the most meticulous and authoritative to date, concludes unequivocally that it is early Geonic Babylonian.⁴ Moreover, in his detailed study of references to Jesus in rabbinical literature, Schäfer shows that the large majority of these allusions appear in the Babylonian Talmud and not in Palestinian sources. His investigation reveals that the Jewish community in Babylonia was familiar with the stories in the New Testament, and displayed considerable interest in Jesus' character and deeds.⁵ Common sense leads to the same conclusion. The freedom to retell a derogatory story of the birth and death of Jesus by using bits and pieces of motifs and narratives from oral and written sources, and then to prepare it in manuscript form and disseminate it – or in medieval terms, to copy it out again and again at the request of interested readers – would not have been possible in Byzantine Palestine, which by this time was largely Christian. Such a manuscript would have been rightly considered a deliberate attack on Christianity, an act of heresy.⁶ In Sassanid, and later Islamic Iraq, a story of this sort could have been created and circulated orally and in writing without sanctions or risk to individuals or to the Jewish community. Schäfer also reveals another aspect of Talmudic literature that is surprisingly apt for *Toledot Yeshu*: while interest in Palestine was mostly directed to the rise of the new sect and its tenets, the Babylonians were mainly intrigued by the life of Jesus himself.⁷

Furthermore, in my opinion, previous discussions of the origins of *Toledot Yeshu* did not give proper consideration to the cultural context, that is, to its creation not only as a polemic and ideological treatise, but as a literary work as

⁴ On the other hand, Willem F. Smelik, "The Aramaic Dialect(s) of the Toledot Yeshu Fragments," *Aramaic Studies* 7 (2009): 39–73, argues that the Aramaic of these fragments originates in Palestine, an argument that is definitely rejected by Michael Sokoloff in his article in the present volume.

⁵ Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*.

⁶ Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach Jüdischen Quellen*, (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1902; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1977), 10–11, prints one of many introductions to *TY*, which express the fear of the copyist that this work will fall into the hands of Christians. On the other hand, Elchanan Reiner emphasizes that in some earlier versions of *TY* the main episodes: the birth, education, the trial, crucifixion, burial and return – all take place in the Upper-Galilee, which is an evidence, according to him, that the composition was created in that area. See: Elchanan Reiner, "The Seal of Christos and the Potion that Failed," in *Continuity and Renewal: Jews and Judaism in Byzantine-Christian Palestine* (ed. Israel L. Levin; Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2004 [in Hebrew]), 355–86.

⁷ Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 115–22.

well. Comparing the Talmudic texts relating to Jesus with *Toledot Yeshu* reveals two distinct differences. The first, as noted above, is the fragmentary nature of the Talmudic references as opposed to the full narrative form of the *Toledot Yeshu*. The second is the Halakhic and midrashic context of the former as opposed to the textual autonomy of the latter. The story in *Toledot Yeshu* stands alone, with no Halakhic or midrashic trappings or pretexts. As Joseph Dan and I both describe elsewhere, these two features of *Toledot Yeshu* are typical of the early Hebrew narratives first produced in the Middle Ages. In this period, the episodic texts strewn throughout the Talmud and *midrashim* in reference to events and characters from Biblical times or later, such as the exodus from Egypt, the destruction of the Temple, Abraham, Moses, or Alexander the Great, were being replaced by full-scale literary narratives that told a whole story. They incorporated both the fragments in rabbinical literature and narrative motifs and episodes whose source was in medieval society. The other major feature of early Hebrew narratives at this time was their autonomy. Rabbinical literature contains no independent tales whatsoever. In other words, there are no stories that do not exist within, and by virtue of, a particular context, whether it be Halakha, ethical teachings, or homily. In contrast, from the very beginning medieval narratives sought to remain free of any such restraints, to constitute independent stories that existed in and of themselves rather than to serve the purposes of one context or another.

As I have long maintained, this important characteristic is associated with a major cultural development in the medieval Islamic east – the emergence of distinct disciplines. Thus, starting in the eighth century we find works devoted to specific disciplines, including prayer and liturgy, history, linguistics, philosophy, and commentary. The first autonomous narratives, such as *Midrash Aseret ha-Dibrot* and *The Alphabet of Ben-Sira*, belong to this category, and the same can be said for *Toledot Yeshu*. I therefore believe that it originated in Islamic Babylonia in the eighth century, not only because of its language and the lack of any credible earlier evidence of it, but because the cultural genre to which it belongs – a full autonomous story independent of any literary context – did not exist prior to this place and time.

Support for this contention can be found in evidence portraying the cultural milieu in Iraq in the Geonic period, particularly the *majlis*, convocations of scholars, some of which were closed while others were open to the public. Later testimony to this custom and spirit comes from a tenth century Muslim traveler from Spain. Describing a visit to Baghdad, he relates:

I twice attended their (the philosophers') assemblies ... At the first session there were present not only Muslims of all sects, but also agnostics, Parsee, materialists, atheists, Jews and Christians, in short, infidels of all kinds. Each of these sects had its spokesman, who had to defend its views. As soon as one of these spokesmen entered, the audience stood up reverently, and no one sat down until the spokesman took his seat.

Earlier evidence of the *majlis* dates from the ninth century.⁸ These public convocations would undoubtedly have been a fitting opportunity for a Christian scholar to present the story of the birth and death of Jesus. And as the traveler suggests, he would most probably have “had to defend its views” before the other participants, perhaps the Jews in particular, in respect to issues such as the virgin birth, the identity of Jesus as the son of God and Messiah, and the resurrection. In other words, it may very well have been at cultural events like the *majlis* that exposition of the Christian doctrine gave birth to the sporadic motifs that were later brought together in what we know as *Toledot Yeshu*. Viewing it as a narrative that took shape largely in oral form in the course of debate with agents of the Christian narrative and Muslim scholars, rather than as the work of a Jewish writer taking one of the Gospels and deliberately distorting it to create a counter-history, may better explain the existence of such a wide variety of different versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, a fact that is apparent even from the earliest references to it.

It is interesting to note the connection between *Toledot Yeshu* and another narrative created in the same cultural milieu: the earliest work attributed to Ben Sira in the Middle Ages. Quite some time ago (in 1975), I dubbed this book *Toledot Ben Sira*, perhaps due to some as yet unarticulated sense of a link to the *Toledot Yeshu*.⁹ Others before me have noted the similarity between the two, particularly in respect to the opening episode in *Toledot Ben Sira*. Ben Sira is said to have been born to the Prophet Jeremiah’s daughter through impregnation in a bathhouse by her father’s semen, which had earlier been emitted into the water. Clearly, this tale might have suggested an explanation, and one that could

⁸ The quotation is from Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959): v, 83. Further evidences and additional bibliography in: Rina Drory, *The Emergence of Jewish-Arabic Literary Contacts at the Beginning of the Tenth Century* (Tel-Aviv: The Porter Institute, 1988 [in Hebrew]), 122, brings another example to a similar event from the 9th century. Other supporting evidences to these type of events are brought by Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 167–9; Wadi Z. Haddad, “Continuity and Change in Religious adherence: 9th Century Baghdad,” in *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands 8th to 18th Centuries* (eds. Michael Gervers and Ramzi Jibran Bikhazi; Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), 33–54, and his clear conclusion in this matter: “Contact between the Christian and Muslim communities by the ninth century appears to have become widespread ... internal evidence from these writings reveals that intimate discussion concerning matters of faith were engaged in on several levels: both official with clergy as well as on the street level by youth gangs, radical groups and others of the rabble” (p. 49). “In the ninth century, Dawud ibn Marwan al-Muqammas, who was intimately integrated into the Christian Arab milieu of Harran, produced the first Jewish work of Kalam theology, the *Ishrun Maqala*, which was considered a major work in its field at least until the thirteenth century,” David E. Sklare, *Samuel ben Hofni Gaon and his Cultural World* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 48. On the *majlis* – convocation for debate or study – see *ibid.*, 73–74; 99–104.

⁹ Eli Yassif, *Tales of Ben-Sira in the Middle Ages* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1985 [in Hebrew]).

purport to be more logical, for the virgin birth of Christ in a “counter-history” or parody of the Christian story. As we have seen, in ninth century Babylonia, the time and place in which *Toledot Ben Sira* originated, Jewish and Muslim scholars, as well as the general public, were familiar with the Christian narrative. It is thus difficult to imagine someone reading or hearing the Hebrew text at that time without being reminded of the virgin birth.

However, the connection between the two Hebrew compositions goes beyond the opening episode, which has been the sole focus of the comparison thus far. Both are also characterized by overt, at times brazen, eroticism, a fact that incurred the rage of religious leaders (especially in the case of *Toledot Ben Sira*). Both describe homosexual encounters (between the evil descendents of Ephraim in a bathhouse in *Ben Sira*; Judah defiling Jesus in this manner in several versions of *Toledot Yeshu*), the spilling of semen in vain (Jeremiah in the bathhouse; Judah spraying it on Jesus as he chases him in the sky), and adultery and illegitimate relations (Lilith, the Queen of Sheba, and the animals in the Ark in *Ben Sira*; the impregnation of Mary by a lustful adulterer and later her own acts of adultery in *Toledot Yeshu*). Furthermore, like Ben Sira, Jesus is discovered to be a child prodigy as soon as he is brought before his teacher, and like him, he treats his teachers with arrogance and disdain.¹⁰

The similarity between these two works and yet a third composition lends further support to my contentions regarding the origins of *Toledot Yeshu*. In the early studies of *Toledot Ben Sira*, Moritz Steinschneider, Israel Lévi and Louis Ginzberg¹¹ already noted its resemblance to an apocryphal work known as *The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Savior*, particularly in an episode that features prominently in both: the hero’s first introduction to his teacher. This is the description in *The Arabic Gospel*:

There was, moreover, at Jerusalem, a certain man named Zacchaeus, who taught boys. He said to Joseph: Why, O Joseph, dost thou not bring Jesus to learn his letters? Joseph agreed to do so, and reported the matter to the Lady Mary. They therefore took Him to the master; and he, as soon as he saw Him, wrote out the alphabet for Him, and told Him to say Aleph. And when He had said Aleph, the master ordered Him to pronounce Beth. And the Lord Jesus said to him: Tell me first the meaning of the letter Aleph, and then I shall pronounce Beth. And when the master threatened to flog Him, the Lord Jesus explained to him the meanings of the letters Aleph and Beth; also which figures of the letter were straight, which crooked, which drawn round into a spiral, which marked with points, which without them, why one letter went before another; and many other things He began to recount and to elucidate which the master himself had never either heard or read in any book. The Lord Jesus, moreover, said to the master: Listen, and I shall say them to thee.

¹⁰ In the Strasbourg manuscript (Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 39), the name of Jesus is Yehoshua’, after his uncle, and right after his birth, his mother “seated him in from of a primary-school teacher (*melamed*) and he was very clever ... learned in the Torah and Talmud.” He behaves rudely to his teachers – exactly as did Ben-Sira.

¹¹ See Yassif, *Ben-Sira*, 34–36, and especially note 18.

And He began clearly and distinctly to repeat Aleph, Beth, Gimel, Daleth, on to Tau. And the master was astonished, and said: I think that this boy was born before Noah. And turning to Joseph, he said: Thou hast brought to me to be taught a boy more learned than all the masters. To the Lady Mary also he said: This son of thine has no need of instruction.¹²

This is very similar to the episode in *Toledot Ben Sira* in which he is brought before the elementary teacher and in response to each letter he is taught, the child utters an aphorism that reveals the teacher's lascivious thoughts. Most scholars agree that reliable evidence of the existence of *The Arabic Gospel* dates from the ninth century, although it was probably based on earlier traditions which it brought together in a single volume in Arabic for eastern Christian believers.

The two Hebrew compositions also show similarities to another classic Arabic text, the Koran. In the Sura "Mary" (#19), Mary is accused of adultery and prostitution as a result of her pregnancy and the birth of Jesus, and it is the child who explains how he was conceived and that he is the son of God. The very same scene appears in both *Toledot Yeshu* and *Toledot Ben Sira*.

A further connection between the two Hebrew texts can be found in relation to a subject of central importance to both Jewish and Christian culture: the Messiah. According to the story of *Ben Sira*, Jeremiah impregnates his daughter in Jerusalem, that is, before the destruction of the Temple. When Ben Sira is born, and immediately afterwards when Nebuchadnezzar sends his soldiers for him, Jeremiah is no longer mentioned and Palestine is already under the rule of the Babylonian king. In other words, these events take place after the fall of Jerusalem. Ben Sira was therefore born at the time of the destruction of the Temple, when according to Jewish tradition, the Messiah would be born.¹³ If we add the divine wisdom of Ben Sira, which is apparent throughout the book, we can not ignore the possibility that its author regarded him as a parody of the Messiah, similar to the figure of Jesus in *Toledot Yeshu*. Furthermore, Ben Sira's name was Jeshua or Jeshu, as is the name of the hero of *Toledot Yeshu*,¹⁴ and this might even explain the choice of the ancient poet Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus) as the subject of the latter text. And there is more. One of the most intriguing episodes in *Toledot Ben Sira* is an animal tale:

And he (Nebuchadnezzar) asked him (Ben Sira): horse and mule and ass, why do they piss where others do and sniff their dung? He said to him, when the three of them were created and given to the first man he began to work them very hard. The mule said to the

¹² *The Arabic Gospel of The Infancy of the Saviour* (trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* 8, 404–15, par. 48); see also: James K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹³ Midrash on Lamentations 1:16, and to variants and discussion see: Galit Hasan-Rokem, *Web of Life: Folklore and Midrash in Rabbinic Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 146–90.

¹⁴ On the name/names of Jesus see: David Flusser, *Jesus* (Jerusalem: Magness Press, 1997), 24–25.

horse and the ass, all the animals rest from their labor and we have no rest from our labor. Let us ask God when our toil will end, and if our seed will not vanish from the world. They answered him: well said. Right away they went to the Holy One Blessed be He and said to him, Lord of the Universe, when will our toil be lifted from us? He said to them: when your waters turn the grindstones and your dung has the fragrance of perfume, at that time will I end your toil ... Their temper appeased, they instructed their offspring that wherever they see water they were to piss so that a great river would form and turn the grindstones, and when they dropped dung they were to sniff it to see if it had the fragrance of perfume. When that happened, they would be released from slavery into freedom. And so they continue to do so.¹⁵

It is hard to imagine of a more scathing satire of messianism. On the overt level, it contains sharp criticism of those impatient for the coming of the Messiah, those who urge God to hasten the redemption and are always looking for signs of its imminent arrival. But it is also no less critical of those who believe the Messiah has already come, those who see the “water” and “perfume” that herald His arrival, but do not realize that they are deluded fools, that what they see is only piss and dung. The public, familiar with Christian rites, would not have missed this far from subtle allusion to the baptismal font and incense of the church. Thus, according to the text, what was perceived as tokens of the Messiah was only filth.

Nevertheless, the most important feature to emerge from a comparison between *Toledot Yeshu* and *Toledot Ben Sira* is not that they contain similar motifs or stories, but that they are written in the same tone and belong to the same literary genre: the parody. Both make use of the “lowest” elements, principally the human organs situated below the belt, to “explain” the central myths in each of the two religions: the heroes of the Bible (the Prophet Jeremiah, King David, King Solomon), the son of God, the virgin birth, and the Messiah. The contrast between the sacred theological source and its elucidation by means of genitalia and bodily excretions creates a tension known in the theory of humor as incongruity, producing the psychological response of derision and laughter. This is precisely the literary technique employed in both texts, and in both cases it characterizes the entire work, not merely certain motifs or episodes. In regard to *Toledot Ben Sira* it has been claimed, and rightly so, that this combination of familiarity with the sources, sexual explicitness, and base humor was most likely the work of youngsters, probably students in the large *yeshivas* in Babylonia in the Geonic period. For them, this type of composition would have represented a *midrash*-like creativity (retelling an earlier text) and subversive criticism of contemporary attitudes (Christianity, religious hypocrisy, messianism), as well as a release from the pressure of the strict regime of studies and discipline in the *yeshiva*.¹⁶ The same

¹⁵ Yassif, *Tales of Ben-Sira*, 240–41.

¹⁶ David Stern, “The Alphabet of Ben Sira and the Early History of Parody in Jewish Literature,” in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel* (eds. Hindy

could be said of *Toledot Yeshu*. The similarity between the two compositions in terms of cultural context, literary genre, and distortion of the story of the virgin birth, the attitude toward messianism, and the crude humor would seem to lead to an obvious conclusion that they were created in the same time, place, and milieu.

Thus, a significant accumulation of textual and contextual elements in *Toledot Yeshu* point to Jewish Iraq in the second-third century of Islam. We can therefore conclude that it was written by young Jewish scholars, in and around the Babylonian *yeshivot* in the eighth century. I believe this determination answers the majority (although admittedly not all) of the cultural, philological, and historical questions raised in the scholarship of *Toledot Yeshu* over the years.¹⁷

Toledot Yeshu as a Volksbuch

In 1982, Günter Schlichting classified *Toledot Yeshu* as a Volksbuch, or folk book.¹⁸ Unfortunately, he did not offer a precise definition of this genre or explain why he categorized *Toledot Yeshu* in this way. We can only assume that his opinion was based on the extensive German research into this genre of folklore, which includes popular tales such as the *Nibelungenlied*, *Faust*, the chivalric romances, and *The Wandering Jew*. They are defined as short narratives published as small inexpensive books which generally contained folktales that had previously been spread orally.¹⁹ The fact that Schlichting's book is devoted mainly to a comparison of the Volksbuch *Tam u-Mu'ad* with the many earlier versions of the story suggests what may be the overriding feature that convinced the author to ascribe *Toledot Yeshu* to this genre: its numerous versions.

In the field of folklore research, different versions, or "multiple existence," is considered a prerequisite for defining a story as a folk narrative. The many ver-

Nayman and Judith H. Newman; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 423–48. An earlier perspective on *TY* as a parody was suggested by Morris Goldstein, *Jesus in the Jewish Tradition* (New York: the Macmillan Company, 1950), 163.

¹⁷ The strongest objection to this conclusion is that of Elchanan Reiner who suggest Palestine/the Upper Galilee in the early Byzantine period as the origin of the work. Compare Reiner, "The Seal." As explained earlier, I cannot accept this proposition, as there are too strong arguments against it.

¹⁸ Günter Schlichting, *Ein jüdisches Leben Jesu: Die verschollene Toledot-Jeschu-Fassung Tam u-mu'ad* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1982), 1–2. Both Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, and Horbury, *A Critical Examination*, although not using directly the term Volksbuch, treated, in large portions of their studies of *TY*, the work as such.

¹⁹ Lutz Mackensen, *Die Deutschen Volksbücher* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1927); Hans Joachim Kreutzer, *Der Mythos vom Volksbuch. Studien zur Wirkungsgeschichte des frühen deutschen Romans seit der Romantik* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1977). Ben E. Perry, "Some Traces of Lost Medieval Story Books," in *Humaniora: Essays in Literature, Folklore, Bibliography; Honoring Archer Taylor* (eds. Wayland D. Hand and Gustave O. Arlt; Locust Valley, N. Y.: J. J. Augustin, 1960), 150–60, describes the route that folk-books written in the East made, through Southern Italy and Spain, into Europe. I suggest that a similar route was made by *TY* as well.

sions of *Toledot Yeshu*, along with the fact that it is anonymous, indicate that it was regarded by the society that told the story as part of its cultural property, and its members therefore gave themselves permission to change it and adapt it to their own life and beliefs. In the early period of folklore research, this approach was applied only to stories told orally. However, it later became clear that folk literature was disseminated no less by written texts, with the same principles remaining valid.²⁰ This gave rise to the critical term *Volksbuch*, which contributed to our understanding of the nature of folklore in literate societies from the Middle Ages onward.

Toledot Yeshu indeed fulfills the criteria for its definition as a *Volksbuch*, and most conspicuously the basic requirement of “multiple existence.”²¹ This aspect of the work is not merely a matter of critical jargon, but is of central importance in comprehending the text and its social significance. Thus far, the countless versions of the book, appearing from the early Middle Ages on in nearly every Jewish community, have been treated in research as a philological hurdle that must be overcome by tedious comparisons and detailed diagrams. While this approach may provide work for scholars, it does little to advance our understanding of the text. Defining it as a *Volksbuch*, however, may change our perception entirely. As noted above, in folklore theory, “multiple existence” is not simply a challenge for scholars, but a cultural marker. It indicates that for the society or community which has introduced changes into a text it received from written or oral sources, that text has become part of its cultural legacy. The nature of the changes reveals the way the society perceives itself and its values. Thus, the different versions of *Toledot Yeshu* should not be seen as textual mutations of some *Urtext*, but as the products of cultural interactions, whether with the Gospels, among the various versions themselves (intertextuality), or between the texts and diverse historical, social, and cultural realities. Each version of the story should therefore be regarded as an autonomous composition that arrived in a particular community and underwent a process of acceptance and adaptation to its worldview and the issues on its cultural agenda (oikotypification). Consequently, here too, as we consider the major differences between the versions regarding the character and childhood of Jesus, the sources of his miraculous powers and charisma, his complex relationship with the Jewish community, his battle with Judas Iscariot, and the separation of Judaism from Christianity, we will relate to them not as deviations from an early authoritative version, but as independent negotiations

²⁰ On the history of research and the contribution of Albert Wesselski in general folkloristics and Moses Gaster to the Jewish field see Eli Yassif, “The Folk-Writer,” in *The Golem of Prague and Other Tales of Wonder* (ed. Eli Yassif, Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 1991 [in Hebrew]), 7–72; idem., “Moses Gaster: Pioneer in Folklore and Jewish Studies,” *Pe'amim* 100 (2004): 113–24 (in Hebrew).

²¹ On the concept and its implications see: Eli Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning* (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 1994 [in Hebrew]), 5–6; 565, note 6.

through which medieval Jewish communities expressed their attitudes toward issues central to their lives and toward the dominance of Christianity.

Defining *Toledot Yeshu* as a Volksbuch has other important implications as well. Studies have pointed to the main difference between this book and the Gospels, not in respect to specific episodes, but in terms of the composition as a whole: the exclusion of any non-narrative textual elements, such as homilies, moral lessons, parables, instruction, or aphorisms. *Toledot Yeshu* ignores these components entirely, confining itself solely to the narrative elements. Research generally refers to this as “omitting” parts or “pruning” the lush text of the Gospels. However, classifying it as a Volksbuch may provide a different explanation. The early Firkovich version²² bears the subtitle, “A book of Fables (about) Jesus Christ,” and concludes with the words: “and thus ends this book with the fable of Jesus Christ.” This version makes explicit use of the genre label “fable” in its medieval sense of a narrative – *fabula*, thus indicating that its author, and other scribes, did not view *Toledot Yeshu* as a moral or polemic work, but as a story. Indeed, one of the defining principles of folk literature is the “law of the epic plot,”²³ whereby non-narrative forms of expression, such as description or reflection, are absent and the focus is mainly on the narrative plot. This is not to say that folktales contain no descriptions or ideas, but that these are expressed primarily through the plot. Based on this principle of folk-narrative, the differences between the Gospels of the New Testament and *Toledot Yeshu* can be seen not as an attempt to omit or ignore the tenets of Christianity, but as a deliberate *choice of storytelling over religious homily*, that is, as the decision to narrate the Christian Gospel as a folktale. The fact that this principle is maintained in every one of the dozens of versions of the book indicates that the writers/tellers applied it instinctively, as did storytellers of folktales throughout the ages.

In order to fully understand the significance of defining *Toledot Yeshu* as a Volksbuch, it may help to compare it with another work from the same domain, *The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Savior* mentioned above. The earliest testimonies to the existence of *The Arabic Gospel* also come from the ninth century, and it was also created within an Islamic culture. Moreover, it too appears in a multitude of versions, and was apparently popular, in both oral and written form, among eastern Christians. Thus, *The Arabic Gospel* has much in common with *Toledot Yeshu*. However, the value of the comparison derives not from the similarities, but from identifying the differences and their meaning. Indeed, the distinctions in structure and content between these two works of folk literature are very telling. Although they both draw on the same source –

²² Yaacov Deutsch, “New Evidence of Early Versions of *Toledot Yeshu*,” *Tarbiz* 69 (2000): 177–97 (in Hebrew).

²³ Axel Olrik, “Epic Laws of Folk Narrative,” in *The Study of Folklore* (ed. Alan Dundes; Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1965), 138–40. *TY* combines, actually, two integral “epic laws”: “the unity of the plot,” and “concentration on the Leading Character.”

the gospel tradition if not the New Testament itself – *Toledot Yeshu* adopts the narrative frame of Jesus' life from birth to death, while *The Arabic Gospel* borrows only the episodic tales of Jesus' miracles and adds dozens more of its own making. And according to *The Arabic Gospel*, all these miracles take place in a short period of time, when Jesus' family is fleeing from Herod to Egypt, and he is still an infant in the cradle. The text contains the tales of dozens of lepers, people possessed by demons, the lame, and other wretched souls of all sorts who are healed by touching Jesus' body or clothes. In other words, while *Toledot Yeshu* tells one continuous and comprehensive story with a coherent sequential connection between the parts, *The Arabic Gospel* tells numerous stories with no link between them save for the identity of the miracle worker. Moreover, the order or number of the stories is immaterial, as any one of them could have been omitted without interfering with the sequence and more could have been added without changing the character of the composition. Thus, *The Arabic Gospel* is a collection of folktales, whereas *Toledot Yeshu* is a folk epic that tells one single story of a biographical nature. Since the Gospels themselves belong to both literary genres,²⁴ each of the two pieces of folk literature could take from this rich tradition the form and content that best suited its purposes. *The Arabic Gospel* wished to stress the divinity of Jesus in the most basic sense: his very body was holy, and so from the moment he was born, merely touching it brought about a miracle. On the other hand, *Toledot Yeshu* totally ignored this aspect of the story, focusing instead on its own objective: to controvert the frame story itself. To do so, it retold the whole narrative of Jesus' life from birth to death.

The two works represent the two major forms of the Volksbuch: anthologies that bring together in writing a collection of folktales previously told orally; and books that tell a single epic story. Both categories were designed for a large audience. Consequently, in our case, both books deliberately ignored the non-narrative portions of the gospel tradition – homilies, moral lessons, parables, prophecies – and focused solely on the plot in accordance with the poetics of folk literature. Each opted for the narrative technique that best promoted its objectives, whether a series of tales each of which added to the wonders of the savior for an audience of his worshippers, or an epic chronology of his life written as a subversive parody for the enjoyment of his deniers.

²⁴ Already the "form criticism" approach to the New Testament considered large portions of it as independent *Novellen*, and thus compared it to narrative tendencies of the pagan culture and rabbinic literature. Compare Martin Dibelius, *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1961), 66–100, and David B. Gowler, "The Chreia," in *The Historical Jesus in Context* (eds. Amy-Jill Levine et al.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 132–48, who sees in the evangelical miracle-tales short anecdotes similar to the Greek *chreia*. On the other hand, other scholars emphasize the epic, unified narrative of the New Testament: Dennis R. MacDonald, "Imitations of Greek Epic in the Gospels," in Levine, ed., *The Historical Jesus*, 372–84; idem., *Does the New Testament Imitate Homer? Four Cases from the Acts of the Apostles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

This comparison between the two works demonstrates that *Toledot Yeshu* clearly belongs to the category of folk literature. Like other medieval Hebrew folk-books, such as *Midrash 'Aseret ha-Dibrot* (The Midrash of the Ten Commandments), *The Alphabet of Ben-Sira*, and *Hibbur Yafeh me-ha-Yeshu 'ah* (An Elegant Composition Concerning Relief after Adversity), which omitted the Halakhic or homiletic context of Talmudic tales, *Toledot Yeshu* omitted the religious context of the New Testament narrative. This fact has considerable social significance, indicating that it was aimed at large sectors of society who had no interest in the theological debate. Just as the humorous tales in *Midrash 'Ekhah Rabbah* (The Midrash on Lamentations) reveal how the general public, as opposed to scholars, dealt with the threat of Hellenism,²⁵ so *Toledot Yeshu* presents a convincing answer to one of the questions that has occupied research into medieval Jewish culture since its inception: How is it that Jews in the Middle Ages seem to have contended with rising Christianity initially through stories rather than theological polemics? Understanding that the writers and tellers of *Toledot Yeshu* created a folk-narrative or folk-book in accordance with the epic conventions of that genre sheds new light on this phenomenon. First and foremost, they wished to tell a story, not to write a polemical essay.²⁶ The story could be widely disseminated both orally and in writing, providing the general public with answers to their questions about the powerful religious adversary that had emerged out of Judaism itself. The choice of the genre of Volksbuch thus had both literary and social ramifications.

From Victim to Villain

As we are relating here to *Toledot Yeshu* as a literary text, it is only proper that we consider one of the most basic features of any work of literature: characterization, and most particularly, the characterization of the protagonist. From this perspective, the different versions of the book can be divided into two distinct categories. In the first, which contains what appear to be the older versions, Jesus is presented in the early stages of his life as a positive, complex, and even tragic figure. He is born, at no fault of his own, into a hapless reality as the illegitimate child of a menstruate woman. The first time his mother brings him to a teacher we are told, "The wicked one was an exceptionally bright and studious pupil. For that reason he was well-loved."²⁷ Similarly, the St. Petersburg version, one

²⁵ Eli Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning* (trans. Jacqueline Teitelbaum; Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press 1999), 177–79.

²⁶ On this characteristic see: Ora Limor, "Judaism Looks at Christianity: The Debate of Nestor the Priest and Toledot Yeshu," *Pe'amim* 75 (1998), 109–25 (in Hebrew).

²⁷ Samuel Krauss, "Une nouvelle recension hébraïque du Toledot Yeshu," *REJ* 103 (1938): 77.

of the earliest known to us, relates: "And Jesus studied well and was great in the Torah and was keen and clever."²⁸ Yet however hard he tries to free himself of his dark past, he can not escape his fate:

The wicked one was disporting with the boys outside as lads do, and he provoked the boys in their game, and they said to him that he was the illegitimate son of a menstruate woman! You think you are the son of Yochanan? You are not his son, you are the son of Yosef Pandera who lay with your mother when she was menstruate and sired you the depraved son of a depraved man. When the wicked one heard that, he ran home to his mother in rage and shouted a great and bitter shout, saying, Mother, Mother, tell me the truth. When I was a young boy the children said to me that I am the illegitimate son of a menstruate woman, and I thought it was an idle taunt, and now the lads yell at me every day, all of them as one, illegitimate son of a menstruate woman and they say I am the son of Yosef Pandera who came to you when you were menstruate.²⁹

Where could the children have heard this malicious gossip about Jesus' birth? -- From their parents, of course. According to the story, the boy had to cope with these ugly rumors from the time he was a little child and until he was a young man. His dash home to his mother, his bitter cry in search of truth, and the need to contend with his dark past are nothing less than tragic.³⁰ We must remember that this is a work of literature, not a historical document. And this is the manner in which the creators of these versions of the story chose to characterize the early life of their protagonist. Just how complex his figure is in these versions can be seen by comparing them to the second group of texts, in which Jesus is born evil and is depicted as such from the very beginning. One typical example begins with the following description:

Jesus Christ was arrogant from the time he learned to talk, and he was devious and cunning and argumentative and known for his foul language. He spoke of the prophets and Torah scholars displaying envy and greed and conceit, and sought tribute, and was disdainful of the Torah and Moses ... and when the rabbis heard of it they said, because he was so disrespectful, he was scrutinized.³¹

In all the versions in the second group, Jesus' status as illegitimate manifests itself in his personality,

When the boy grew older, (his mother) took him to the *bet midrash* to learn Torah. And the illegitimate one was clever and would learn in one day what others could not learn in a year, and of this the rabbis said, bastards are clever, and especially this one who was the illegitimate son of a menstruate woman ... and he spoke with such conceit that showed contempt for his rabbi and for the sages of Israel.³²

²⁸ Deutsch, "New Evidence," 183.

²⁹ Krauss, "Une nouvelle," 78.

³⁰ So argued already Ora Limor, "Judaism Looks at Christianity," 120.

³¹ Michael Higger, "The Story of Jesus," *Chorev* 3 (1936/7): 144.

³² Krauss, "Une nouvelle," 66.

Even when the authors of these versions laud Jesus' intelligence and study skills, they present these qualities as deviations deriving from the sin of his birth as the illegitimate son of a menstruate woman. In other words, whereas the first group describes him as an innocent child, attributing his hostility to Jewish society to the cruelty he suffered at its hands, the second group depicts his villainy and hatred for the Jews as inborn traits resulting from his conception in sin.

Indeed, the narrative development in the two categories is utterly reversed. In the first group of versions Jesus is accused from early childhood of being a bastard and the son of a menstruate woman although he himself is blameless, while in the second group "because he was so disrespectful, he was scrutinized." It was only *after* his villainy became apparent, when he was still a child that the rabbis looked into his past and discovered what there was to discover, so that Jewish society was in no way responsible for his fate and actions. The complex characterization in the earlier versions is even more impressive at the point in the story when Jesus' family returns from Egypt,

And it happened in those days that the *bet din* (rabbinic court of law) in that place presided over trials of the people and their judgments were influenced by bribery and favoritism. And Jesus Christ would sit with them and lecture them on the justice, and they were menaced by him for it and he prevailed over them in the argument ... And they loathed him for it and sought a pretext to remove him from among them ... And between the hearings the judges called for his mother Mary after the death of her husband Joseph and made her swear in the name of the Lord, tell us from where this man Jesus came to you, whose son is he that speaks to us with such imperiousness ... When Jesus returned from the village and came to take his accustomed place, the judges rose and pushed him away saying: a bastard shall not enter the congregation of the Lord. He said to them: even if it is as you say, I am wiser than you and God-fearing and I will not spare you rebuke ... They answered: from now on we do not accept your words and you will not sit among us for you are a bastard. He appealed to them and they would not be appeased until he wearied and went off vehement and "Jeroboam went astray."³³

This episode, which appears in one form or another in all the versions in the first group, is an indication of their literary and ideological complexity. In a manner not very different from the gospel narrative, the events are recounted from the point of view of Jesus. He sees deep-rooted corruption in Jewish society, not among the people, but among the judges and rabbis who are meant to be its moral compass. He tries to rise up against it, admonishing, arguing, but his foes fight back with the basest means: gossip and the exposure of the dark past of his family in which he had no part. What is more, he attempts to appease them, to win favor with the leaders of Jewish society, but in their fanaticism and corruption they push him away, and consequently, it is the unscrupulous judges and rabbis who are primarily responsible for the fact that he left the fold.

³³ Deutsch, "New Evidence," 184 (Ms. St. Petersburg 274).

As the rest of the story unfolds, Jesus is depicted as a wicked man who deceives his followers, presenting himself as the Messiah and the Son of God, and thus his execution is justified according to the internal logic of the narrative. However, this does not detract from the literary and ideological complexity of these versions. Jesus is characterized as a person who develops, not as a negative character from the beginning as in the second group of versions. His fate is not determined by the sinful circumstances of his birth, but by the decisions and actions of the society in which he lives, and the Jesus of the start of the story is not the Jesus of its end. It might be said that the first group of versions of *Toledot Yeshu* took from the Gospels not only the frame narrative of Jesus' early public activities, but also the tone: criticism of the moral conduct of Jewish society, Jesus' fight against corruption, and his being expelled from the Jewish community rather than making a personal decision to withdraw from it. Naturally, the theme of the insults hurled at Jesus for being the son of an adulteress, presented as the underlying cause of his suffering and tragic fate, does not appear in the Gospels, since any mention of it could give credence to rumors of this nature that were already circulating in the period of early Christianity.³⁴ These versions of *Toledot Yeshu* employ the theme as an effective and sophisticated literary means of delineating the protagonist as a "round" character (in contrast to the "flat" character that features in the second group), a man who struggles in his youth with the bitter fate he can not escape, just like every tragic hero in world literature.

The Turning Point

Toledot Yeshu also displays a connection to the genre of the novella, the long-short story which relates unusual events in a person's life and is generally of an erotic nature.³⁵ This comes to bear as early as the introductory episode, the seduction of Mary. To judge by the early versions of *Toledot Yeshu* (e.g., St. Petersburg, Strasbourg, etc.), in all of which it appears in one form or another, this novella-like opening episode was most likely an integral part of the text from the very beginning. The various elements of the story – the adulterer lusting after a beautiful wife, appealing to her elderly mother to help him in his scheme, laying in wait until her husband (or betrothed) has left the house, sneaking into the house, disguising himself as her husband and fornicating with her throughout the night, and the way in which her husband learns of the sinful deed – all sound as if they came straight out of a story by Boccaccio,

³⁴ See among others: Goldstein, *Jesus in the Jewish Tradition*, 147–66.

³⁵ From the rich research on the novella see: Robert J. Clements and Joseph Gibaldi, eds., *Anatomy of the Novella* (New York: New York University Press, 1977); Corradina Caporello-Szykman, *The Boccaccian Novella: The Creation and Waning of a Genre* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), and the rich bibliography in each. See also below, note 37.

and are equally typical of the tales in the classic Persian-Arabic anthology *One Thousand and One Nights* and the popular *Tales of Sendebār* (or *Seven Sages*), which emerged in Arabic or Persian in the same time and place where I believe *Toledot Yeshu* originated. A story from the *Tales of Sendebār* can be a valuable example of such stories, which was undoubtedly known to Jewish readers (or listeners). It is told as a separate tale of the type known in research literature as “*iuvenis femina*”:

There once was a man who had a most beautiful wife. Lusting for her was a young man who could not attain her because her husband was jealous. So jealous that he used to lock her in a room every day and he'd carry the key of the room with him. Now this merchant was old and the youth became bedridden because of his great love. Now an old crone came to him and asked him: what manner of illness have you? So he told her why he had fallen sick. And she said to him: will you do all that I command you? He replied: yes. So she told him: you get up and shave off your beard and put on women's clothes and cover your face with a veil right up to the eyes. This he did. Now the old crone went to the aged man and said to him: I pray you, my lord, I am a widow, and I've got a one and only daughter, who's very virtuous, and I wish to go on a trip to another city. Now I've heard how virtuous your wife is, and I was afraid to leave my daughter in a strange place. So now, if it pleases you, I'd like to bring her here, with her expenses, and let her serve your wife till I get back. Replied the old man: Bring her expense money and let her lie in the same room as my wife. Whereupon the crone went for the young man, fetched him thither, and he lay with her.³⁶

This story can be found in all medieval Hebrew translations of *Tales of Sendebār*, although they (the translations we know of, not the text itself which is much earlier) admittedly date from a later period, indicates that the Jews were familiar with it, whether from earlier versions of the book in Persian or Arabic or from oral traditions taken from it. Whatever their source, however, the story demonstrates that typical novella-like elements found their way into the *Toledot Yeshu*.

One of the basic structural characteristics in the theory of the novella is the unexpected turning point or *Wendepunkt*.³⁷ This refers to an imposing, frightening, erotic, or tragic event that changes the life of the protagonist and shifts the direction of the plot. In *Toledot Yeshu*, the turning point comes at the moment that Jesus goes from a persecuted young student to public figure acting against Jewish society. In the St. Petersburg manuscript, immediately after he is ousted by the rabbis, “he left his place in the land of Galilee. And he declared, ‘I am the son of God and believe in me in my miracles which I shall show you,’ and every vain and irresponsible fellow gathered around him.”³⁸ In the Munk manuscript

³⁶ This is the medieval Hebrew version, in Morris Epstein, *Tales of Sendebār* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1967), 246–50.

³⁷ On this concept in the theory of the novella see: Benno von Wiese, *Novelle* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1963), 15 ff.; John M. Ellis, *Narration in the German Novelle: Theory and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 4.

³⁸ Deutsch, “New Evidence,” 184.

published by Samuel Krauss, he hounds his mother until she tells him the truth about his birth, and “finally after much tormenting she told him the truth that he is Jesus son of Pandera and he is the son of a menstruate woman. And he left off his mother, saying: ‘If I am the illegitimate son of a menstruate woman I will act like the illegitimate son of a menstruate woman!’ And immediately he secretly went to the Temple for the Ineffable Name was carved on the foundation stone of the Temple.”³⁹ In the Higger version: “as he heard that it was made known, that his mother was a harlot and he was a bastard and the son of a menstruate woman, immediately he left and fled to Jerusalem ... and in the Temple on the Foundation Stone, which is the rock which the Patriarch Jacob anointed in oil, there were the letters of the Ineffable Name.”⁴⁰ Similar accounts appear in all the other versions of this group as well.

In other words, the narrative turning point in which the story goes from being the biography of a child conceived in sin to the account of decisive historical events occurs at the moment in which the young man learns his true identity. This is the cause, the motive, for his very next act: stealing the Ineffable Name from the Temple and using it for illicit and subversive purposes against the Jews. At this precise point, the protagonist is transformed from an innocent child into the ultimate villain who changed the face of Jewish history. In this sense, the *Wendepunkt* of *Toledot Yeshu* is not merely a narrative turning point typical of a novella, but a historical turning point as well, and the authors of all the versions of the text were very well aware of its weighty significance.

The hypothetical question of how a different turning point would alter the plot is one of the fundamental issues in the theory of the novella. If the protagonist had acted differently, if he hadn’t decided to slaughter his favorite hawk to prepare a meal for his beloved who loved him only for his hawk, how would the story and his life be different? If he had not raised his eyes to the top of the tower and seen the young wife of the rich old man imprisoned there, would his life have taken a totally different course? The alternative narrative or course of events creating itself in the mind of the reader or listener of the story is a major aesthetic component in the theory of the novella. This issue is especially pertinent in respect to the turning point in *Toledot Yeshu*. How would the story have unfolded if Jewish society – the schoolboys, the rabbis in the *bet midrash* – had not taunted the young man as they did? After all, he removes the Ineffable Name of God from Judaism, from the Temple, because they expelled him from the Jewish collective. He flees to the Upper Galilee after being shamed in public as the illegitimate son of a menstruate woman, and only then “when the word that Jesus was a bastard was made known, he left the Upper Galilee, and stole to Jerusalem and entered the Temple and learned there the holy letters and wrote down the

³⁹ Krauss, “Une nouvelle,” 80.

⁴⁰ Higger, “The Story of Jesus,” 144.

name.”⁴¹ Any such hypothetical question always contains an element of criticism. Here it implies that if the Jews had treated Jesus better, not only the plot of a story but perhaps the entire course of Jewish history might have been different.

Charisma and Polemics

The direct outcome of the turning point that drives the plot of the story is thus the theft of the Ineffable Name. With this act, Jesus goes from a wretched taunted child to a powerful charismatic leader. According to the theory of the novella, this crucial point in the narrative also holds the meaning of the tale. Indeed, interpreting a novella often relies on the definition of the turning point. In our case, however, the importance of the theft of the holy name carved on the foundation stone of the Temple does not derive solely from its function in terms of plot development. It can also be said to be the most original episode in *Toledot Yeshu*, and nearly the only one that does not have a source in the gospel narrative (the only other episode that meets this description is the battle in the sky between Jesus and Judas Iscariot, but the two scenes are linked by the role of the Ineffable name, a subject discussed at greater length below.) Whereas all the other episodes in the book – the virgin birth, Jesus’ wanderings, the miraculous acts of healing, recruitment of the disciples, persecution by the Pharisees, Jesus being brought before Pontius Pilate or Queen Helena, the crucifixion, and the resurrection – are drawn in one way or another from the Gospels, there is no mention, or even hint, of the theft or use of the Ineffable Name in the New Testament. It is therefore the most creative and imaginative episode in *Toledot Yeshu*, fashioned virtually out of whole cloth.⁴²

As both its role in the plot and its originality indicate the importance of the episode, it must be key to any interpretation of the text. In order to understand its meaning, let us look at the two early versions of the story from which it is absent: the Geniza fragments and the St. Petersburg manuscript. In one of the Geniza fragments, John the Baptist is brought before Joshua ben Perachia and Marianus the Elder to be questioned,

⁴¹ The Wagenseil version, in Ora Limor, ed., *Jews and Christians in Western Europe: Encounter between Cultures in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (5 vols.; Tel-Aviv: The Open University, 1997 [in Hebrew]), 4:394.

⁴² Almost. Because of the fragmental story in the Talmud (*b. Shabbat* 104b; *y. Shabbat* 12:4): “‘He who cuts upon his flesh.’ It is a tradition that Rabbi Eliezer said to the Wise: ‘Did not Ben Stada bring witchcraft from Egypt in a cut which was upon his flesh?’ They said to him: ‘He was a fool, and we do not bring proof from a fool.’” On this, and full analysis of the text see Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 15–21, as well as the important evidence on this by Celsus: “Having been brought up in obscurity, he (Jesus) went as a hired laborer to Egypt and there acquired experience of some (magical) powers. Thence he returned, proclaiming himself a god on account of these powers” (Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978], 81).

And he said to John, these are the books of witchcraft that were found in the hands of your disciple Jesus. If you tell us the truth we will let you go and if not you and Jesus will be executed with a double-edged sword. John replied saying, Masters, Jesus wrote these books, I have been a prisoner since the days of Tiberius Caesar and I have never seen these books, but he and his eleven disciples wrote them and use them to deceive people.⁴³

In another fragment, it is Jesus who is questioned:

They said: The sorcerers' books in your hands are they new or old and belong to Balaam [and in Egypt] you found them? [...] He said to them they are of Balaam [...] to do [magic] with them ... And why did you use them [...] and do evil to all of creation? [...] the books in your hand if you tell [us] whose they are and if not we will kill [...] your carcass to the beasts of the field. [...] The books are not old [and not ancient] and not Balaam's [...]. He said, they are John's [...] he gave them to me ...⁴⁴

In the fuller text preserved in the St. Petersburg manuscript, the scene is described thus:

And (Jesus) dealt in magic and witchcraft and deceived people. For he had books from the sorcerers of Egypt and he delved into them always ... They said to him these books in your hand are they new or old? He said to them, Masters, the writings are old and ancient. They are from Balaam son of Beor and I found them in Egypt and they cure with incantations all ailments, wounds and sores. They said to him: tell us the truth where you found these books and you teach and instruct people in them and you and they deceive the world. Tell us the truth and if (not) we will kill you. He said to them these books are not ancient and not old and I did not find them in Egypt but John my Master gave them to me and he taught them to me ... R. Joshua answered and said to John: these books that were found in the hands of Jesus your disciple where did you find them? If you tell the truth you will be saved, and if not you and Jesus your student will die a horrible death. John answered and said to them: the books are from my masters. Jesus wrote them and copied them for I was imprisoned and the Emperor Caesar imprisoned me and he copied them and did not show them to me, and he and his twelve disciples know them and rose up and deceive the world.⁴⁵

From the fragmentary texts in the Geniza documents, and even more clearly from the early St. Petersburg manuscript, we can see *Toledot Yeshu's* near obsessive preoccupation with the sources of Jesus' magical powers. The rabbis Joshua ben Perachia and Marianus the Elder threaten John the Baptist with the death penalty for himself and Jesus not because of anything they have done, but if they do not tell the truth about the source of the books from which Jesus learned to do witchcraft. The texts that have survived suggest three possibilities: he learned sorcery in Egypt, from which he brought back the writings; he learned it from his teacher John the Baptist; or he made it up and wrote the books himself. The first option

⁴³ Daniel Boyarin, "A Revised Version and Translation of the 'Toledot Yeshu' Fragment," *Tarbiz* 47 (1978): 251–52.

⁴⁴ Deutsch, "New Evidence," 185.

⁴⁵ Deutsch, *ibid.*, 184–86.

attributes the books to a foreign source, Egypt and the gentile prophet Balaam ben Beor. The second attributes them to John the Baptist, perhaps alluding to the splinter Jewish sects, such as the Essenes, with whom he fraternized in his early life. In the third option, Jesus himself is the source of his knowledge and the books are “new” and do not belong to any earlier tradition. All three alternatives appear in various forms in Jewish sources on magic from Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages.⁴⁶ Here, in the rabbis’ interrogation of John the Baptist and Jesus, any of them can serve the same fundamental purpose: to present Jesus’ powers as witchcraft or black magic. Whether the source of the writings is external (Egypt), internal (e. g., the Essenes), or personal (Jesus himself) makes no difference. Whatever their origin, they describe acts of evil magic aimed to deceive.

Scholarship contains considerable discussions of the debate between Jewish scholars and early Christians over whether Jesus’ powers derived from the fact that he was the Messiah and the Son of God or whether they were merely magic tricks, a controversy already evidenced in the New Testament, in Talmudic sources, and among the first Christian theologians.⁴⁷ However, less attention has been paid to the question of how the Jewish community in the Middle Ages contended with the Christian claim that Jesus’ powers were divine rather than magical. While the early versions of *Toledot Yeshu* clothe the argument in narrative garb, they add little to the New Testament narrative: “And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitude marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel. But the Pharisees said, ‘He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils.’” (Matt. 9:33–34). Indeed, the Gospels contain many references to this controversy in which Jesus’ followers regard his acts as miracles while the Pharisees see them as sorcery.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ On these general observations see the discussions in two recent surveys, Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), and Yuval Harari, *Early Jewish Magic: Research, Method, Sources* (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 2010 [in Hebrew]).

⁴⁷ Compare to the discussions by Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician*; Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian’s Reading of the Gospels* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1973); Markham J. Geller, *Joshua B. Perahia and Jesus of Nazareth: Two Rabbinic Magicians* (Ph. D. diss.; Brandeis University, 1973); Deutsch, ‘*Toledot Yeshu*’ in *Christian Eyes*; Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, and the amazing discussion in: John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (4 vols.; New York: Doublday, 1994), 2:646–873.

⁴⁸ In Acts 4:5–12, after the Apostles heal a sick man, they are questioned by the Pharisees and asked how they did so. They answer, “by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole ... Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” This is confirmed in the Talmudic tales, where the acts of healing are also performed by means of the name of Christ. The use of the Ineffable Name in *Toledot Yeshu* sounds very much like a response to the claim in the New Testament. It alone has such power, and even Jesus himself performed his miracles by means of the Ineffable Name, and not his own name, as the apostles claim. Naturally, according to New Testament doctrine, Jesus had no need to invoke any name at all as he himself was the source of power.

On the other hand, the large majority of versions of *Toledot Yeshu* which do describe the theft of the Ineffable Name add another narrative motif which casts the significance of the debate, and perhaps also the function of the whole work as a polemical text, in a new light. In order to clarify this point, let us consider a typical passage from Mark:

And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean. And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed. And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away; And saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter (1:40–45; similar accounts appear in the other Gospels as well).

Several points in these verses are relevant to the interpretation I am proposing here. The first is the total absence of any reference to the means by which Jesus performed the miracle. The text states merely, “I will,” and nothing more. There is no attempt whatsoever to explain the source of Jesus’ power, the miraculous or magical mode he employed, or even any queries or puzzlement regarding this issue. The many tales of similar miraculous deeds almost invariably pose the natural question: Where does the person who says “I will” and it is done get his power from? But the more acts of this nature that occurs without any explanation, the greater the mystery surrounding the individual who performs them. If Jesus were holding a book of some sort, if he called on some ancient tradition of magic (such as Balaam ben Beor) as in the Geniza versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, there would be no mystery. And I believe that is precisely what the Gospels sought to do, to heighten the aura of mystery that emanates from the incredible remaining inexplicable. It might be argued that there was no need for an explanation because the source of Jesus’ power was obvious: he was the Son of God and therefore had divine powers and was capable of bringing about whatever he wished. But even if that is a valid contention (a question that belongs to the realm of theological interpretation of the New Testament and is thus outside the scope of this discussion), it has no relevance to the point I am making. The connection between Jesus’ divinity and its manifestation in the real world through miracles would still remain shrouded in mystery and incomprehensible to anyone who heard these stories. Our focus here is not on theological commentary or the miracles themselves, but on the general public, the believers who heard the stories and responded emotionally, not intellectually.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ These stories should be compared with tales of healing via the name of Christ, such as the Talmudic legends discussed by Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 52–62, or the significant testimony of Epiphanius, Bishop of Cyprus in the second half of the fourth century, who tells the story

In the verses above, Jesus goes on to instruct the former leper not to tell anyone about his cure, but he does the exact opposite: "He went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter." Could Jesus have been unaware that this would happen? That the more he demanded that the man keep the act a secret, the more he would be tempted to reveal it? In addition, he tells him to make an offering before the priest for his cleansing. To the best of our knowledge, offerings could be sacrificed before a priest only in the Temple, and the miracle was performed in the Galilee. In other words, the former leper was told to make the long pilgrimage from the Galilee to Jerusalem carting a sacrifice with him the whole way, and he was not expected to tell anyone why he was doing it?! And when he eventually reached the Temple, would it not have been natural for him to relate the circumstances of his cure and explain why he was asking to offer up a sacrifice? Jesus must have been fully aware of what would happen, and therefore deliberately gave these instructions to the leper so that his deed would be known not only in the Galilee, in the provinces, but in the religious and administrative center of Jerusalem as well.

In this manner, Jesus emerged as a charismatic figure. Both his character and his deeds were surrounded by an aura of mystery that defied explanation, arousing speculation as to the source of his power among the growing audience who heard the stories about him. And on the whole, the spread of these miracle tales was tacitly encouraged by Jesus and his followers themselves. Another episode which appears in different versions in each of the first three Gospels provides further support for this interpretation of the evolution of Jesus' charisma:

And when he was come into his own country (town), he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house. And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief (Matt. 13:54-58, and similar accounts in Mark 1:1-6, Luke 4:16-30).

of Joseph, a Jew who, before converting to Christianity, healed a man possessed by a demon in Tiberias: "He took water in his hand and sprinkled it before the man stricken with madness making the sign of the cross and saying: In the name of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, go out, demon, and he was healed! ... and because he returned to his senses and his right mind, he often thanked the man and God, for he understood that he had brought him redemption," see Zeev Rubin, "Joseph the Comes and the Attempts to Convert the Galilee to Christianity in the Fourth Century CE," *Cathedra* 26 (1982): 110 (in Hebrew). Such stories provide clear evidence of the distinction between the miracles in the Gospels and those performed by means of the name of Jesus. The stories of Jesus' own miracles are cloaked in a heavy shroud of religious mystery. This mystery is virtually absent from the tales of the later miracles where the source of power is explicit.

The story offers a clear explanation for why Jesus did not perform miracles in his own town of Nazareth: because there was no mystery about him in the place where he had been known from birth as a flesh-and-blood human being. In the town where everyone saw him as a normal child playing in the local streets, the power and charisma that derive from an aura of mystery were impossible. This is an extremely telling passage as it provides information by way of the negative. It demonstrates that it was the mystery surrounding the young man who appeared out of nowhere and performed such extraordinary deeds that was the force which drew so many people to him. There could be nothing enigmatic about him in the town where everyone saw his mother wipe his nose and his bottom.

Another figure who performed miracles and is often compared to Jesus, in terms of both time and the nature of their deeds, is Honi Ha-Ma'agel, the Circle-Drawer who could bring rain. He stood before a crowd of believers, uttered a prayer, and no rain came. Then he drew a circle in the dust, and addressed God contentiously, invoking "the great name." With many people looking on, he admonished God when the rain was too weak or too strong. Honi was a transparent figure: he showed his audience what he did and how he felt. But it is impossible to imagine Jesus acting in the same way. His deeds were invariably shrouded in mystery and utterly baffling.⁵⁰ Consequently, Honi was not a charismatic individual. There is no evidence that he attracted a circle of disciples or followers. Instead, he was simply called on when he was needed.⁵¹ In contrast, Jesus and his disciples thoroughly understood the power of "awe-inspiring mystery" in creating the charisma of a religious leader, and they made full use of it.

It was this charisma with which the medieval Jewish society was forced to contend. The rabbis could not ignore the hundreds of written and oral sources that documented Jesus' miracles, nor the fact that he succeeded in drawing hordes of Jews and gentiles to him. Exposing the magic powers behind Jesus' acts in *Toledot Yeshu* – whether he learned the secrets of witchcraft in Egypt according to some versions or he acquired his powers from stealing the Ineffable Name according to others – had a clear objective: *to dismantle Jesus's charisma*. His attempt to perform miracles in Nazareth was doomed to failure because of the absence of the element of defamiliarization and mystery; revealing that the

⁵⁰ Judah Goldin, "On Honi the Circle-Maker: A Demanding Prayer," in idem, *Studies in Midrashic and Related Literature* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1988), 331–36. Maier, *A Marginal Jew*, 536, presents an important observation which supports my argument. In his opinion, Jesus is a "miracle worker, performing miracles by his own power," the pagan sorcerers and Talmudic rabbis perform these miracles by activating supernatural power by means of prayers, holy names etc., and conclude that "stories of this type cannot in the strict sense be called the stories of miracle-worker." On the charisma of Honi and other Holy men see: William Scott Green, "Palestinian Holy Men: Charismatic Leadership and Rabbinic Tradition," *ANRW* 19.2 (1979): 619–47.

⁵¹ On this aspect (charisma as leadership) of the charisma of Jesus, see: Martin Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers* (trans. James C. G. Greig; New York: Crossroad, 1981).

source of his power was witchcraft would have the same effect. He would lose the awe-inspiring aura of mystery stemming from divinity, and would become a regular human being performing magic tricks of the sort that anyone clever enough to learn the secrets of sorcery could imitate. Jesus did not demonstrate heavenly power, but merely contemptible earthly manipulations laid bare in the text (by means of Judas' actions in the battle in the sky, which are aimed at stripping Jesus of his bogus powers). I believe this explains why most stories in the New Testament so emphatically ignore the question of the source of Jesus' powers, whereas *Toledot Yeshu* seeks repeatedly, almost desperately, to insist that they come from pagan witchcraft or the theft of the Ineffable Name of God from the Jews.

Toledot Yeshu can not be understood without recognizing the great narrative effort invested in the attempt to dismantle Jesus' charisma. Clearly, the authors of the text regarded this attribute as one of the major reasons for the threat Christianity posed for the Jews.

The Ineffable Name

As we have seen, the large majority of versions of *Toledot Yeshu* contend with the menace of Jesus' charisma with the help of the motif of the Ineffable Name, which appears here for the first time in connection to Jesus' actions. Even if the reasons for the choice of this motif are not entirely clear, the fact remains that it is employed extensively throughout the text, beginning with its theft by Jesus. With it he performs miracles, recruits disciples, convinces Queen Helena that he is the Messiah, and eludes the rabbis. It is given by the rabbis to Judas Iscariot, who uses it in the battle in the sky to defeat Jesus, and then given to Simeon Kepha, who uses it to prove he is a faithful apostle of Jesus.

The striking contrast between the absence of reference in the New Testament to the source of the power that enables Jesus to perform miracles and the insistence in *Toledot Yeshu* that each of his inexplicable acts is carried out by virtue of the Ineffable Name is an indication of the importance of this motif. It suggests that for the authors of *Toledot Yeshu*, it was one of the major, and perhaps the most significant, change they felt compelled to introduce into the Gospel narrative. The Talmudic tale in which Jesus brought witchcraft from Egypt by means of scratches on his flesh⁵² indicates that the Sages were not yet making use of the Ineffable Name in their struggle against Christianity. All versions of the story in Tannaitic and Talmudic sources say only that the secret of Ben Stada's power was the witchcraft he brought from Egypt. In this period, there is no mention whatsoever of any connection between Jesus and the Ineffable Name. However,

⁵² Above, note 42.

it is interesting to consider the testimony of Epiphanius, Bishop of Cyprus in the second half of the fourth century, who relates the story of the Jew Joseph as he heard it from his mouth. Joseph succeeded in expelling a demon from the body of a raving Jew running naked through the streets of Tiberias by invoking the name of Jesus and holding a cross up in front of him. Afterwards, "because (the possessed Jew) returned to his senses, he often thanked the man (Joseph) and God, for he understood that he had brought him redemption. He published the name of Joseph in the city, and so his name was known to the Jews for this miracle. A rumor spread throughout the city saying that Joseph opened the *geniza* (books treasury), found the Ineffable Name written there, read it, and performed great miracles with its aid. And indeed it was true, but not as they believed (he found copies of the Gospels translated into Hebrew in the secret archives) and they were the real source of his power."⁵³ In other words, as early as the second half of the fourth century, the Jews accused the Christians of performing miracles by means of the Ineffable Name they stole. Nevertheless, we can assume that neither Epiphanius, nor Joseph from whom he heard the story, had any inkling that the same accusation was directed at Jesus himself. Had this been the case, they would not have hesitated to report this "falsehood" as well. Thus, both early rabbinical literature and the story of the events in Tiberias appear to demonstrate that the use of the Ineffable Name was only attributed to Jesus in a later period. It would, in fact, appear to have been a synthesis of two traditions alluded to in these earlier sources: Jesus stole a device of witchcraft by hiding it in his flesh (the Talmudic tradition), and that device, which he used to perform miracles with, was the Ineffable Name (the Tiberian tradition). Like other narrative motifs in *Toledot Yeshu*, the key theme of the Ineffable Name therefore had its roots in the Late Antiquity, but took shape and became central to the epic biography of Jesus only in the Middle Ages.

It is not surprising to find the Ineffable Name in Jewish folklore and mystical literature in Late Antiquity and early Middle Ages. It appears frequently in Jewish traditions as a magical device employed to perform supernatural acts, in sources from as early as the Second Temple, in Talmudic and midrashic literature, and in the Geonic period.⁵⁴ It was used to bring rain, to heal the sick, to stave off enemies, and to cross large geographical distances. Almost invariably, these were acts performed by culture heroes in a given society – people who were considered holy, righteous, or wise – and were done for the good of the community. That is to say, they were acts of what is known as "white magic."

⁵³ The quotation and its source, in note 26, above.

⁵⁴ Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987): 124–34; Hermann Leberecht Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash* (6 vols.; Munich: Beck, 1922–1961), 4:527–35; Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, (New York: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1939), 78–103.

The only problem with applying this definition to the miracles in *Toledot Yeshu* is that Jesus was not a legitimate figure in Judaism, and he obtained the Ineffable Name by stealing it. Nonetheless, he performed his miracles by making use of the legitimate device of the Ineffable Name, and the acts themselves were of a positive nature: he healed the sick, made the barren conceive, and brought the dead back to life. However, his primary objective in doing these things was to establish himself as the Messiah and the Son of God, which is by definition a negative goal. This ambiguity regarding the classification of Jesus' acts as black or white magic raises a fundamental question: Why did the authors/tellers of *Toledot Yeshu* choose to present the Ineffable Name as the source of Jesus' power instead of retaining the original depiction of him as a sorcerer utilizing the witchcraft he brought from Egypt? The earlier explanation makes it much easier to present him as no more than a magician calling on demons and black magic for his own purposes. Consequently, the decision to alter this aspect of the story could not have been trivial. Attributing the power of the Ineffable Name to Jesus has enormous literary and ideological significance.

The illegitimate use of magical techniques, particularly the Ineffable Name, was a subject of considerable interest in Jewish folklore as early as the rabbinic period,⁵⁵ but drew greater attention throughout the Jewish community in Babylonia in the Geonic period, the very time and place in which I contend that *Toledot Yeshu* was produced. The first story in *The Scroll of Ahima'az* from the mid-eleventh century is a familiar legend relating to R. Aharon the Babylonian:

And in the days of these saints, descended one of the dearest ones, a greatly beloved man, from the land of the Bagdadites, Head and Father, from the lineage of Yoav, his name was Aharon ... Before his departure from the land of his birth, his father owned a grindstone for his subsistence, and the mule which turned it, the lion came and devoured it. At that time Aharon was away. When he returned to the place, he could not find the mule. In place of his mule, he brought in the lion and subdued it, forcing it to turn the grindstone for him. When his father became aware of this, he approached him, screamed at him, raised his voice, and said unto him, "what have you done, you've brought in the lion, you sought to subdue its strength, though the Lord made him a king, to (walk erect) you have deployed him in your labors, to serve you. Now, I swear, you will not stand before me, you shall go out into exile, and for three years, you shall make amends for your silly acts."⁵⁶

According to the calculations of Ahima'az, the author of the Scroll, R. Aharon left Baghdad for southern Italy shortly before the time of his family ancestor, R. Shefatya, who lived during the reign of the Byzantine emperor Basil I (867–886 CE), that is, around the year 800. Again, this is the time and place to which I ascribe *Toledot Yeshu*. Here too, R. Aharon refers to a magical technique which

⁵⁵ Urbach, *The Sages*, 112–13.

⁵⁶ The recent edition and translation of *The Scroll of Ahima'az*, in: Robert Bonfil, *History and Folklore in a Medieval Jewish Chronicle: The Family Chronicle of Ahima'az ben Paltiel* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 238–41.

immediately afterward is revealed to be the Ineffable Name. In a famous responsum, the later Babylonian scholar R. Hai Gaon (early eleventh century) relates to the power of the Ineffable Name, providing further evidence that the Jewish community in Babylonia in the Geonic period was concerned with the issue of its legitimate and illegitimate use.⁵⁷ *Toledot Yeshu*, like *The Scroll of Ahima'az*, unreservedly recognizes the power of the Ineffable Name to perform miracles, and even speaks of the severe punishment incurred by its illegitimate use. The difference between the texts lies in the person invoking this power. In *The Scroll of Ahima'az* it is a revered religious leader who erred in his youth and subsequently went on a journey of repentance; in *Toledot Yeshu* it is Judaism's greatest foe who was seeking to undermine the very foundations of Jewish religion.

This comparison with the legend of R. Aharon the Babylonian may help us understand why *Toledot Yeshu* chose to attribute Jesus' power to perform miracles to the Ineffable Name. Miraculous events occur even when R. Aharon, and other rabbis mentioned in Babylonian sources, make illegitimate use of the Ineffable Name, since there is no question that it is an expedient means of changing reality, whether for better or worse. Had the creators of *Toledot Yeshu* endowed Jesus with a different power that enabled him to perform forbidden miracles, the text would have implied that witchcraft was as potent as the sacred Jewish name. They would not have wished to acknowledge such a possibility and popularize it by means of their text, whether written or oral. Indeed, as we have seen, the whole story centers on the motif of the protagonist's magical power, which is both crucial to the narrative turning point and drives the development of the plot. If all these events were products of some pagan witchcraft, a sin of which Jesus had earlier been accused, the authors of *Toledot Yeshu* would be recognizing the power of black magic, and that they were undoubtedly reluctant to do.

That being said, the shaping of a central motif is invariably intricate, and does not lend itself to a single straightforward reading. The same is true for the choice of the Ineffable Name as the literary and ideological *leitmotif* in *Toledot Yeshu*. The narrative development of the episode describing the theft of the Ineffable Name demonstrates the complexity of this issue. The leaders of the Jewish community created a sophisticated shield around this sacred power designed to prevent its theft and illegitimate use. Nonetheless, Jesus managed to break the "secret code" of Judaism, to put his hands on the only sacred force whose efficacy was not in doubt, and to employ it for his own purposes. In order to achieve his objective, he hid the Ineffable Name in his flesh. That is, for the short time between the theft and the removal of the parchment from the cut in his thigh, it was part of his body. Thus, only by suffering the obligatory agony could he penetrate the protective barrier guarding the holiest and most secret of Jewish

⁵⁷ See as an example, Robert Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 144–45.

forces. In this manner, he succeeded in removing the Ineffable Name from the Temple, from the bastion of Judaism. In other words, the text is saying that Christianity took its power from what it stole from Judaism. It has no validity of its own, but is merely the illicit use of the sacred principles of Judaism. The argument that Christianity is *Verus Israel* is thus fraudulent at the core, as it is nothing but thievery and lies, and like other acts of this sort, it will be exposed and punished. Indeed, the rest of *Toledot Yeshu*, from the narrative turning point on, is an attempt to show the illegitimate use of the sacred power and how Judaism restored it to its proper place. Clearly, then, the choice of the Ineffable Name as the means by which Jesus performed his marvels was anything but a trivial decision. *In Toledot Yeshu, the Ineffable Name is a metonym for the Jewish perception of Christianity: its source is pure (Judaism), but its actions are tainted.* Nothing could represent this contradiction better than the Ineffable Name. The message is clear: the Christians make use of the most sacred power, the Name of God, for the basest of purposes, worshipping a false messiah and establishing a new religion that strips Judaism of its values. It exploits Judaism to achieve material goals: to spread itself among the nations (the way Jesus gained believers). On the other hand, Judaism only calls on the Ineffable Name when its survival is threatened (when it is given to Judas Iscariot). Judaism thus conceives of itself as spirit in contrast to flesh, as holy in contrast to profane, as the original in contrast to a fraudulent imitation. This might be a narrative response to the classic Christian argument that the Christians are “Israel in spirit” while the Jews are “Israel in flesh.”

The use of the Ineffable Name as a narrative device is fundamental and symbolic. It is a strong ideological contention presented not in the form of polemical debate, but in the form of narrative. The strength of the text lies not in any convincing ideological or intellectual arguments, but in its emotional impact. Using the popular idiom to summarize an episode in the simplest terms, that is, to say something like “they stole the Ineffable Name from us,” with all the historical, theological, social, and emotional connotations of such a statement, would undoubtedly have influenced the thinking of large segments of Jewish society much more than any polemical or ideological discourse. This feature lends further credence to my contention that the folkloric nature of the text may help explain why the creators of *Toledot Yeshu* chose this literary form to voice their arguments against Christianity, which was posing an ever-growing threat.

From Polemics to Self-criticism

Since the beginning, scholars have justifiably considered *Toledot Yeshu* to be a polemical text. However, analysis of its narrative structure, the literary characterization of the main character, the choice of the leading *leitmotif*, and the de-

velopment of the plot, all demonstrate that there is more to this work than meets the eye. From the perspective of medieval Judaism, the story of Jesus would also appear to have served as a sort of test-case that helped to put a fine point on criticism of some of the major aspects of Jewish life and society. We have already considered two such narrative themes: Jesus' childhood and the Ineffable Name.

As we have seen, according to the text, Jesus' experiences in his childhood and youth and his going astray as a young man were not necessarily the result of the sinfulness he was born with, but the product of the odious social cloud he was under from birth as the "illegitimate son of a menstruate woman." The constant taunts from his young friends who heard the mean gossip at home, the unflinching suspicion with which he was treated by his teachers and the ridicule of the people around him forced the boy out of Jewish society and culture. It is impossible to ignore the harsh criticism of Jewish social norms contained in the detailed descriptions of a child driven out of the Jewish nation against his will. No matter how deserving or exceptional their gifts, young men had no chance of standing out and advancing in religious or social circles if the slightest impropriety was attached to their family or he did not belong to the social elite. In a set of early versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, Jesus' gifts made him especially worthy of rising to the very top of the religious and social ladder, but he was held back by his family history, for which he himself was not to blame, and therefore had no prospects in the Jewish world.

Jesus' own critical remarks evoked a similar response. When he exposed the corruption of his fellow judges, they kicked him out, vilifying him and his family. Here, too, censure of the Jewish establishment is shown to be voiced by someone who does not belong to it, who comes from outside, from the remote periphery (Nazareth), looked upon as foreign and disreputable by the religious and social elite. A close reading of these portions of *Toledot Yeshu* inevitably reveals the sharp criticism of the norms in Jewish society that elevated family background, social status, and genealogy over talent, integrity, and wisdom.

This interpretation of *Toledot Yeshu* reinforces my contention regarding the group that produced the text. The novella-like interest in the erotic (a beautiful young wife, a man who seduces her, her cuckolded husband, the night of love-making), as well as social criticism of the Jewish community which judged a young man by the deeds of his forefathers and his family status rather than by his own talents and accomplishments, would have been typical of certain circles in particular. Moreover, in terms of both language and content, the text was clearly meant for the broad sectors of a society that suffered most from the attitude of the religious and social elite.⁵⁸ All these features lead directly to the students in

⁵⁸ So describes Salo Baron the historical-social reality in the Babylonian juridical system in the 9th-10th century: "Here the top-heavy, self-governmental structure itself had serious drawbacks. Some judges abused their power, conniving the rich and oppressing the poor under jurisdiction ... We also possess responsum by Hai Gaon in which he cursed, with characteristic

the Babylonian *yeshivot*. Like youngsters in any closed male society, they were charged with sexual energy. In addition, many of them came from the poorer and weaker sectors of Jewish society and from the periphery, and were therefore treated as inferior to their peers from wealthy, prestigious families. And like young people everywhere, they would have been critical of their teachers and social leaders. Thus, the narrative structure, social criticism, and appeal to the general public all suggest that *Toledot Yeshu* was the work of in or out the circles of *yeshiva* students in Babylonia.

We have already discussed at length the motif of the Ineffable Name as the element that drives the plot of *Toledot Yeshu*. However, if we consider it not as part of the narrative plot, but from an external, critical perspective, it may lead us to perceive the text not as a story about the past but, as proposed above, as an example meant to hold a mirror up to basic beliefs of Judaism. In both his personality and his actions, Jesus displayed what were thought to be the identifying signs of the Messiah. He was born to a family that traced its lineage back to the House of David, in his birth and youth he fulfilled many of the Biblical prophecies about the Messiah (as the text of *Toledot Yeshu* demonstrates repeatedly), and he performed the miracles expected of the Messiah: healing the sick, making the barren conceive, resurrecting the dead, exorcising demons, turning inanimate objects into living creatures, and flying in the air. It was for these reasons that he attracted so many believers, as we learn from messianic traditions. But all of these signs were bogus. Granted he was descended from the House of David, but he was born in sin, the illegitimate son of a menstruate woman. And while he had magical powers, he acquired them illicitly, by stealing the Ineffable Name. However, these facts were unknown to the public, and consequently multitudes followed him, believing the signs to be genuine.

Here, too, the religious criticism is conspicuous. The text is saying to its readers or listeners: let us consider the story of Jesus as a test case. Suppose someone obtains the signifiers of the Messiah through deceit or by some other illegitimate means, convincing whole Jewish communities to believe in him – how can we tell if he is the real Messiah or a false one? How can we, common folk, know if the charismatic man standing before us and exhibiting all the signs of the Messiah was really sent by God or is a charlatan and a fraud? Indeed, questions of this sort were actually raised in this very period of time.⁵⁹ The case of Jesus,

vigor, those ‘judges of Sodom, highwaymen, and robbers’ who help wealthy creditors seize the household furnishings of poor debtors ... In an enthusiastically religious age, using mainly a religious nomenclature, such discrepant social and political forces often resulted in sectarian divisions” see Baron, *A Social and Religious History*, 5:178.

⁵⁹ Baron, *ibid.*, 192–94, tells of Severus, a Syrian who in the year 720, abused a Jewish girl in Samaria, was caught by the Jewish crowd, given to the authorities, and they returned him to the Jews for trial and crucifixion. He claimed that he is the messiah, and thousands of Jews believed in him. His followers were considered by the rabbis as *mamzerim*, and thus were not allowed to return to Judaism. He also describes in detail the messianic fervor in that time and

related in such detail in *Toledot Yeshu*, demonstrates that by applying the criteria laid down by Judaism, even a man who is the illegitimate son of a menstruate woman and an artful thief may be welcomed as the Messiah. Perhaps, then, the signs of the Messiah that have been accepted in Jewish tradition for centuries, are inappropriate or inadequate? Proof, says the text, can be found in the case of Jesus, which illustrates the danger of similar situations arising in the future.

Moreover, in order to smuggle the Ineffable Name out of the Temple, Jesus makes a cut in his thigh, copies the Tetragrammaton onto a piece of parchment, and hides it in the cut. In other words, to achieve his goal, he combines the sacred and the profane: the Ineffable Name, which is the essence of holiness and purity, is placed within his physical body, the essence of the earthly and impure. When he seeks to become the leader of the nation by presenting himself as the Messiah, he uses the Ineffable Name to heal the sick, the lame, the possessed. This, too, he does not for their benefit but for his own purposes – again the holiest and purest of means is employed to achieve the basest of material, egotistic objectives.

The ultimate instance of combining the pure and the impure occurs in the episode of the battle in the sky between Jesus and Judas Iscariot. Both rise into the air with the help of the Ineffable Name, and there Judas urinates on Jesus or sprays his seed on him or sodomizes him (depending on the version), thereby defiling him and bringing him down. Whatever act Judas performed, he did so with his sexual organ while holding the Ineffable Name. That is, the conjunction of the pure and the impure is explicit, deliberate, and incontrovertible. The goal is a worthy one – to strip Jesus of his power – but it is achieved by wrongful means, by mixing the material and the spiritual, the ignoble and the exalted, the profane and the sacred.

It is difficult to imagine a more blatant depiction of the theme of the thin line between the pure and the impure than that which appears throughout the narrative of *Toledot Yeshu* and reaches its climax in the scene of the battle in the sky. The text offers striking descriptions of the crossing of boundaries and the lack of clear borders between the profane and the holy, raising questions about the parameters of the sacred and how it deals with the impure, about where to draw the line between material reality and spiritual essence. According to the story, the sacred may be defiled in order to achieve a lofty aim, but does it still remain sacred? After Judas defiled the Ineffable Name, is it still holy? I phrase these issues as questions because the episodes in the *Toledot Yeshu* do not supply the answers, but merely leave them open and unresolved. What we have here is a typical liminal state in which the protagonists, and consequently the reader or

area, on pages 177–205. On Severus see also Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 54, esp. note 30. Most important and relevant testimony of these events are by the Karaite al-Qirqisani, in *Ya'qub al-Qirqisani on Jewish Sects and Christianity* (eds. Bruno Chiesa and Wilfred Lockwood; Frankfurt a. M. and New York: Peter Lang, 1984).

listener, is caught in the middle, neither here nor there or both here and there. They hold the Ineffable Name in their hands, but their flesh is at the basest level.

Is it possible to find a connection between the three subjects of criticism outlined above (Jewish society, the messianic tradition, the liminal state) and the reality in which *Toledot Yeshu* was created? I believe it is. To do so, we must return to my contention regarding the time, place, and social context in which the work was produced: the world of *yeshiva* students in Jewish Babylonia in the eighth century. Existing evidence regarding the educational practices and social relations in the Geonic *yeshivot* points to an expansion of religious education and an effort to draw broader circles of the population into the *yeshivot*. Young students from all levels of society began to arrive, including boys from the periphery and from families with no social standing.⁶⁰ Then, like now, those youngsters would not have grown up with the same privileges as their peers from the social elite, and even within the *yeshiva* they would have continued to occupy a lower status whatever their individual talents.⁶¹ This confusing and discriminatory condition appears to resonate clearly in the description of Jesus' painful experiences as a child in his school. Only someone who has felt the pain of social rejection because of his family status or parentage could describe this distress with such sensitivity.

Criticism of the messianic tradition was also associated with the same social and historical context. Historical evidence shows that Jewish messianic movements emerged in the east in this period, attracting mass followings. Descriptions of their rise and fall is remarkably similar to the story of Jesus. A man from a lower-class background claiming to be descended from the House of David declares himself the Messiah and proves it by performing miracles. He draws in thousands of believers, despite the opposition of local Jewish leaders,

⁶⁰ The narrative of *Toledot Yeshu* sounds almost as an echo of the historical situation described by Baron. So describes also Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 33, the social situation in the Jewish community in Babylon in that time: "Though few solid conclusions can be established concerning the precise profile of the Jewish community in the eighth century, its occupational and class-differentiated pluralism seems beyond dispute."

⁶¹ In *The History of the People of Israel in the Middle Ages* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1969 [in Hebrew]), Chaim Hillel Ben Sasson describes the social structure in the Babylonian *yeshivot* in this period: "The *yeshivot* held classes in the Mishna and Talmud for the boys, most of whom were sons of the *yeshiva*'s scholars ... These institutions made an interesting attempt to establish leadership on erudition and study, while basing its continuity and authority on the principles of hierarchy and genealogy. In other words, the *yeshiva* students were seen to occupy an ascending ladder of rank and title, with lineage determining one's place on the ladder ... In each of the *yeshivot*, status was passed down within the scholars' families. The father bequeathed his fixed status in the *yeshiva* to the son or close relative deemed most worthy of being his heir in terms of ability and degree of family relationship ... Whenever Rav Sherira Gaon, a member of one of the 'geonic families,' referred to a gaon was not from these elite families, he employed a derisive phrase, such as 'not from these scholars but from the merchants'" (49–50). For the level of studies and income of the many students from the periphery, see Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia*, 43–48.

who pronounce him to be a false messiah and do everything in their power to stop him. Finally, he is tortured to death. There can be no doubt that word of such events in the periphery reached the Jewish community in the Babylonian capital and aroused considerable concern. As I have shown, *Toledot Ben Sira*, which originated somewhat later in the same place, deals extensively with the issue of false messiahs. It seems more than likely, therefore, that the young men in the *yeshivot*, who did not represent the religious or social elite but rather the broader and unprivileged sectors of the communities, were also preoccupied by the problem of how to recognize a false messiah. The case of Jesus, and many others like him in their own time, illustrated that Jewish tradition did not provide sufficient tools to cope with this dilemma. Criticism of tradition and the contemporary leaders, who represent it, is typical of adolescents everywhere, who are at the stage in life when they must learn to deal with the real world and assume social responsibility.

The cardinal expression of this social and historical situation is the blurring of borders between the sacred and the profane. Transitioning between the two domains is a universal feature of human society, and is especially salient for a young *yeshiva* student. Holding the Holy Scriptures in one hand, he satisfies his natural urges with the other. Indeed, masturbation and homosexual relations are common in any isolated male society. It is hard to imagine a young Torah scholar whose sleep was not disturbed by this liminal state.

In this context, the specific historical milieu is particularly relevant. As noted at the beginning of this article, the time and place in which I contend that *Toledot Yeshu* originated was characterized by rare social and religious openness, with a free exchange of ideas between the different religions and sects, public debates, and forthright criticism and controversy. It seems unlikely that this discourse stopped at the door of the *yeshiva*, that the young students did not take an active part in it, at least to some extent. Such an atmosphere of openness, the recognition that other truths may also be valid, that the leaders and worshippers of other faiths are not sorcerers or frauds but intelligent people, would have been a difficult test for these youngsters, as young people always tend to be fervent and extreme in their beliefs. This, again, would typically produce a liminal state of confusion, of seeking one's way, of seeing the virtues in more than one opinion or belief without the capacity to choose between them. The sense of uncertainty aroused by the complexity and diversity of reality inevitably places a heavy burden on young people on the personal, social, and religious level. It blurs the borders between right and wrong, between pure and impure, between good and evil. I believe the overriding significance of *Toledot Yeshu* lies in this confusion, in this liminal state. Most versions conclude with the episode of Simeon Kephas, the learned Jew sent by the rabbis to stand at the head of the Christian hierarchy and institute new rules to separate it once and for all from Judaism. Nothing could better exemplify the liminal state than this scene, which puts an end to the

link between Judaism and Christianity. Simeon Kephaz is a Jew who becomes a Christian and yet remains a Jew. He establishes principles that benefit Christianity, and yet his aim is to benefit Judaism. He is a Jewish sage who becomes the foremost scholar of Christian theology. Could anything be more liminal? The choice of this episode for the conclusion of *Toledot Yeshu* demonstrates that the uncertainty has not been dispelled, that the indeterminacy between right and wrong, between the sacred and the profane, which lies at the heart of this work, remains an open, bleeding wound. The final episode in the text, in which a Jewish scholar becomes the driving force of Christianity, palpably indicates that the ambivalence, the indistinct borders, remain unresolved, both in the narrative itself, and in historical reality.

The *Toledot Yeshu* in the Context of Jewish-Muslim Debate

Philip Alexander

The *Toledot Yeshu* and the Muslim World

What functions, if any, might the *Toledot Yeshu* have served in Jewish-Muslim debate? To the best of my knowledge, this question has not often been raised, but if it makes sense, then it has the potential to open up a whole new front in our search to contextualize this puzzling work. The setting in which the *Toledot Yeshu* is normally placed is Jewish-Christian debate. It is seen as a Jewish anti-Gospel, showing some knowledge of the canonic Christian Gospels, which was composed in order to counter Christian claims about Jesus. Thus, when William Horbury, in his groundbreaking 1970 Cambridge doctorate, raised the question as to why Jews in the Islamic world read the *Toledot*, he constructed an answer largely in terms of demonstrating that Jews living under Islam could have had continuing knowledge of and contact with Christianity.¹ He notes, for example, that the *Toledot* could have gained a new lease of life among Jews in the Middle East and Persia with the arrival of Christian missionaries from the west in the nineteenth century. The Jewish-Christian controversy is unquestionably the original and primary setting of the *Toledot*, and there can be no doubt, as we shall see, that Jews continued to encounter and combat Christianity within *Dar al-Islam*. But this is surely not the whole story. The *Toledot Yeshu* inevitably acquired a significant secondary setting in Jewish-Muslim relations, a setting which would have accorded it interest and relevance, even if Christianity had not remained a significant presence in the Muslim world. My thesis is simple: the fact that Jesus and his mother became massively important figures in Islam raises the question of where the *Toledot Yeshu* stands in relation to the Muslim "Gospel," and this question must throw some light on the circulation of the *Toledot* among Jews in the Muslim world. The dynamics of the *Toledot's* reception in the Muslim east cannot have been the same as in the Christian west, because in the east it competed not with one, but with two "Gospels."

¹ William Horbury, *A Critical Examination of the Toledoth Jeshu* (Ph. D. diss.; Cambridge University, 1970), 206.

Copies of the *Toledot* from the Muslim world

The evidence that the *Toledot* did circulate among Jews in the Muslim world is clear. First, we have five Aramaic fragments from the Cairo Genizah (Cambridge: T-S Misc. 35.87, T-S Misc. 25.88, T-S NS 298.56; Jewish Theological Seminary New York: 2529 [Adler 2102]). Second, we have, also from the Cairo Genizah, a number of versions of the *Toledot* in Judeo-Arabic (e. g. Cambridge: T-S NS 264.24, 298.49, 298.55, 298.57). Third, we have at least five Yemenite manuscripts in Hebrew ranging in date from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries (Cambridge Or. 557; Sassoon 152 and 902; JTS Adler 4180; Jerusalem JNUL 4° 15 [Joel 326]). Fourth, we have a group of texts from Iraq and Persia. One of these is a Hebrew version of the *Toledot* completed in Baghdad in 1846 (Sassoon 793). Two others are in Judeo-Persian, both probably dating to the nineteenth century, one a JTS fragment from Bokhara, published by Krauss, the other a manuscript described by Fischel.²

This list may not be exhaustive, but it is probably sufficiently representative to allow us to draw some tentative conclusions. (1) Four languages are involved – Aramaic, Hebrew, Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Persian. The Aramaic is easily explained since it is by common consent the original language in which the *Toledot* was composed. It is interesting to note, however, that Aramaic versions continued to circulate until quite late: the Genizah copies are all medieval. Aramaic texts would have been readily accessible in the Middle Ages only to scholars, as would, to a lesser degree, those in Hebrew as well. The rendering of the *Toledot* into the vernaculars, Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Persian, testifies to this, and shows a desire to disseminate the work more widely. (2) Three distinct geographical regions are involved – Egypt, the Yemen, and Iraq/Persia, which shows that the propagation of the *Toledot* in the Muslim world was widespread. (3) Knowledge of the *Toledot* persisted over a long period of time. The dates of the extant manuscripts range from the early middle ages to the nineteenth century. Indeed, it seems fair to conclude that, although its popularity may have waxed and waned, the *Toledot* in one form or another would have been available to Jews in the Muslim world from the rise of Islam to the present day. (4) The number of copies of the *Toledot* from the Islamic world is quite impressive. True, when we compare the numbers of eastern and western manuscripts, the western heavily predominate. Though chance always plays a part in what survives the ratio probably reflects accurately enough the greater relevance of the *Toledot* in Christendom. Nevertheless, the number of copies from the Muslim world is by no means negligible, and this, combined with the range of space and time they

² Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1902; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1977), 140–41; Walter J. Fischel, “Eine jüdische-persische ‘Toldoth Jeschu’-Handschrift,” *MGWJ* 78 (1934): 343–50.

cover, suggests a work that was rather well known and popular – which brings us back to our opening question of what purpose it would have served in this setting.

The *Toledot* and the Christian Gospel in the Muslim world

Before turning to the question of the *Toledot Yeshu* and the Muslim “Gospel” it is important to remind ourselves that Christianity did not suddenly collapse in Asia and North Africa in the wake of the first Muslim conquests, only to be re-introduced (as an arm of colonialism) by European missionary activity in the nineteenth century, as popular perception would have it. While the existence of the Muslim “Gospel” would, on its own, I would argue, have ensured some sort of continuing role for the *Toledot* among Jews living under Islam, even if Christianity had faded away, Christianity did not, in fact, disappear, so the primary setting of the *Toledot* in Jewish-Christian debate continued to apply. What happened was that a second front opened in which the *Toledot* found itself playing a new role in defining Judaism over against *Islam*. It got caught up in the triologue between the Abrahamic faiths. The emergence of an interested third party – one that held political power – altered the whole dynamic of the *primary* debate between Jews and Christians.

Even after the triumph of Islam in Asia and North Africa, Christianity remained a very visible presence. The political power of Christianity was rolled back, all the way to Tours in 732, and to the gates of Vienna in 1529, but this did not necessarily mean the collapse of Christianity *as a religion* within the Muslim world. On the contrary, Christianity survived and, occasionally, even flourished. In certain regions, such as Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia, Christians remained a substantial proportion of the population down to the fourteenth century, when widespread *pogroms* perpetrated by Muslims on the Christian communities in their midst shattered the Churches and precipitated the rapid decline of Christianity – a decline that has continued, despite the intervention of European Christian missions over the last two centuries, down to the present day. During the first five or six Islamic centuries, however, Christianity remained a force to be reckoned within the Muslim world. Christians had adopted the Arabic language, and played a significant part in administration, culture, and science. We know of Christians holding prominent positions in the Umayyad, Abbasid and Mameluk bureaucracies, the most famous being, perhaps, John of Damascus. This Christian Arab culture and the contribution it made to the spectacular flowering of the Muslim world in its heyday (mid-eighth to mid-thirteenth centuries), has not, as Sidney Griffith reminds us, received anything like the attention it deserves. What we think of as “Islamic civilization” in the golden age was by no means monolithically Islamic: many streams fed into it – Indian, Persian, Jewish and

Christian. Of these tributaries, perhaps the most explored is the Jewish, but the Christian was at least as large and as important. Again as Griffith comments, while educated westerners may have heard something of Sa'adia Gaon, Judah Halevi, Avraham ibn Ezra, and Moses Maimonides, few, even among Christian medievalists, will recognize the names of Hunayn ibn Ishāq, Theodore Abū Qurrah, 'Ammār al-Basrī, Yahyā ibn 'Adī, Bar Hebraeus, or al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl.³ So Jews living under Islam would have remained all too aware of Christianity, which in some regions in the early period would have still been, numerically speaking, the dominant faith.

The continued pre-occupation of Judaism with Christianity, even after the rise of Islam, manifests itself in various ways, but perhaps none is more striking than Jewish eschatology. The rise of Islam led to a revival of apocalyptic speculation in the east Mediterranean and the Middle East. The *fin de siècle* mood began to set in before Islam emerged, but it undoubtedly received a boost when the new faith burst onto the scene. Apocalypticism swept across the region affecting Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and eventually Islam itself.⁴ From our point of view the curious fact to note is that while Christian apocalypticism registered the rise of Islam, and was inclined to identify the new Arabian prophet with the Antichrist, Jewish apocalypticism on the whole did not. The most important Jewish apocalyptic scenarios seemed still to have seen Christianity as the main eschatological foe of the Jewish people, whom the Messiah would have to defeat: the Antichrist remained Armillus, the King of Edom. This is what we find in Sa'adia's influential Eighth Book of his *Beliefs and Opinions*, in Sefer Zerubbavel, in Tefillat Shim'on ben Yohai, and other works. It is true that here and there we find attempts to paint the Ishmaelites into the picture, but only in a half-hearted sort of way. The enemy remains the old enemy – Christianity. Of the texts of the apocalyptic revival the most pertinent for present purposes is Sefer Zerubbavel, because of its explicit denigration of Mary and Jesus. While this work may have originated in the early seventh century, just before the Muslim invasion of the Middle East, there seems little doubt that it continued to circulate

³ Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 3. It is interesting to speculate on the psychology of this neglect. There was undoubtedly an element of shame at the loss of the heartlands of the Christian faith – a shame which Christendom violently attempted to expunge with the Crusades. But there were also more practical reasons. While great Judaeo-Arabic texts were translated into Hebrew and so made available to Jews in the west, few Christian Arabic texts found their way into western languages, and so remained locked out of the intellectual development of the politically dominant form of Christianity.

⁴ On this apocalyptic movement around the time of the rise of Islam see: John C. Reeves, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Paul J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (ed. Dorothy deF. Abrahamse; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Saïd Amir Arjomand, "Islamic Apocalypticism in the Classical Period," in *The Continuum History of Apocalypticism* (eds. Bernard J. McGinn, John J. Collins and Stephen J. Stein; New York: Continuum, 2003), 380–413.

and undergo reworking for some time after the Muslim conquest. This continued fixation with Christianity even after it had lost political power is curious. Does it suggest that the new religion of Islam was regarded as more benign? Does it imply that Jews expected that Islam's reign would be temporary, that Christianity would recover lost ground and that Jewish-Christian hostilities would recommence as before? It is hard to say. One thing is, however, clear: the continued presence of Christianity in the Muslim world, and Judaism's continued concern as to its intentions, make Jewish interest in the *Toledot Yeshu* in principle not hard to explain.

It would be wrong, however, to think that absolutely nothing had changed. Though Judaism remained, as before, in dispute with Christianity, the rise of Islam profoundly altered the dynamics of this debate. It did this in two ways. First, Jews in Muslim lands were no longer under the constant, grinding pressure to limit the public expression of their faith. The field of engagement between Jews and Christians was suddenly levelled. Both sides found themselves holding the same status as *ahl al-dhimma*. Christianity must suddenly have lost its attractiveness to socially aspiring Jews, and Christian attempts to coerce Jews into the Church must have stopped. The odd thing is that the new freedom towards Christianity which the Jews gained under Islam does not seem to have led to indifference but rather to a fresh appetite for debate. As Daniel Lasker points out, the earliest systematic Jewish anti-Christian treatises that we have were written in Arabic in the first few centuries of Islam.⁵ Lasker may misstate the position, if he means to imply that there was no Jewish-Christian debate before the Islamic period. That is manifestly not the case. It is becoming abundantly clear that there was an intense Jewish-Christian dialogue going on right throughout the Talmudic period, the impact of which on the formation of Rabbinic theology, and on Rabbinic literature (Midrash and Talmud) was profound.⁶ And, of course, if the *Toledot Yeshu* originated in some shape or form in late antiquity, as many would argue it did, then it is relevant to the question, because it has clear anti-Christian intent. The debate in late antiquity was curiously asymmetrical: on the Christian side it was open and noisy: the Jews are identified as the opponents and directly attacked. On the Rabbinic side it is much more muted, and often seems to be at its most intense where Christianity is not explicitly named. This silence, I have argued, was basically a "loud" silence – an apologetic ploy that allowed the Rabbis to assert priority: they were the older faith, the true heirs of Moses; they had no need to take

⁵ Daniel J. Lasker, "The Jewish Critique of Christianity under Islam in the Middle Ages," *PAAJR* 57 (1991): 121–53.

⁶ See the essays in *The Exegetical Encounter between Christians and Jews in Late Antiquity* (eds. Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling; Leiden: Brill, 2009).

cognizance of the younger, up-start.⁷ This silence may, however, have been reinforced by a fear of speaking out too strongly and explicitly in a Christian world. Where Islam made the difference was that Jews felt they could now go public with their objections to Christianity, and compose formal, anti-Christian treatises that could be put, so to speak, into the public domain.

There was a second way in which the rise of Islam changed the dynamics of the Jewish-Christian debate. Islam was not simply a referee, it was itself deeply interested in the points at issue, and took a distinctive view of them, sometimes agreeing with one side, sometimes with the other. This raised the possibility of theological alliances between two of the parties against the third. It was, then, not only Islam's levelling of the playing-field but also its own direct engagement with the issues that changed the modalities of the Jewish-Christian controversy, and ensured that it did not go cold. The Qur'an itself set the tone. It constantly and directly disputes both Judaism and Christianity; it is endlessly putting both Jews and Christians right. It set up a dialogue which was to continue right through the Middle Ages. Subsequent Muslim rulers, in the spirit of the Qur'an, show considerable appetite for disputation, sometimes within the social setting of the *majlis*.⁸ This manifest Muslim interest seems to have sparked off competition between Christian and Jewish intellectuals to impress their Muslim overlords – a competition resembling the rivalry between siblings to gain the attention of a parent.⁹

At the same time we should not overestimate how outward-looking this debate was. Religious apologetics and polemics have a complex and subtle dynamic which is not always well understood. The default scenario is that they are addressed to the members of the other faith: what *seems* to be happening is that the polemicist attempts to use the power of argument to persuade the members of the other faith to acknowledge the error of their ways, and embrace the polemicist's point of view. But in reality the polemic seldom reaches this implied audience. Take, for example, the Jewish anti-Christian treatises of the early Islamic period. These are, indeed, in Arabic, but they are in Judaeo-Arabic, and, at a stroke, inaccessible to Christian or Muslim intellectuals. The exception that proves the rule may have been the Qaraites who regularly used Arabic script. That may be simply an index of the fact that they, on the whole, at least in the early Middle Ages, engaged more directly than Rabbanites with the dominant Islamic culture, and were more outward looking. But why compose elaborate

⁷ See my essay "The Parting of the Ways' from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism," in *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways A. D. 70 to 135* (ed. James D. G. Dunn; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992): 1–25.

⁸ Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, Mark R. Cohen, Sasson Somekh, and Sidney H. Griffith, eds., *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1999), esp., the article by Cohen and Sasson, "Interreligious Majālis in Early Fatimid Egypt," on pages 128–37.

⁹ A vivid image suggested to me by Ora Limor.

polemics in such a way that it would hard for the other side to read them? The reason is that apologetic/polemic has often as much, if not more, aimed at an *internal* audience – with reassuring oneself and one's fellow believers that the faith can be defended against attack, and with establishing a distinctive identity. There is no better way to define a theology than by setting it in opposition to alternative points of view, whether real or imaginary.¹⁰

This need for reassurance argues uneasiness and insecurity: it suggests an attempt to deny the *attractiveness* of the other faith. How could this have applied to Jewish-Christian relations in the early Islamic period, when Christianity no longer had the power to coerce acceptance, nor offered obvious social advantages? The answer may be simple. In the relatively benign conditions which existed under early Islam open and free conversion to another faith once again became a real life-choice. The Muslim rulers were indifferent if a Jewish subject became a Christian or vice versa: conversion between *dhimmis* was not really seen as conversion in Islamic law. It is perhaps no accident that we have evidence of such conversions. The most pertinent for present purposes is the *Qissat Mujādalat al-Uṣqaf*, the first known systematic Jewish anti-Christian treatise, composed in Arabic possibly in the mid-ninth century.¹¹ The author was a Christian priest who converted to Judaism, and wrote the *Qissa* in order to explain himself to his former co-religionists. The work was later adapted into Hebrew as the *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer*, in which the unnamed original priest was seemingly identified with Nestorius the great theologian of Syriac Christianity. The lifting of the deadening hand of Christianity, whether in its Orthodox Chalcedonian or Jacobite or Nestorian forms, allowed diversity to emerge within Christianity in the Muslim world. The generally *laissez-faire* attitude of the early Muslim authorities in religious matters may have encouraged diversity also within Judaism. This was, of course, the time when the major split between Rabbanism and Qaraism occurred. There are grounds for thinking that Qaraism has deep roots within Judaism, going back to anti-Rabbinic, priestly trends in the Talmudic period, but it is interesting that these trends only seem to crystallize into an organized anti-Rabbinic movement under early Islam. Linguistic evidence suggests that the first Arabic versions of the *Toledot Yeshu* were done in the ninth century. That would put them in the same time-frame as the earliest systematic Jewish anti-Christian polemics. These translations should be seen as part of a new, open

¹⁰ This internal audience is very clear in some polemical treatises, e.g. Maimonides *Epistle to the Yemen*. But even in this case the Islamic opponent remains an ultimate target, in that Maimonides is surely furnishing the community with arguments which will not only reassure them, but which they can turn on their opponents, as occasion arises, in public debate. Some polemics have an implicit third party in view – either the uncommitted public or the authorities. Much early Christian apologetic, while having Judaism ostensibly in view, has one eye firmly fixed on the Roman authorities and is obliquely arguing that Christianity is not subversive of the state.

¹¹ Daniel J. Lasker and Sarah Stroumsa, *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest: Qīṣṣat Mujādalat al-Uṣqaf and Sefer Nestor Ha-Komer* (2 vols.; Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1996).

Jewish engagement with Christianity, within the broader context of the religious diversity and sectarianism engendered by the rise of Islam.¹²

There is one form of this sectarianism which may have a particular relevance for the present discussion. It has been claimed that the early Islamic period saw the resurgence of Jewish forms of Christianity. The evidence is confused and contested, and if the claim is correct it is not at all clear whether we are talking about the re-emergence into the light of day of an unbroken Jewish Christian movement going all the way back to early Jewish Christianity which effectively disappeared from our historical record in the fifth century, or a new Judaizing movement, that is to say, a movement generated from within the mainline churches which stressed the Jewish roots of Christianity and adopted certain Jewish practices and beliefs. The history of the Church is littered with such Judaizing movements, sparked into life by the fact that mainline Christianity never repudiated its Jewish heritage: it is there for all to see in the Christian Scriptures, and it is hardly surprising if some Christians, from time to time, wonder whether the older form of the faith possesses not only greater antiquity but also greater authenticity. Jewish or Judaizing Christianity would be thoroughly at home in the sectarian milieu of early Islam. The new-found religious freedom and the stimulus the new faith gave to innovative religious thinking could easily have encouraged the emergence of such hybrid religious identities.

A pointer in this direction may be found in the work of Josef Meri on the cult of the holy man in medieval Syria. Meri gathers evidence that it was common for Jews, Muslims, and, indeed, Christians, to participate in each others religious festivals and venerate each others saints.¹³ Like languages in contact, the natural evolution of religious communities in everyday contact, if they are given half a chance, is towards religious syncretism, especially at the level of the common folk. It takes enormous effort on the part of the religious authorities on all sides to counter this tendency, to keep their flocks separate, to police the boundaries between them. If there was, indeed, an upsurge of religious “promiscuity” in the early Islamic period, and if that “promiscuity” was firming up into sectarian forms of Jewish or Judaizing Christianity, then we have an obvious context in which an Arabic translation of the *Toledot* would have had work to do. As a text of popular appeal, an anti-hagiography capable of being circulated orally, it could have played a part in reminding Jews of their distinctive identity, of where their true allegiance lay.

¹² I allude here to John Wansbrough’s use of the phrase “the sectarian milieu” to capture the religious situation under early Islam (Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu* [Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1979]).

¹³ Josef W. Meri, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Meri concentrates on the eleventh to sixteenth centuries, but there is evidence for similar religious promiscuity earlier.

It is important to note the popular character of the *Toledot Yeshu*. This becomes obvious when we compare it with other anti-Christian Jewish works of the early Islamic period. I have already mentioned the anonymous *Qiṣṣat Mujādalat al-Usqf*. From only slightly later comes the *ʿIshrūn Maqāla* of Dāwūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammis, the first Jewish anti-Christian polemicist whom we know by name.¹⁴ The contrast with the *Toledot* could not be more sharp. The *Qiṣṣa* and the *ʿIshrūn Maqāla* are basically theological, even philosophical works, the *Toledot* is a narrative, which offers an alternative to the Gospel story. Lasker and Stroumsa, to be sure, detect a vulgar tone in the *Qiṣṣa*, a tendency which becomes more pronounced in the *Nestor*. They find echoes here of the *Toledot*, which they actually suppose the author of the *Qiṣṣa* may have used as a source.¹⁵ But this is rather misleading: there are no close verbal parallels to the *Toledot* in the *Qiṣṣa*, and in reality the two works are poles apart in genre. The *Toledot* has folkloric elements: it was clearly intended for popular consumption, and was, so it seems, passed down by the fireside, maybe at times by the women of the house. Nonetheless it is in many ways a sophisticated work, which shows close knowledge of the Gospels. It is a clever parody, and we should not be fooled into thinking that, because of its surface simplicity and vulgarity, it is pure folktale, its authors uneducated sons of the soil. It is satire, with a large dose of the burlesque, and it is no more the product of an untutored mind than *Pentagrue* or the *Letters of Obscure Men*. But the desire to reach out to ordinary folk is palpable in the form of the work, and that is suggestive of its *Sitz im Leben*.

So far we have established that if a (re)-emergence of Jewish/Judaizing Christianity occurred in the early Islamic period, it would have been thoroughly at home in the sectarian milieu of the time, and would provide a plausible and specific context that the Arabic versions of the *Toledot Yeshu* could have been meant to address. But where is the evidence for the existence of Jewish/Judaizing Christianity at this time? The debate has raged around Shlomo Pines's claim that the long and unusually detailed critique of Christianity in the *Tathbūt dalāʾil al-nubuwwa* of the Muʿtazilite Islamic scholar, ʿAbd al-Jabbār (c. 935–1025), who spent the latter part of his life in Rayy (a few miles south-east of present-day Tehran), relies on Jewish-Christian sources. Pines' attempt to establish that Jewish-Christianity lies behind the anti-Christian polemics of the *Tathbūt* extends over several detailed articles, though he never produced a final, definitive synthesis before he died.¹⁶ He argued that ʿAbd al-Jabbār's critique of Christianity is unusual within the context of early Muslim anti-Christian polemic. He noted that certain aspects of it have a strong Jewish-Christian ring, such as the claim that,

¹⁴ Sarah Stroumsa, *Dāwūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammis's Twenty Chapters (ʿIshrūn Maqāla)* (Leiden: Brill, 1989).

¹⁵ Lasker and Stroumsa, *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, 14 and 21.

¹⁶ The articles are conveniently collected by Guy Stroumsa in *The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines Volume IV: Studies in the History of Religion* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1996).

since Jesus came to confirm the Torah of Moses, his followers are at fault for not observing it, or that, since Jesus spoke Hebrew, they should never have given that language up. He analyses the Gospel quotations in the *Tathbīt*, and shows that while some of them conform to the Peshitta and some to the Old Syriac Gospels, others do not. Some of the non-aligned quotations may betray the influence of the Diatessaron, while others may reflect "the Hebrew Gospel, i. e. the Gospel according to the Hebrews or some similar Judaeo-Christian Scripture."

Pines argues that these diverse aspects of 'Abd al-Jabbār's critique of Christianity can be neatly unified by the single hypothesis that he has drawn on a Jewish-Christian source, probably originally composed in Syriac. If this is the case, then the implications are clear. The most plausible way that this source could have reached 'Abd al-Jabbār was in Arabic translation, probably transmitted directly to him by members of a Jewish-Christian group. But this means that these Jewish Christians must have been around in his time. Pines finds a reference to just such a group in 'Abd al-Jabbār's statement that "a sect of them (the Christians), who are the elite, believe that their Lord is a Jew, the son of a Jew, born from a Jew, and that his mother is a Jewish woman." The wording here is suggestive. It seems to deny the divinity of Christ, and possibly also the Virgin Birth. Pines is clear that his Jewish-Christian group not only believed that the Mosaic commandments were still binding on Christians but that, though they accepted him as a prophet, they denied his divinity. He notes that Sa'adya appears to know of a Christian sect which equally did not believe in the divinity of Jesus, but regarded him simply as a prophet, though Sa'adya's group also, apparently, believed in the abrogation of Torah. A further implication of Pines' hypothesis is that since his putative Jewish-Christian community had access to early Christian, including Jewish-Christian sources, it was probably not, on the balance of the probabilities, a spontaneous Judaizing movement, but rather, somehow, a lineal descendant of early Jewish Christianity.

Samuel Stern strongly attacked Pines.¹⁷ He argued that 'Abd al-Jabbār's critique of Christianity is nowhere near as unusual as Pines supposed. Pines had missed significant Islamic parallels, and several of the elements which he identified as Jewish-Christian are widespread in Islamic tradition. There is no doubt that Pines's position is highly speculative, and falls some way short of proof. But Stern's counter-attack also has its weaknesses. He fails to do justice to the cumulative character of Pines's argument. He fails to note that finding Islamic parallels to some of 'Abd al-Jabbār's ideas does not solve the problem of origins, but simply moves it elsewhere. His assumption that because, as everyone knows, Jewish Christianity disappeared centuries before the Islamic era 'Abd al-Jabbār

¹⁷ Samuel M. Stern, "Quotations from Apocryphal Gospels in 'Abd al-Jabbār," *JTS* 18 (1967): 34-57; idem, "'Abd al-Jabbār's Account of How Christ's Religion was Falsified by the Adoption of Roman Customs," *JTS* 19 (1968): 128-85.

cannot have relied on Jewish Christian sources begs the question, and rules out *a priori* the possibility that it may actually have survived or revived. Interestingly Pines and Stern both agree that the *Tathbīt* probably betrays knowledge of the *Toledot*. For Stern 'Abd al-Jabbār drew directly on the *Toledot*. But this is problematic: the *Toledot*, as we shall see, would have been as offensive to 'Abd al-Jabbār as it would have been to any Christian, and the parallels between it and the *Tathbīt* would surely have to be much stronger than they are for it to be plausible that he relied on it as a source. Pines is typically more subtle. He suggests that the parallelism arises from the fact that the *Toledot* was aimed at a *Jewish-Christian* version of the Gospel. The parallelism is, consequently, indirect and coincidental. The suggestion that the *Toledot* was shaped to refute a specific Jewish-Christian view of Jesus is intriguing, and may explain the rather puzzling fact that the divinity of Jesus does not figure more prominently in it, though the issue is implicit. The Jewish-Christian group attacked may not have believed that Jesus was divine. All this is highly suggestive. The jury is still out on the Pines-Stern debate, but it raises important questions and points to several further lines of research.¹⁸ Above all it reminds us just how confused the religious situation became in the early Islamic period. Jewish Christianity scuffs the borderlines, and it may have engendered polemic from the establishments on both sides aimed at re-affirming the differences. The *Toledot Yeshu* would have had an obvious function in a context where some Jews were drawn to Christianity, not in an orthodox but in a Jewish form that did not hold to a high Christology. A Jewish anti-Gospel could have served the purpose of deterring potential converts, an anti-Gospel which does not directly take issue with the supposed divinity of Jesus, but rather focuses on denying his claim to prophethood and labelling him as a sorcerer who tried to lead Israel astray.

The circulation of the *Toledot* in the Middle East and North Africa is inevitably bound up with the fate of Christianity under Islam, and we would expect that the work would drop out of view in the post-medieval period. From the late middle ages onward, Christianity was decimated in the Muslim world, and went into precipitous decline. Its ecclesiastical organization was destroyed, its life disrupted, its members killed, scattered or oppressed. It had neither the leisure nor resources nor the freedom to engage in proselytizing or in inter-communal debate.¹⁹ Certainly it no longer offered an attractive alternative to Judaism, which also suffered severely under Muslim rule. This decline of Christianity seems to be mirrored in our record of Jewish interest in the *Toledot*. There is evidence of continued copying of the work in the Yemen in the early modern

¹⁸ For a thorough discussion see Gabriel Said Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: 'Abd al-Jabbār's Critique of Christian Origins* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

¹⁹ Philip Jenkins offers an interesting overview and analysis of the decline of Christianity in the Arab world in *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa and Asia – and How it Died* (New York: Harper One, 2008).

period, but that might be explained by the presence across the straits of the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia, with its strong trading links with southern Arabia. The contrast with Christian Europe is striking because it is precisely at this period that Jewish interest in the *Toledot* seems to be at its most intense. One might predict a resurgence of interest in the *Toledot* with the arrival of European Christian missions in the Middle East in the nineteenth century. Organizations such as the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews (now the Church's Ministry among Jewish People – the CMJ), established in 1809, were interested not only in the Jews of Europe but also in more remote communities. The London Society, for example, mounted a mission to the Falashas in Ethiopia, whose existence had been reported to an incredulous Europe by James Bruce, the Ethiopian traveller. This mission provoked a counter-mission from the Jews of Europe to save their endangered brethren from the clutches of Christianity – a counter-mission supported by Azriel Hildesheimer and the Alliance Israelite Universelle.²⁰ But I know of no evidence that this raised any interest in the *Toledot Yeshu* in Ethiopia, though one wonders if it might explain the copying of the *Toledot* in neighbouring Yemen. Claims have been made that the *Toledot* was already known in Ethiopia at an earlier date, but they are unsubstantial and remain under-researched.²¹

One of the earliest of the Christian missions to the Muslim world, and one that pioneered the principles of many that were to come, was mounted by Anthony Norris Groves. Groves' party, which included John Kitto, later to become a famous Bible scholar, F. W. Newman, the brother of John Henry Newman, and a socially well-connected Englishman, John Vesey Parnell, settled into Baghdad in 1830–31. It is, of course, immediately tempting to link their presence there to the printing of the *Toledot* in Baghdad in 1846, were it not for the fact that Groves's mission was a disaster. It got caught up in a local plague which carried off Mrs Groves, and seems to have been abandoned in 1833, leaving no lasting community. Groves turned his attentions to India where the going was easier.²²

Similar comments can be made about the more colourful Christian missionary Joseph Wolff (1795–1862) whom E. Brauer back in 1930s suggested may have been responsible for renewed interest among middle eastern Jews in the *Toledot*.²³ Wolff, the son of a Rabbi was particularly interested in Jews and got absolutely

²⁰ The story is well told in Emanuela Tevisan-Semi, *Jacques Faitlovitch and the Jews of Ethiopia* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007).

²¹ For *Toledot Yeshu* in Ethiopia, see Horbury, *A Critical Examination*, 214, 211 (n. 3), and see 219 for some remarks on the missionary activity by Henry Aaron Stern.

²² Timothy C. F. Stunt, "Anthony Norris Groves in an International Context: A Re-assessment of his Early Development," in *The Growth of the Brethren Movement: National and International Experiences* (eds. Neil T. R. Dickson and Tim Grass; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2006), 223–40.

²³ See Fischel, "Eine jüdische-persische 'Toldoth Jeschu'-Handschrift," 340–49.

everywhere – from Ethiopia and the Yemen to Bokhara. He mounted a one-man crusade against the Islamic world! But he was no more successful than Groves. It is a well known feature of missionary literature in the nineteenth century that colourful tales and much piety often conceal the fact that few converts were being made. The real impact of these missions was small. The exception that proves the rule was the Bishopric of Jerusalem established in 1841 by the Church of England and the Evangelical Church of Prussia, the first incumbent of which was a converted rabbi Michael Solomon Alexander. The missionary activities around the Jerusalem Bishopric were more successful because it was backed by considerable political power, it built up institutions, some of which have survived down to the present day, and its preaching to the Jewish community was reinforced by social and educational work. There are grounds for thinking that it unsettled the Jewish leadership of the old Yishuv, but that doesn't seem to correlate with any increased copying or printing of the *Toledot Yeshu*.

In short, while there is some evidence of a revival of interest in the *Toledot* among Jews in Muslim lands in the nineteenth century and it is almost certainly a direct result of the new challenge of European Christian missions, it is muted, partly because these missions were generally unsuccessful, and partly because the Jewish communities were religiously isolated, inward-looking and traditional, with little appetite or interest in responding on their own account to Christian claims.

The *Toledot Yeshu* and the Muslim “Gospel”

Let us now turn to the question of the *Toledot* and the Muslim “Gospel,” and begin by reminding ourselves of some of the key elements of the *Toledot*'s view of Jesus and his mother. The *Toledot*, of course, exists in numerous versions, and one of the most vexing problems it poses is how to model this diversity. Its textual complexity mirrors that of the Christian lives of Jesus, especially if we include not only the four canonical Gospels but all the other Gnostic and apocryphal Gospels as well. This diversity shows just how alive the tradition was, how constantly it was being reworked, and interest in it renewed. Its genre is also a problem, and affects how we read it. There are clearly elements of folklore and burlesque in it, which counsel against taking it all too literally. It belongs to a long tradition of polemical satire. Yet at its heart lie three fundamental claims about Jesus which are common to all the versions, and are clearly meant in deadly earnest.

First, there was no virgin birth. Jesus was born out of wedlock; he was a *mamzer*, and the story of the virgin birth was concocted as a way of covering up this shameful fact. The versions differ considerably as to the degree to which Mary was culpable. In some she is tricked and raped, and comes across

as a rather tragic figure. In others the portrait is much more hostile and she is complicit in adultery.

Second, Jesus was not a true prophet but a charlatan and a sorcerer who led Israel astray, and it was on that charge that he was tried by the Sanhedrin and put to death. Curiously, there is no attempt to deny that he performed miracles: he healed the lame and raised the dead. The explanation of this is that he achieved these genuine miracles through the power of the Ineffable Name, the secret of which he managed to steal from the *'Even Shetiyyah* – the foundation stone of the world. The implicit charge here seems to be that Jesus was a sorcerer, though that does not sit easily with his use of the Ineffable Name: sorcery is more commonly associated with the use of demonic powers (*shedim*), but this nicety does not seem to trouble the authors of the *Toledot*.²⁴

Third, Jesus was really and truly put to death, but there was no resurrection, or ascension into heaven. The missing body in the tomb is explained by a story about someone removing it and burying it elsewhere, where it was discovered three days later, and ignominiously displayed in public.

There is, to be sure, much more than this in the *Toledot*, even in its most minimal forms. Some versions carry the story down to the history of the early Church, to the parting of the ways between Christianity and Judaism, but these three claims form the core message of the text.

Let us now compare this with the Muslim Jesus. This needs to be done with care, because Jesus is a highly complex figure in Islam who is used, as in Christianity, to illuminate and validate many different points of view. Different pictures emerge depending on whether we look at the Qur'an, or the Hadith, or the *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, or Sufi, or *Adab* literature, or the theological writings of heterodox sects such as the Nusayris. Of all the prophets before Muhammad Jesus is the one who receives by far the most attention. Tarif Khalidi in *The Muslim Jesus* speaks of Islam's "love-affair with Jesus."²⁵ The bedrock on which this rich

²⁴ While I still think that the *Toledot Yeshu* does mean to brand Jesus as some sort of magician, it is possible to argue that magic is not the central charge, but rather using the undoubted power of the divine name to lead Israel astray: Jesus was guilty of *mesit*. It is not clear whether the mere pronunciation and use of the Tetragram was in itself seen as a capital offence. In the discussion of magic in Bavli Sanhedrin the conclusion seems to be that a magician is one who does miracles through the power of *shedim* (see Philip S. Alexander, "The Talmudic Concept of Conjuring ('*Ahizat 'Einayim*) and the Problem of the Definition of Magic (*Kishuf*)," in *Creation and Recreation in Jewish Thought: Festschrift in Honor of Joseph Dan on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (eds. Rachel Elijor and Peter Schäfer; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 7–20, and it is interesting that this is not the *Toledot's* view of the miracles of Jesus. Its position is all the more remarkable because already in the canonical Gospels Jesus is accused of invoking the power of demons to do his miracles (Luke 11:14–23): it was a very ancient charge. Morton Smith (*Jesus the Magician* [London: Gollancz, 1978]) sees the *Toledot* as continuing this accusation, but the parallelism is not as clear-cut as he supposes.

²⁵ Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001). This is, to date, the largest collection of Jesus stories

tradition rests is, however, the Qur'an. This devotes long and carefully crafted passages to Jesus and his mother, which merit and have received close reading from both traditional and modern commentators.²⁶ The Qur'anic view of Jesus can be defined by the following five points.

First, Jesus was virgin born. Qur'an 3.45–47: "Behold! The angels said: 'O Mary! Allah gives you glad tidings of a Word from Him (*bikalimatin minhu*): his name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honour in this world and the hereafter, and one of (the company of) those nearest to Allah. He shall speak to the people in childhood (*fi l-mahdi*)²⁷ and in maturity, and he shall be one (of the company) of the righteous.' She said: 'O my Lord! How shall I have a son when no man has touched me?' He said: 'Even so: Allah creates what He wills, and when He has decreed a plan, He has but to say to it, "Be," and it is.'"²⁸

Second, Jesus was a true prophet, and the truth of his prophecy was established by clear "signs," i.e. miracles. Qur'an 3.48–49: "Allah will teach him [Jesus] the Book and Wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel, and (appoint him) an

from Islamic sources. See the earlier collection by M. Asin Palacios, "Logia agrapha domini Jesu apud moslemicos scriptores, asceticos praesertim, usitata," *Patrologia Orientalis* 13 (1919): 335–431, and 19 (1926): 531–624. It is not impossible that Islam may have created its own counter-narrative to the canonical Gospels, its own *Toledot Yeshu*, and that this lies behind the Gospel of Barnabas. But the Gospel of Barnabas is a very late work, first attested in the sixteenth century, and its sources and origins remain deeply obscure. It is, however, still invoked by Muslim apologists today as preserving a more accurate account of the life of Jesus than the canonic Gospels.

²⁶ The bibliography on Jesus in the Qur'an is now vast. In addition to Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus* see, e.g.: Enno Littmann, "Jesus in Pre-Islamic Arabic Inscriptions," *The Muslim World* 40 (1950): 16–18; Heikki Raisanen, "The Portrait of Jesus in the Qur'an: Reflections of a Biblical Scholar," *The Muslim World* 70 (1980): 122–33; Kenneth Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985); Sidney H. Griffith, "The Gospel in Arabic: An Inquiry into its Appearance in the First Abbasid Century," *OrChr* 69 (1985): 126–67; Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity: The Representation of Jesus in the Qur'an and the Classical Muslim Commentaries* (London: Macmillan, 1991); Jane Damen McAuliffe, *Quranic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); David Thomas, "The Miracles of Jesus in Early Islamic Polemics," *JSS* 39 (1994): 221–43; Tarif Khalidi, "The Role of Jesus in Intra-Muslim Polemics of the First Two Islamic Centuries," in *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period, 750–1258* (eds. Khalil Samir and Jørgen Nielsen; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 146–56; Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an* (Oxford: One World, 1995).

²⁷ Literally "in the cradle." Yūsuf 'Alī, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 1989), 139 note 388, takes this metaphorically for childhood and sees an allusion to the Gospel story of Jesus teaching in the Temple (Luke 2) – a story which may also be alluded to in the *Toledot Yeshu*. But it is more likely that the reference is to the infant Jesus in his cradle miraculously speaking to the people. See Q 19.29–30: "But she (Mary) pointed to the babe. They (the people) said: 'How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle (*fi l-mahdi*)?' He (the infant Jesus) said: 'I am indeed a servant of Allah: he has given me revelation and made me a prophet.'" Some of the Infancy Gospels also represent Jesus speaking from the cradle.

²⁸ See also Q 19.16–26. Quotations of the Qur'an and the verse numbering are based on the translation of Yūsuf 'Alī, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, which is adequate for my purposes.

apostle (*rasūlan*) to the Children of Israel (with this message): ‘I have come to you with a sign from your Lord (*biāyatin min rabbikum*), in that I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and I breathe into it and it becomes a bird by Allah’s leave. And I heal those born blind, and the lepers, and I quicken the dead, by Allah’s leave; and I declare to you what you eat, and what you store in your houses. Therein is a sign for you, if you believed.’ Qur’an 5.110: “Then Allah will say: ‘O Jesus son of Mary! recount My favour to you and to your mother. Behold! I strengthened you with the holy spirit (*birūhi l-quḍsi*), so that you spoke to the people in childhood (*fī l-mahdi*) and in maturity. Behold! I taught you the Book and Wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel. And behold! you made out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, by My leave, and you breathe into it, and it becomes a bird, by My leave, and you heal those born blind, and the lepers, by My leave. And behold you bring forth the dead by My leave. And behold! I did restrain the Children of Israel from (violence to) you, when you did show them the clear proofs, and the unbelievers among them said: ‘This is nothing but evident magic (*siḥrun mubinun*).’”²⁹ In a famous Hadith Muhammad says that of all the earlier prophets he is closest to Jesus, and the Qur’anic commentator Ibn Kathir calls him the “seal” of the Israelite prophets.³⁰

Third, Jesus was not the Son of God. Qur’an 4.171: “O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion, nor say of Allah aught but truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an apostle of Allah (*rasūlu l-lahi*), and His Word (*wakalimatuhu*), which he bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from him (*warūḥun minhu*): so believe in Allah and his apostles. Say not ‘Trinity’ (*thalāthatun*). Desist – it will be better for you. For Allah is one God, glory be to him. (Far exalted is he) above having a son.” The same point is made again and again in the Qur’an, often apparently dragged into contexts where it seems to have little relevance.³¹ And yet, it should be noted, that this did not prevent high christologies from emerging in later Islamic thought, within the mystical tradition (see especially Ibn ‘Arabi³²) and among “heterodox” Islamic groups

²⁹ See also Q 2.253; Q 19.27–34; Q 57.27.

³⁰ Brannon M. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Qur’an: An Introduction to the Qur’an and Muslim Exegesis* (London: Continuum, 2002). Sahih Muslim 30.5835: “Abu Huraira reported Allah’s Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: I am most akin to Jesus Christ among the whole of mankind, and all the Prophets are of different mothers but belong to one religion and no Prophet was raised between me and Jesus.” Sahih Muslim 30.5836: “Abu Huraira reported many *ahadith* from Allah’s Messenger and one is that Allah’s Messenger said: I am most close to Jesus, son of Mary, among the whole of mankind in this worldly life and the next life. They said: Allah’s Messenger how is it? Thereupon he said: Prophets are brothers in faith, having different mothers. Their religion is, however, one and there is no Apostle between us and Jesus Christ.”

³¹ See Q 5.17; 5.73–75; 5.116; 6.100–102; 9.30–31; 10.68–70; 17.111; 18.4–5; 19.88–92; 21.26–29; 37.149–59; 39.4; 43.81–82; 112.1–4.

³² See Andreas d’Souza, “Jesus in Ibn ‘Arabi’s *Fusus al-Hikam*,” *Islamochristiana* 8 (1982): 185–200. Further: Yves Marquet, “Les Ihwan al-Safa et le christianisme,” *Islamochristiana* 8 (1982): 129–58.

such as the Nusayris. A good example of this can be found in the “trinitarianism” of the Nusayri theological treatise the *Kitab al-usūs* (Book of Foundations), composed no later than the 13th century, but extant now in an 18th century ms in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Fonds arabe 1449, fols 1–179). The influence of Christian ideas on this text are obvious: it offers a veritable fusion of Christian and Islamic theology, and it reminds us just how porous the theological boundaries between Islam and Christianity could be.³³ The seeds of this high Islamic Christology are found in the Qur’an itself in the highly suggestive references to Jesus as the “Word” and “Spirit” of God.³⁴

Fourth, Jesus did not really die, nor was he buried, but he ascended direct into heaven. Qur’an 4.156–159: “They (the Jews) rejected faith; they uttered against Mary a grave slander (*waqawlihim ‘alā maryama buhtānan ‘azīman*); they said (in boast), ‘We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Apostle of Allah’ – But they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them (*walākin shubbiha lahum*), and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not. Nay, Allah raised him up (*rafa‘ahu*) unto Himself; and Allah is exalted in power, and wise; and there is none of the People of the Book but must believe in him before his death; and on the Day of Resurrection he will be a witness against them.” There has been much debate whether Muhammad is here embracing a Docetic view of the death of Jesus: certainly one way of understanding his words is to suppose that at the last moment God substituted for Jesus some sort of simulacrum which was crucified in Jesus place, but there can be no question of Muhammad being a full-blown Docetist. His Jesus is a fully human, flesh-and-blood Jesus.³⁵ What Muhammad may be doing here is quite deliberately cutting out the central claim of the Christian Gospel: if there was no death, then there was no atonement. This was not an inevitable move: he

³³ Meir M. Bar Asher and Aryeh Kofsky, *The Nusayrī-ʿAlawī Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 2002). The presence of Christian ideas in later Islamic theology is hardly surprising. Many Christians converted to Islam, either out of conviction or under pressure. Conversion is a complex phenomenon. Some converts mark their conversion by exaggerated rejection of their former faith, and public hostility to it. Others seek an accommodation with their former faith, and attempt to retain elements of it, fused with their new faith. Much of what is commonly called heterodox Islam in the Middle East represents a significant fusion of Christian and Islam ideas. The once vast Christian presence in the Middle East did not totally vanish. Its spirit lived on in heterodox Islam.

³⁴ As Khalidi rightly remarks, “If some modern Western Christian Scholars warn us against attaching overdue importance to the Qur’anic epithets of Jesus as ‘Word’ and ‘Spirit’ of God, in the Sufi texts these two epithets are absolutely central to the structure of his image. Indeed, the great Sufi master Ibn ‘Arabi (d. 638/1240) invents a new honorific for him: ‘The Seal of the Saints’ (Khatam al-Awliya’)” (*The Muslim Jesus*, 41–42).

³⁵ Mahmoud Ayyoub, “Towards an Islamic Christology, 2: The Death of Jesus – Reality or Illusion?” *The Muslim World* 70 (1980): 91–121.

could have accepted the death of Jesus, but portrayed him as a righteous martyr, like some of the other prophets.

Fifth, like Enoch and Elijah in earlier Judaism, Jesus' escape from death is bound up with the role assigned to him by God at the *eschaton*. This second coming of Jesus is (possibly) alluded to in the Qur'an at 43.61: "And (Jesus) shall be a Sign (for the coming of) the Hour (of Judgment): therefore have no doubt about the (Hour), but follow Me: this is a straight way."³⁶ But under the direct influence of Christian eschatology, this role was elaborated in Hadith: Jesus will descend to the white minaret on the east side of Damascus and join the Mahdi in the wars against the Antichrist (*al-Masīh ad-Dajjāl*). He will kill the Antichrist and lead both Jews and Christians to accept Islam.³⁷

The sources of the Jesus traditions in the Qur'an have been much debated. I am inclined to take a traditional view of the origin of the Qur'an, and to see it as indeed the work of Muhammad, as against the more radical theories.³⁸ My principal reason for this is the strong discontinuity I perceive between the Qur'an itself and the earliest *Tafsir* tradition. The Qur'an is famously allusive, and much of this allusiveness seems to have been as puzzling to the early *mufasssirun* as it is to us today. I find this very hard to explain if, as my late colleague Norman Calder argued, the Qur'an and Tafsir grew side by side. So, for the sake of the present argument I am assuming that the sayings in the Qur'an were indeed composed by Muhammad in the Hijaz in the early seventh century, and the text we now have reasonably faithfully represents that early work. The Suras about Jesus and Mary include those traditionally assigned to both the Meccan and the Medinan periods of his life.

If this is the setting of these Jesus traditions then the question arises as to where Muhammad got them from. There clearly are Christian sources, but what can they be? The Qur'an is full of echoes of the Gospels, but there is no clear evidence of an Arabic rendering of the Gospels to which Muhammad could have had access, and it is more likely his knowledge of Christianity came from oral tradition, perhaps conveyed primarily by converts to Islam among his first followers. The famous miracles of the animation of the clay birds and Jesus' speaking from the cradle show that Muhammad knew apocryphal traditions about the life of Jesus: these stories are paralleled in the Arabic Infancy Gospel, which probably goes back to a pre-Islamic Christian Arabic source, in turn derived from Syriac.³⁹ There is also a question as to the form or forms of Christianity Muhammad would have encountered in the Hijaz. Mecca was both

³⁶ So Yusuf Ali translates, but the Arabic at the beginning of the verse is highly allusive and obscure (*wa-innahu la'ilmun lissā'ati*).

³⁷ See, e.g., Saḥīḥ Muslim, *Kitāb al-Fitān*, ch. 9 (41.6924) and ch. 18 (41.7015).

³⁸ See John Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

³⁹ Arabic Infancy Gospel 36 and 46; cf. Infancy Gospel of Thomas 2.

a centre of pilgrimage and an important caravan city, on a trade route that ran from the Yemen up to Syria: it was not by any means closed to the outside world, and tradition has it that Muhammad himself led caravans up into Syria where he was said to have come in contact with Christian monks. But Mecca was far away from the great centres of Christian orthodoxy, and that its Christianity should have had “unorthodox” features is widely accepted as probable. Attention has focused on the Muhammad’s possibly Docetic view of the death of Jesus, which I have already mentioned.

Muhammad was also in contact with Judaism, though the form this Judaism took is also problematic: note, for example, his famous claim, hard to explain, that Jews call ‘Uzayr (Ezra?) a Son of God, apparently in the same way as Christians call Christ Son of God (Q 9.30). It is obvious from a close reading of the Qur’an that Muhammad was fully aware of Jewish rejection of Jesus, and was carefully positioning himself over against that as much as he was positioning himself against Christianity. Some references are deeply suggestive. As we saw, when Jesus presented to the Jews clear signs of his prophethood, they reject them saying, “This is nothing but evident magic (*sihrun mubinun*)” (Q 5.110). Exactly the same phrase is used again in the same context at Q 61.6. Mary is treated with a reverence and delicacy worthy of the most pious Christian: there is clearly an attempt to defend her honour against those who would impugn it – obviously the Jews, who are accused of uttering against her “a grave false slander” (Q 4.156). The charge is not specified, but it takes little imagination to see it as the claim that Mary had been unchaste, and that Jesus was born out of wedlock. Now I am not suggesting that these are direct allusions to the *Toledot Yeshu* (though the possibility cannot be ruled out that later Muslim commenators in elaborating these passages do know some version of the work): the accusation of sorcery is, as I have already noted, alluded to in the Gospel’s themselves, and the unchastity of Mary is implicit in the Talmud (*b. Shabbat* 104b). But it cannot be denied that these Qur’anic references constitute the framework within which Muslims see the *Toledot* down to the present day, and they are the reason why it is as offensive to them as it is to Christians.

Muhammad’s views on Jesus illustrate graphically how carefully he positioned himself vis-à-vis both Judaism and Christianity. He entered with gusto into the Jewish-Christian debate, but he did so in a way that avoided him decisively taking sides. Instead he steered a middle course, zig-zagging, so to speak, between the other two faiths, and negotiating a distinctive Muslim identity. It is a measure of his success that many within the two older traditions were inclined to see Islam as a heretical version of their own faith. My point can be graphically, if rather simplistically, represented by the following grid, in which Judaism is represented by the *Toledot*:

Jesus in Christianity, Judaism and Islam

<i>Jesus was ...</i>	Christianity	Judaism	Islam
virgin-born	Yes	No	Yes
Son of God	Yes	No	No
a true prophet	Yes	No	Yes
a worker of miracles	Yes	Yes	Yes
truly died on the cross	Yes	Yes	No
buried	Yes	Yes	No
raised from the dead	Yes	No	No
ascended to heaven	Yes	No	Yes
will return to earth	Yes	No	Yes

It is hardly surprising, given their prominence in the Qur'an, that the figures of Jesus and Mary should have retained an important position within Islam right down to the present day, and, as a direct result, for either a Christian or a Jew to convert to Islam means adopting not just a new attitude towards Muhammad, but also towards Jesus. A lively polemic was waged throughout the middle ages between Judaism and Islam, which mirrored the debates between Judaism and Christianity, and Christianity and Islam. We should see these debates always as triangular, as a *dialogue* between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. We should never consider the relationship between any two of the protagonists without considering their relationship to the third. Even when the third party is not mentioned, they are often there as an unseen presence, and should not be ignored. Islam posed a real threat to Judaism. Jewish scholars in Muslim lands were well acquainted with it, would have been able to read the Qur'an, and would have known the Muslim views of Jesus. Islam was attractive to Jews: Jewish scholars such as Sa'adya and Maimonides hugely admired the Islamic intellectual tradition, and the circle of Jewish Sufis in Egypt, led by members of the Rambam's family, had a very positive attitude towards Islamic religious practice. Add to this the constant danger that some zealous Muslim ruler, ignoring the status of the Jews as *dhimmi*s, would take it into his head to force conversion on the Jews within his domain.

On the Muslim side, in the great debate with Judaism, Islamic apologists increasingly adopted the weapons which Christianity had used to prove itself over against Judaism. They appealed, for example, to the Jewish Scriptures to prove that Muhammad was foretold, often applying to Muhammad key Christian proof-texts for the messiahship of Jesus. A detailed refutation of this approach can be found in Maimonides *Epistle to the Yemen*. The debate with Islam must increasingly have seemed to Jewish apologists like a rerun of the earlier debate with Christianity. It is also pertinent to note how prominently Christology figures in the dialogue between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The ditheistic and even trinitarian tendencies in both Judaism and Islam should warn us not to

separate the theologies of the three traditions into watertight compartments, and they suggest that the *Toledot* may have had work do not only against Christianity and Islam, but even against some forms of Judaism itself. The interplay of ideas was remarkably dynamic. There have been scattered claims in the past that some Muslim apologists before the modern period knew the *Toledot*. William Horbury collects most of the suggestions that had been aired by the time he wrote his dissertation: they include Wahb ibn Munabbih, a well known tradent of *Isra'iliyyat*, and possibly a Jew, who died around 730, al-Jahiz in the ninth century, 'Abd al-Jabbār in the late tenth (see above), and Samuel ibn Abbas (who was certainly a convert from Judaism) in the twelfth. The references, it must be said, are suggestive rather than clear-cut, but, while it is difficult to prove that any of these Muslims knew the *Toledot* itself (I know of no manuscript of it in Arabic script), there can surely be little doubt that they knew the broad position it adopted, and even some of the traditions to which it attests.⁴⁰ No-one has been really looking for this kind of evidence, and I suspect this handful of references is only the tip of the iceberg. It should be borne in mind that Muslim apologists were precluded by the Qur'an from using the *Toledot* as a weapon against Christianity. Here an interesting contrast can be drawn with early pagan anti-Christian polemics. In the early centuries of the Church pagans used Jewish rejection of Jesus as an argument against the truth of Christianity, and Celsus seems to have known some of the traditions incorporated into the *Toledot*. But this line of attack was not open to Muslim apologists, because the Qur'an had chosen to adopt a conspicuously respectful attitude towards Jesus.

Summary and Conclusions

Texts like the *Toledot Yeshu*, with its sharp, polemical tone, arise in situations where a community is under pressure and fighting for its identity, striving to draw boundaries, and to resolve confusion. Jews in the Arab world found themselves in just such a situation in the first few centuries after the rise of Islam. The emergence of the new order shook the old certainties, social and religious, blurred the boundaries between the faiths, and provoked religious controversy. The fight against the old enemy, Christianity, had to be renewed, but there was now a new enemy to be confronted in the shape of Islam. The *Toledot* originated as an anti-Christian tract in Aramaic in late antiquity. Its place of origin was probably the Galilee. The circles in which it originated may not have been Rabbinic, though traditions similar to those it contained were known to the Rabbis.⁴¹ It gathered

⁴⁰ Horbury, *A Critical Examination*, 206–19.

⁴¹ It has, perhaps, not been emphasized enough that the lack of correlation between the *Toledot Yeshu* and the Talmudic traditions about Jesus is as important as the overlap. It raises the possibility that the *Toledot* may not be in origin a Rabbinic text. There are Jesus traditions

together stories about Jesus, Mary and the early disciples that had been circulating among Jews, some from at least the second century, and, with one eye on the Christian Gospels, wove them into a Jewish anti-Gospel. A version of this text was taken east where it was heavily reworked, and where it doubtless played a role in Jewish-Christian debate in late Sasanian Babylonia. The rise of Islam, far from making it redundant, gave it a new lease of life: it was translated into Judeo-Arabic (possibly in Egypt), and, along with more philosophical polemics, served once again to buttress a distinctive Jewish religious identity – not only against Christianity, but now also against Islam. With the precipitous decline of Christianity in the Muslim world from the fourteenth century onwards, it would inevitably have lost some of its appeal, because its usefulness in *dialogue* exclusively between Judaism and Islam is nowhere near as great as its usefulness in *trialogue* between the “Abrahamic” faiths, but it was sparked back into life in the nineteenth century with the arrival from the west of aggressive Christian missions bent on making Jews in the Middle East followers of Jesus.

In this short paper I would claim to have done no more than outline an hypothesis. To substantiate it would require much painstaking and detailed research. The recensions of the *Toledot* that emanate from the Islamic world, especially those written in Arabic, would need to be examined to see if they betray distinctive elements that could be related specifically to their Islamic milieu. Muslim-Jewish polemics would have to be scanned to discover if Jesus has a significant part to play in them. In particular, do Muslim views of Jesus and Mary in Qur’an, Hadith, Tafsir, and the other genres of Arabic literature, contain anti-Jewish elements which might be aimed at rebutting the *Toledot Yeshu*, and so betray a knowledge of that work, or the traditions it contains? This research has barely begun and its outcome remains as yet unclear. What cannot be denied is that the *Toledot Yeshu* distances Judaism not just from the Christian Gospel but from the Muslim “Gospel” as well, and this means it plays a more complex role in the Islamic world than it does in the Christian west.

in Rabbinic literature which are absent from the *Toledot*, and vice-versa, and those which are paralleled often contain important differences. In this context two points gain in significance. (1) The *Toledot* was popular among Qaraites, and they may have played a role in transmitting it. This might suggest that they did not regard it as a Rabbanite work. (2) There seems to have been an attempt in the Yemen to collect the *Rabbinic* traditions about Jesus from the Talmud and other Rabbinic sources, and weave them into a distinctively *Rabbinic* anti-Gospel (Horbury, *A Critical Examination*, 216–18). Whoever did this may have recognized that the *Toledot Yeshu* was not a *kosher* Rabbinic composition. The presence of named “Rabbis” (e.g. Shim’on ben Shetaḥ) in some *Toledot* traditions does not invalidate this claim, any more than the presence of Rabbinic names in the Aramaic incantation bowls or the Hekhalot literature turns these into Rabbinic compositions.

Hanged and Crucified: The Book of Esther and *Toledot Yeshu**

Sarit Kattan Gribetz

Introduction

In an Aramaic poem composed in Byzantine Palestine in the late fifth century, Haman, the antagonist of the Purim story, converses with various other doomed biblical characters: Nimrod, Pharaoh, Amaleq, Sisera, Goliath, and Zerah the Ethiopian.¹ These men's punishments are recounted in the poem's rhyming dialogues, and throughout the many stanzas Haman asserts that the other men's violent fates were deserved, while his execution (hanging from the gallows) was unjust. But then Jesus chimes in: "Do you really believe that you alone were crucified? I too share your lot!"² Jesus does not stop by likening Haman's death on the gallows to his own crucifixion; he describes his death in gruesome detail: "Nailed to a cross, my flesh slashed at hand-breadth length, I am the son of one who carried wood (a carpenter)!... Pierced with nails, my limbs clamped into place, a barley eater is better off than me. This is the end of the pierced one, disgraced in every town."³ In addition to the physical pain of crucifixion (the nailing, the piercing, the slashed flesh, the clamped limbs), Jesus alludes to

* Thanks to Peter Schäfer for encouraging me to pursue this subject and for helpful feedback on this article, to Michael Meerson for his help locating specific manuscripts and references in them, to Gabriel Wasserman, who pointed me to many sources (and on whose translations of Rabenu Avigdor and Avraham Fraenkel I rely below), and to John Gager, Simi Chavel, Shira Billet and Jonathan Gribetz for reading earlier drafts.

¹ The poem appears in Joseph Yahalom and Michael Sokoloff, eds., *Jewish Palestinian Aramaic Poetry from Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1999), 204–19. For various interpretations of the poem's tone and details, see the footnotes in Yahalom and Sokoloff as well as: Joseph Yahalom, *Poetry and Society in Jewish Galilee of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1999), 57–59; Ophir Münz-Manor, "Carnavalesque Ambivalence and the Christian *Other* in Aramaic Poems from Byzantine Palestine," in *Jews in Byzantium: Dialectics of Minority and Majority Cultures* (eds. Robert Bonfil et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 831–45; Menahem Kister, "Jewish Aramaic Poems from Byzantine Palestine and Their Setting," *Tarbiz* 76 (2008): 161–62, n. 302; Hagit Sivan, *Palestine in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 152–55. I read the poem's tone as mocking and interpret it as a biting parody.

² The translation of this poem is problematic at various places. I have provided here the translation in Sivan, *Palestine*, 152–53.

³ Sivan, *ibid.*

the embarrassment such a death caused him, paralleling the humiliation Haman endured as he paraded Mordecai around the streets of Shushan as a hero (and, later, his hanging on the gallows). Despite the dramatic, violent imagery and the emotional self-pity, Jesus' words contain a glimmer of self-mockery, too. In the middle of describing his execution, Jesus alludes to the irony of his situation: "lashed by rods, of woman born, they called me Christ ..." Jesus admits his human birth and his tortured death, and exclaims, ironically, that despite all this he was (foolishly) called Christ, the savior! Read or performed on Purim, this poem presents Jesus as a latter-day Haman.⁴ Just like the antagonist of the Book of Esther, who is presented, on the one hand, as threatening the very existence of the Jews, and, on the other, as a fool who meets his all-too-deserved and shameful end at the gallows, Jesus is presented at once as an enemy of biblical proportions and also as the object of derision in this Purim poem. In the end, both men are humiliated and hanged, and the poet beseeches God to "revive these miracles ... [and] bring, now, in these days salvation to beloved children ... just as once it was in Shushan the capital ..."⁵

This poem is an early and particularly evocative example of the association, in the minds of Jews, between Haman and Jesus, but it was not the last. Another parody, more widespread and enduring, links these two characters as well. In many versions of *Toledot Yeshu* – a set of Jewish parodies of Jesus' life – references to Haman and the Book of Esther are subtly intertwined into the narrative of the life of Jesus. In this article, I explore the ways in which *Toledot Yeshu* employs tropes and images from the Book of Esther, and then I place these literary allusions into their broader social-historical context, in which the holiday of Purim was linked with anti-Christian polemics and practices. It is my contention that a careful study of these literary allusions within their proper context permits us better to understand the aims of *Toledot Yeshu* and its authors as well as the way in which the text(s) was (were) received by subsequent readers. The Book of Esther was simultaneously regarded by its Jewish readers as a factual historical narrative of events in the Persian Empire and as a parody of that empire and its leadership (and, later, as a prototype for Jewish triumph over their enemies).⁶ The *Toledot Yeshu* authors' allusions to the Book of Esther suggest their intention to create a work of a similarly dual genre: an accurate account of Jesus' life and a mockery of it. The link between the two texts is not merely one of genre, however. The *argument* of *Toledot Yeshu* is more clearly discerned as well when

⁴ On the poem's liturgical use, see Yahalom and Sokoloff, *Jewish Palestinian Aramaic Poetry*, 204 ff.

⁵ Sivan, *Palestine*, 148.

⁶ See for example Harold Fisch's analysis of the Book of Esther as history and parody in *Poetry with a Purpose: Biblical Poetics and Interpretation* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1988), 8–14. On medieval Jewish interpretations of the story of Esther, see Barry Dov Walfish, *Esther in Medieval Garb: Jewish Interpretation of the Book of Esther in the Middle Ages* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993).

attention is paid to the allusions to Haman and the Book of Esther. Just as Haman posed a serious threat to the Jews during Persian times, Jesus and, by extension, Christianity, also represented an existential danger to new generations of Jews, the narrative of *Toledot Yeshu* appears to insinuate. But Haman was ultimately defeated, and so too, the authors imply, Jesus and Christianity would be as well. *Toledot Yeshu* thus functions simultaneously as a polemic against Christianity and as a story of encouragement to those Jews for whom Christianity appeared to be an insuperable threat. Moreover, *Toledot Yeshu*'s incorporation of elements from the Book of Esther might also reveal the text's communal function. I thus conclude my analysis with a tentative suggestion about the use of *Toledot Yeshu* as a liturgical or performative text on Purim or at another time in the Jewish calendar.

Toledot Yeshu and the Book of Esther

It should be emphasized that I do not intend to argue that the Book of Esther is the only, or even the most important, text to which *Toledot Yeshu* alludes. *Toledot Yeshu* is filled with quotations and references to many biblical passages and stories (e. g. the story of Joseph, the relationship between Moses and Jethro, Moses' miracles, scattered verses from Psalms, Isaiah, etc.) as well as rabbinic ideas, laws, and characters (e. g. humility in front of one's teachers, laws of *nidah* and *mamzer*, the figure of Shimon ben Shetah) and post-rabbinic features (legends about Shimon bar Yitzhaq bar Avun's son Elhanan, the schism between Nestorius and the Christians). Rather, the Book of Esther serves as one of many texts upon which *Toledot Yeshu* draws in its presentation of Jesus' birth, life, and death, and interpreting these specific allusions yields fruitful results that further our understanding of the text as a whole. While the allusions employ specific motifs from the Book of Esther, they are also intended, I argue, to trigger a broader association between the two stories of Jewish endangerment and eventual triumph. Finally, my argument about *Toledot Yeshu*'s use of tropes and imagery from the Book of Esther is not limited to a specific manuscript or manuscript group. As I will demonstrate, allusions to the Book of Esther appear in all *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts I have examined from the different manuscript groups in Aramaic and Hebrew; though the allusions are not the same in each version, there are several references to the Book of Esther in each text.⁷ I use

⁷ I have consulted the following manuscripts: Cambridge 35.87, Adler JTS 2529.1, Cambridge 35.88, Cambridge 298.56, Adler JTS 2529.2, St. Petersburg NL 105.9, JTS 6312, St. Petersburg 274, Strasbourg BnU 3974, New York JTS 2221, Cambridge 557, New York JTS 1037, London Sassoon 793, Leipzig BH 17, Ox. Cod. Heb. 2407, Harvard 57, Philadelphia 361, and Amsterdam HS Ros 442. I have not checked the Yiddish and Arabic manuscripts.

“*Toledot Yeshu*” as a generic term for the various manuscripts that are available. Below, see my footnotes for the particular manuscript that I cite in each case.

Just as the Aramaic poem above links Haman and Jesus through their similar deaths, so too *Toledot Yeshu* draws a parallel between Yeshu’s crucifixion and the hanging of Haman. *Toledot Yeshu*, however, goes beyond simple analogies between hanging and crucifixion and preserves a tradition about Haman’s hanging found in an Aramaic targum of the Book of Esther and other midrashic collections.⁸ In *Toledot Yeshu*, Yeshu is crucified on a cabbage stalk.⁹ For example, in Strasbourg BnU 3974, each tree upon which Yeshu is hanged breaks, until a cabbage stalk is brought and he is hanged on it instead.¹⁰ The text reads:

When they brought (Yeshu) to be hanged on a tree, it would break, because the ineffable name was with him, and when the fools (Yeshu’s followers) saw that the trees broke beneath him, they thought that this happened because of his righteousness, until they brought him the stalk of a cabbage. For when he was alive, he knew that it was the custom of Israel to hang him, and he knew that he would die and at the end they would hang him on a tree, so he arranged through the ineffable name that no tree should accept him. But to the stalk of cabbage he did not say the ineffable name, for it is not a tree but a plant (and so he did not consider it an option for his crucifixion). Thus he rose to heaven (on a cabbage stalk) ...

The image of trying to find the proper tree on which to crucify Yeshu resembles a tradition in the Second Targum of Esther, in which various trees (the vine, wild fig, fig, olive, palm, citron, myrtle, oak, pomegranate) give excuses for why they cannot be used for Haman’s hanging.¹¹ For example, the vine declares: “I am unable (to bear) that he be hanged on my top, because from me wine is taken for oblations ...” and the olive tree chimes in: “I would not be able (to bear it) if he were hung on my top, because from me the oil for the lamp stand is taken-...” and the pomegranate tree argues, “Were he to be hung on my top, I would not be able (to bear it) because the righteous are compared to me.” Finally, the cedar suggests that Haman and his ten sons be hung on the same (cedar) gallows that

⁸ Bernard Grossfeld, *The Targum Sheni of the Book of Esther: A Critical Edition Based on MS Sassoon 282 with Critical Apparatus* (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1994), 66–67; idem, *The Two Targums of Esther: Translated, with Apparatus and Notes* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991), 180–83. A number of midrashim contain parallels of the Haman story (*Abba Gurion* VII, p. 41 f.; *Panim Acherim* II, p. 77; *Esth. Rab.* IX:2; *Agg. Esth.* 7:9, p. 60; *Agg. Esth.* 5:14 p. 58; *Yalq. Shim.* #1054). For a comparison of the versions, see Grossfeld, *The Two Targums of Esther*, 213–16 (Table 12).

⁹ Much has been written on this peculiar detail of the cabbage stalk; for two interesting pieces and more bibliography, see Hillel I. Newman, “The Death of Jesus in the ‘Toledot Yeshu’ Literature,” *JTS* 50 (1999): 59–79, and Michael Meerson’s article in this volume.

¹⁰ Parallels are found in *JTS* 2221, Cambridge 557, *JTS* 1037, Sasson 793, Leipzig BH 17, Ox. Cod. Heb 2407 (Opp. Add. 4 145), Harvard 57, and Philadelphia 361.

¹¹ David Biale notes this parallel between *Toledot Yeshu* and both *Midrash Esther Rabbah* and the *Targum Sheni* as well; see his article “Counter-History and Jewish Polemics Against Christianity: The *Sefer Toledot Yeshu* and the *Sefer Zerubavel*,” *Jewish Social Studies* 6 (1999): 135.

Haman prepared for Mordecai.¹² In *Midrash Esther Rabbah*, it is not the cedar on which Haman is hung but a mere thorn bush.

These two passages from *Toledot Yeshu* and the Second Targum of Esther are far from identical. Yeshu uses magical means (the ineffable name that he stole from the temple and sewed into his thigh) to avert his crucifixion, causing each tree to break beneath his body's weight. In the end, though, rather than being spared, Jesus is hanged in the most humiliating fashion, on a cabbage stalk. In the Haman episode, it is not Haman who outwits the trees, as in the Jesus tale, but the trees that cleverly avoid being desecrated with Haman's body. It is the cedar tree (or the thorn bush), finally, that finds the perfectly ironic solution, to hang Haman on the gallows he himself built. Despite the differences, the stories share a common theme – the difficulty of identifying a tree to hang the culprit. While the particular trees are different in the two cases, in both narratives, the *type* of tree used is of utmost importance to highlight the added humiliation of their deaths. This trope of tree-selection links the two stories and, thus, Haman and Jesus.¹³ Indeed, the version preserved in one Yemenite manuscript of *Toledot Yeshu* (Jerusalem JNUL b 32–4 = 15) *explicitly* connects these two narratives of tree-selection. The text explains that “they stood to hang him (Jesus) on a tree, and that evil one cursed all the trees so that they would not accept him, *as Haman the Aggagite did*, and each tree upon which they hung him broke immediately ...”¹⁴

¹² Grossfeld, *The Targum Sheni*, 66–67; idem, *The Two Targums of Esther*, 180–83. The stories about Haman and Jesus might be loosely based on Jotham's parable in Judges 9. There, Jotham tells a parable to the citizens of Shechem about trees that try to appoint a king for themselves. They approach the olive tree, but the olive tree does not want to relinquish its oil in order to rule over the others. The fig tree, too, does not want to give up its fruit, and the vine refuses to give up its wine. Finally, the thornbush (hardly a tree!) agrees to become king if the rest take refuge in its shade; if not, they will all be consumed by fire.

¹³ Sivan discusses another Purim poem that associates Haman with Jesus and alludes to these parallel traditions about the trees; the poem is found in Yahalom and Sokoloff, *Jewish Palestinian Aramaic Poetry*, 183–87 (Piyyut 29). In the poem, each tree refuses to give its wood for Haman and Jesus' hanging/crucifixion; see the discussion in Sivan, *Palestine*, 149–50.

¹⁴ Emphasis added. In addition to this particular manuscript's explicit reference to Haman, the Aramaic Targum of Esther might reference Jesus as well. A peculiar turn of phrase in the Second Targum of Esther's account of the disputing trees (at least as it is preserved in certain manuscripts) makes reference to “Ben Pandera,” a name used for Jesus in *Toledot Yeshu* and elsewhere. After begging Mordecai, in vain, to spare his life, Haman begins “lamenting and weeping for himself in the midst of the palace garden,” crying “listen to me, you trees and plants, which I have planted from the earliest times” (Grossfeld, *The Two Targums of Esther*, 180). Perhaps the image of Haman praying and weeping in the garden is an allusion to Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, e.g. Luke 22:39–46. Before the parable of the trees begins, the narrative interjects a line that is difficult to translate: “devar hamedata ba'e lemisraq le'aleksanria devar pandir() 'itkanshu kulhon ve'etsu 'etsah” (Grossfeld, *The Targum Sheni*, 66; translation and notes in idem, *The Two Targums of Esther*, 180–81). The references to Alexandria and Bar-Pandera are problematic, and have been interpreted in various ways, as Grossfeld points out. One interpretation reads Haman's desired destination not as Alexandria (le'aleksanri'a) but

Beyond the conflated details of the executions of Haman and Yeshu, *Toledot Yeshu*'s language and terminology describing its central characters also recall the Book of Esther and associated traditions. For instance, *Toledot Yeshu* refers to Yeshu as *yeshu harasha*', perhaps a play on the name *haman harasha*' (this name is not actually used in the Book of Esther, but it appears in rabbinic literature and frequently in post-classical midrashim).¹⁵ In one manuscript (Sasson 793), Yeshu is called *ha'arur yeshu* and *yeshu ha'arur*, perhaps an allusion to the phrase *arur haman* used to describe Haman in the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds and other rabbinic texts.¹⁶ The phrase *arur haman* was also appended to

rather, according to a variant reading, understands 'aksanri'a (MS Sasson 282) as a nasalized version the Greek *ezedra*, a vestibule or covered hall, that is, an Exedra. In such an Exedra, musicians would sit and play their drums so as not to hear the hanging of the person outside. (Pander, in this reading, refers to musical instruments.) In this case, Haman expresses his wish to be in such a room, rather than to be the one hanged. Another interpretation reads the phrase as "the son of Hammedatha wanted to go up to Alexandria (Egypt), where the son of Pandera (that is, Jesus) was." While the first explanation is more often understood as the correct, original meaning, it is telling that certain manuscripts preserve a reading that is most easily deciphered as a reference to Jesus. Beyond associating Haman's death with Jesus, there is another subtle allusion to the relationship between Haman and Jesus in the *Targum Sheni*. When Haman is introduced into the text of the *targum* at 3:1, his full genealogy is traced all the way back to Esau, who was already associated with Rome and Christianity by the time of the *targum*'s composition. The *targum* might allude to the idea that Haman and Jesus/the Christians are related not only metaphorically but also genealogically! See Grossfeld's discussion of Haman's genealogy in *The Two Targums of Esther*, 140, 143–44, and 211. On the identification of Esau with Rome and Christianity, see Gershon Cohen, "Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought," in his collection of essays *Studies in the Variety of Rabbinic Cultures* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1991), 243–69; Günter Stemberger, "Die Beurteilung Roms in der rabbinischen Literatur," in *ANRW II* 19.2 (eds. Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase; Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1979): 338–96; Carol Bakhos' modification to Cohen's analysis in *Ishmael on the Border: Rabbinic Portrayals of the First Arab* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 63–64, and Burton Visotsky's analysis of Esau and Edom in *Leviticus Rabbah*: Visotsky, *Golden Bells and Pomegranates: Studies in Midrash Leviticus Rabbah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 154–72.

¹⁵ *Yeshu harasha*' appears in the majority of *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts that I consulted (including Strasbourg BnU 3974; JTS 2221; Cambridge 557); in the Aramaic fragment Cambridge 35.87, it is *yyeshuu rshi'a*; JTS 1037 and Ox. Cod. Heb 2407 (Opp. Add. 4 145) call *Yeshu rasha*', and Sasson and Leipzig BH 17 *harasha*', and Philadelphia PA 361 both of these. For rabbinic references to *haman harasha*' see: *y. Megillah* 1:60, 4/4; *y. Megillah* 3:64, 1/1; *b. Megillah* 10b; *b. Pesahim* 117a; *Masekhet Sofrim* 21:2, *Exodus Rabbah* 31; *Leviticus Rabbah* 11, 13, 15, 27, 28; *Ruth Rabbah*; *Esther Rabbah* 6, 10; *Lamentations Rabbah* 3:33. The epithet *haman hara*' is used in the Book of Esther at 7:6. The epithet *harasha*' is also used for some other characters deemed evil in rabbinic literature, for example: Balaam (e.g. *m. Avot* 5:17; *b. Berahot* 7a; *Avot de Rabbi Natan* A chapter I, in which the snake and Titus are also called *harasha*); Turnus Rufus (*b. Baba Batra* 10a); Nevuchadnesar (*b. Berahot* 55bf.); Esau (*b. Gittin* 66b); Nimrod (*b. Hagigah* 13a); Hadrian (*y. Peah* 7:20, 1/1), but it appears particularly associated with Haman as early as this literature but certainly later even more so.

¹⁶ The Palestinian Talmud mandates, in the name of Rav, that the lines "arur haman arurim banav" must be recited on Purim (*y. Megillah* 3. 5.7). *Genesis Rabbah* 49:1 seems to indicate that the line "cursed is Haman!" was declared each time Haman's name was read from the Book of Esther on Purim. The term "arur" is also used to describe Haman in *b. Megillah* 7b.

the famous piyyut *Shoshanat Ya 'aqov*, which was recited in many communities on Purim after the recitation of the Book of Esther.¹⁷ Similarly, the way in which *Toledot Yeshu* describes Miriam, Yeshu's mother, reminds the reader of the main character in the Purim story. Miriam is introduced at the beginning of the narrative in JTS 2221 as *yefah to 'ar vetovat mar 'eh*, nearly identical words used to depict Esther's beauty in Esther 2:7 (*yefat to 'ar vetovat mar 'eh*).¹⁸ In addition to commenting on Miriam's beauty in a way similar to the description of Esther's beauty, one manuscript also identifies Miriam as belonging to the tribe of Benjamin, like Esther (Esther 2:5).¹⁹ Both women are described as *betulot*, virgins.²⁰

Additional tropes from the Book of Esther – letter-sending, fasting and praying for three days before approaching a royal figure – are also employed in the text of *Toledot Yeshu*. In the longest Aramaic fragment of *Toledot Yeshu* (Cambridge 35.87), Tiberius Caesar asks John the Baptist and Yeshu about their occupations. The men answer that they are the sons of God – they heal the sick, resurrect the dead, even cause virgins to conceive. To demonstrate his magical abilities, Yeshu causes the Caesar's daughter to conceive and even promises to custom-make the embryo male or female according to the Caesar's request. During the nine months of pregnancy, Pilate keeps the two men, Yeshu and John the Baptist, bound, and the Jews find themselves in a great deal of distress at the prospect that Yeshu's miracle will come to fruition and Israel's accusations against him will be proven false. R. Joshua ben Perahiah sends letters to all of the provinces in which the Jews dwell declaring a three-day fast, and the people follow the rabbi's instructions for fear that Jesus' miracle will occur and they will suffer potentially devastating consequences. In another manuscript (Leipzig BH 17), the Jews are instructed by Queen Helen to reveal the cross on which they

¹⁷ On the piyyut *Shoshanat Ya 'aqov*, see Avraham Fraenkel's article, "Asher heniya – toldoteha shel berakhah mefuyetet," <http://www.piyut.org.il/articles/834.html> (accessed 23 February 2011).

¹⁸ Ox. Cod. Heb 2407 (Opp. Add. 4 145) has *yefat to 'ar uyefat mar 'eh*; Strasbourg BnU 3974 has *yafa mar 'eh*, perhaps a contraction of the longer phrase (the text is ambiguous enough that the description could compellingly be applied to either Miriam or Joseph grammatically and conceptually, but given the reading of JTS 2221 and the sentence structure, I am inclined to read it as a description of Miriam). Leipzig BH 17 has *yefat to 'ar* and Amsterdam HS Ros 442 (Huldreich) proclaims that Esther was *yefat mar 'eh 'ad me 'od*.

¹⁹ Amsterdam HS Ros 442 (Huldreich) notes that Miriam was from the tribe of Benjamin in the same sentence that it mentions Miriam's beauty.

²⁰ Esther is described as a *betulah* along with all of the other girls vying for the king in Esther 2:3, a term certainly associated with Miriam (e.g. Philadelphia 361). The term *betulah* also refers to other women in the Bible (to Rebecca in Genesis 24:16, who is also identified as beautiful like Esther and Miriam; women of Yavesh Gilead in Judges 21:12; Tamar in 2 Samuel 13:2; Avishag in 1 Kings 1:2; other references use the term to refer to a category of women, rather than to specific characters). I am not arguing that the term is reserved exclusively for Esther and Miriam, but that the term, because of its association with both women, links them in this way, too.

had crucified Yeshu years earlier or face death.²¹ R. Judah the Elder is chosen for the task of identifying the three pieces of wood, but before he agrees to uncover the place of their burial, he makes a request of the queen: “Give me three days, and I will fast and pray to God.” At the conclusion of the three days, the text describes how the rabbis came before the queen (*vayehi bayom hashlishi*) and led her, through seemingly magical means, to the exact spot of Yeshu’s cross. R. Joshua ben Perahiah’s actions – sending letters and declaring a fast to last three days – and R. Judah the Elder’s steps – fasting and praying for three days prior to appearing before the royal figure – allude to Esther’s actions as well as Mordecai’s communication with the Jewish people. At the end of chapter four of the Book of Esther, prior to Esther’s unannounced visit at the king’s palace, Esther declares a three-day fast in order to evoke God’s sympathy (Esther 4:16). Esther, like R. Judah the Elder, appears before the king on the third day (Esther 5:1, *vayehi bayom hashlishi*, precisely the same language used in the story of the finding of the cross).²² Later, Mordecai sends letters to all of the Jews in the empire informing them about Haman’s downfall and encouraging them to fight back on the day intended to mark their destruction (Esther 8:8–11).

Other elements of *Toledot Yeshu*’s narrative might also invoke or evoke aspects of the narrative of the Book of Esther (especially in conjunction with the clearer allusions), though these next examples are not as direct as the parallels discussed above. The beginning of *Toledot Yeshu*’s narrative resembles the Book of Esther’s first few chapters. After brief introductions, both texts open their narratives with highly sexualized scenes. In *Toledot Yeshu*, Yeshu’s conception entails a detailed story of rape or adultery (depending on the manuscript).²³ According to Ms. Strasbourg BnU 3974, for example, Miriam, in a state of ritual impurity and betrothed to Yohanan, is raped by Joseph in the middle of the night and thereby conceives Yeshu. In the Book of Esther, the king hosts a party and requests the presence of his wife, Vashti (rabbinic sources explain that he asked that she arrive *naked*).²⁴ Vashti refuses the king’s invitation, a fatal decision, and the king conducts a search for a new queen. Despite obvious differences in details, in both texts the women – Miriam (according to all but one manuscript)

²¹ In many versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, as in the Book of Esther, a woman is in a position of royal power; Strasbourg BnU 3974 explicitly states that Queen Helen ruled Israel, while Esther is married to King Ahasuerus. Though subtle, the parallel female royal figures also connect TY with the story of Esther; see Leipzig BH 17, Ox. Cod. Heb 2407 (Opp. Add. 4 145), Cambridge 557, and JTS 1037, in which Queen Helen governs the entire land.

²² The phrase *vayehi bayom hashlishi* occurs a few other times in the Hebrew Bible as well (Genesis 34:25, 40:20; Exodus 19:16; 2 Samuel 1:2; 2 Kings 3:18), but the context of the Book of Esther provides the closest parallel to the scenario described in *Toledot Yeshu*.

²³ Most manuscripts depict a rape scene, though the Huldreich version presents Mary as promiscuous.

²⁴ *b. Megillah* 12b.

and Vashti – decline aggressive sexual maneuvers but ultimately do not succeed (Vashti is killed, Miriam is raped).

What happens next in the two narratives is also similar. Yeshu, as a child, is described passing the gate of the synagogue or house of study, where the rabbis sit; at the gate, he acts disrespectfully to the rabbis, causing them to publicize the identity of his real father and thus setting Yeshu on his path toward heresy.²⁵ The text elaborates on Yeshu's insolence: rather than walking bent over, with his face covered, Yeshu strides proudly, standing up impudently and not greeting any of the rabbis, as the text deems appropriate. Most egregiously, according to the text, Yeshu recites halakhot from *Masekhet Neziqin*; Yeshu not only acts disrespectfully, but through his behavior he challenges the authority of the rabbis.²⁶ The rabbis declare that Yeshu is violating the rabbinic prohibition that declares: "one who expounds halakhah before his teacher deserves the death penalty," foreshadowing his death and claiming that Yeshu deserved his crucifixion because of his disrespect for rabbinic authority. The Book of Esther also provides a story about characters who act disrespectfully of authority (and even conspire to depose that authority) at a *gate*. Immediately following Esther's entry into the royal palace as the king's new companion, Mordecai is described sitting at the palace gates (Esther 2:21). There, he overhears two men (Bigthan and Teresh) conspiring to kill the king. The conversation is reported and both men are hanged for their plot (Esther 2:23). Both texts tell similar stories, but from different vantage points: in the former, Yeshu's threat to the rabbis' authority at the gate of the house of study (their "palace") is presented as the reason for his eventual death (hanging and crucifixion), while in the latter, the king's eunuchs also threaten the king's authority through their assassination plot (which they reveal in front of the king's palace gates) and therefore are killed (also by hanging).

I would propose that the accumulation of these parallels serves not only to highlight specific motifs, but also to relate the overall narrative themes of the

²⁵ The passage is from Strasbourg BnU 3974, while other manuscripts place the scene in various locations such as the market (e.g. Leipzig BH 17 and Ox. Cod. Heb 2407 Opp. Add. 4 145) or the Sanhedrin (Harvard 57); several manuscripts do not include a section on Yeshu's sins.

²⁶ In several manuscripts (e.g. Strasbourg BnU 3974), Yeshu reverses the hierarchy between himself and the rabbis by referring to the biblical story of Jethro and Moses. "Who was the teacher and who was the student, Jethro or Moses?" asks Yeshu. Yeshu describes how Moses was considered the most illustrious of prophets and the greatest of all sages (indeed, Deuteronomy declares that no greater prophet arose in Israel), and yet Jethro was older and taught Moses the ways of the world when he imparted to his son-in-law the details of a system of judges. Thus both men, Jethro and Moses, were each other's teachers and students, blurring the hierarchy between instructor and instructed. Yeshu uses this interpretation of scripture to declare that he has the authority to teach the rabbis even though he is their students' teacher, just as Moses was Jethro's teacher. Just as Jethro was able to teach Moses and the reverse, so too, according to Yeshu's reasoning, Yeshu does not only need to learn from the rabbis but is also able to teach his rabbis halakhot and thus act in a less than deferential fashion towards them. Yeshu's disregard for social and religious hierarchy is interpreted as dangerous and one of the causes of his downfall.

Book of Esther to *Toledot Yeshu*. The presentations of Jesus as a Haman-like figure and the devout Jews as comparable to Esther and Mordecai, allude to the gravity of the threat *Toledot Yeshu*'s authors perceived in Jesus (and, by extension, Christianity). Haman sought physically to destroy the Jews, "young and old, babies and women," as the Book of Esther puts it (Esther 3:13, 8:5). Jesus of the canonical Gospels, of course, desired nothing of the sort. But for *Toledot Yeshu*'s authors, we might surmise, the Jewish community was at risk: Christianity, like Haman, represented an existential threat to Judaism, whether because of the threat of Christian violence, or (ironically) because of the allure of Christianity. On the one hand, Jesus' followers, the Christians, seem to be destroying Judaism through hostility; the Jewish community is often threatened with death because of their unwillingness to accept Jesus. On the other hand, Jesus' followers blur the lines between Judaism and Christianity by attracting (unwitting) Jews to the Christian faith, another form of danger to the Jewish community that posed a threat to the survival of the Jews as Jews.²⁷ In both cases, however, the authors of *Toledot Yeshu* were determined to battle the threat or draw of Christianity through polemicizing against the faith and, especially, its central figure Jesus. The parallels relating to the Jews' sense of insecurity – especially the dissemination of letters and the three-day fast – highlight this association. The link between the story of Christianity's founding and the story of Purim has a dual nature; it at once reflects the sense of Christianity's threat felt by the authors and is a tool of the polemic (the readers are meant to associate the two enemies). However, the association with the threat of Haman implies that the threat is not insuperable. Rather, the *Toledot Yeshu* authors seem to be suggesting, the peril of Christianity has been or can be overcome just as Esther, Mordecai, and the Jews of Shushan triumphed over Haman and his evil plot to decimate the Jewish people.²⁸ The text takes seriously the presence and power of Christianity, and offers a (satirical) counter-narrative that might have emboldened those readers who lived in a Christianized Roman Empire, and, later, in Christian Europe. A scribal error in one manuscript reveals that the allusions to the Book of Esther

²⁷ Some versions of *Toledot Yeshu* provide an antidote to this second type of threat: a narrative is constructed in which Paul/Simon Peter works as a double-agent to finalize the parting of the ways between the two religions. Different versions of this narrative are found in: Strasbourg BnU 3974, JTS 2221, Cambridge 557, London Sasson 793, Leipzig BH 17, Ox. Cod. Heb 2407 (Opp. Add. 4 145), Harvard 57, Philadelphia 361, and Amsterdam HS Ros 442. John G. Gager's article in this volume discusses this tradition extensively.

²⁸ One form of triumph proposed in some *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts is the final schism between the Jews and the Christians, brought about by Paul. Another, less explicit form of victory is the uncovering of Jesus' true life story as it is recounted in *Toledot Yeshu* itself. Some of the account is told in earnest, as the historical biography of Christianity's central figure. But the true story itself, *Toledot Yeshu*'s authors propose, is laughable and highly ironic in its details, proving even more emphatically that Jesus and the religion that emerged from him are not to be taken seriously by Jews. In addition, the connection between the Book of Esther and *Toledot Yeshu* reinforces the farcical picture the authors of *Toledot Yeshu* paint of Jesus.

probably did play such a role of encouragement. In one section of the text, when the Jews attempt to separate fully from Christianity and pray to God, asking for sufficient strength in their hearts to act bravely in challenging times, the scribe refers, mistakenly, to God as the “God of Esther.” Upon noticing his error, the scribe crossed out the word “Esther” and replaced it with “Israel.”²⁹ Even though the final text does *not* contain an explicit reference to or citation of the Book of Esther, the story of the Jews’ persecution and eventual victory during the time of Haman was apparently so present in the mind of the scribe as he copied the text of *Toledot Yeshu* that he accidentally referred to his God not as the God of Israel but as the God of Esther!

Purim and Anti-Christianity

The scribe’s mistake – confusing the God of Israel with the God of Esther – is not surprising. *Toledot Yeshu*’s allusions to the Book of Esther are best understood in a broader historical context, in which the paradigm of the Purim story was applied to present circumstances, the celebration of Purim oftentimes included anti-Christian practices, and the figure of Haman frequently became a prototype for Christian villains. The association between Haman, Jesus, Purim, and anti-Christianity can be found as early as the late fourth or early fifth century, and extends in various forms through the medieval period and beyond. The association between Purim and anti-Christianity, thus, was common to the numerous historical contexts into which the compositions of *Toledot Yeshu* fit, regardless of the precise dating of the various traditions in and the numerous versions of *Toledot Yeshu*.³⁰

²⁹ Jerusalem Schocken 04088 (Wagenseil).

³⁰ The dating of *Toledot Yeshu*’s traditions and versions has been the subject of much debate; estimates range from the second century to the ninth century or later. See Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: S. Cavalry, 1902; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1994); William Horbury, *A Critical Examination of the Toledoth Jeshu* (Ph. D. diss.; Cambridge University, 1970); Riccardo Di Segni, “La tradizione testuale delle Toledoth Jéshu. Manoscritti, edizioni a stampa classificazione,” *La rassegna mensile di Israel* 50 (1984): 83–100; idem, *Il vangelo del ghetto* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1985); Yaacov Deutsch, ‘*Toledot Yeshu*’ in *Christian Eyes: Reception and Response to ‘Toledot Yeshu’ in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period* (MA thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997 [in Hebrew]); idem, “New Evidence of Early Versions of *Toldot Yeshu*,” *Tarbiz* 69 (2000): 177–97 (in Hebrew). See also the brief summaries in Newman, “The Death of Jesus,” 59–63, and Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, “An Ancient List of Christian Festivals in Toledot Yeshu: Polemics as Indication for Interaction,” *HTR* 102 (2009): 483–85, and Michael Sokoloff’s linguistic analysis of the Aramaic fragments, in his article in this volume. I follow Peter Schäfer with regard to dating the *Toledot Yeshu* collection; see his article in this volume, in which he identifies the earliest written form or recension of a composition called *Toledot Yeshu* to somewhere between the seventh and ninth centuries and cautions against assuming an earlier dating based on isolated traditions. Moreover, I do not imply that the association between Purim and anti-Christianity in late antiquity and the

Haman was a particularly appropriate biblical villain to compare with Jesus because of the similarities of their recorded punishments: hanging and crucifixion – “and they hanged Haman on the gallows ...” (Esther 7:10), “and they crucified him” (Mark 15:25; John 19:18). These acts, after all, appear very much the same. In both cases, the victim dies while hanging upright in public. Moreover, crucifixion is often referred to as a type of hanging in Roman and Christian sources; there does not seem to have been much of a distinction in late antiquity.³¹ Beyond the visual and conceptual similarities, a verbal association appears in Greek and Latin renditions of Haman’s death, in which Haman is depicted as *crucified*.³² As early as the Septuagint (Esther 7:9, 16:17) and Josephus (*A.J.* 11.246, 261, 266, 267, 280), the term *staurō* is used to describe Haman’s hanging.³³ In Latin sources, too, Haman’s execution is translated using the language of crucifixion (*cruce*m in Jerome’s commentary on Galatians

medieval period manifested itself in the same ways at all times; this would be too simplistic an argument and would ignore changing historical, cultural, and polemical circumstances. See, for example, Katrin Kogman-Appel’s compelling analysis of visual depictions of the hanging of Haman in Jewish medieval manuscripts from the 1260s–1270s and the way in which the artists invoked and subverted Christian imagery of the Tree of Life and the Tree of Jesse that was particular to those very decades in order to convey historically-specific polemical messages. Kogman Appel, “The Tree of Death and the Tree of Life: The Hanging of Haman in Medieval Jewish Manuscript Painting,” in *Between the Picture and the Word: Manuscript Studies from the Index of Christian Art* (ed. Colum Hourihane; University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 187–208. What I do argue, though, is that from late antiquity through the medieval period, Purim was associated, in various ways, with anti-Christian sentiment and that *Toledot Yeshu*’s allusions to the Book of Esther were invoked and interpreted by authors and readers within their particular contexts. For example, the references to Esther might have resonated differently to those in early medieval Lyon, in a climate of relative Jewish freedom, and to Jews in later periods, particularly in the more violent times of the Crusades and especially the thirteenth century. The relationship between Jews and their Christian neighbors was continuously evolving and changing; at times, the invocation of the story of Esther and Haman might have alluded to the sense that Jews were overcoming the pressures of Christianity, while at other times the same references might have reflected a longing for such triumph or hope for eventual success and salvation, as unlikely as it seemed at those difficult moments. Though beyond the scope of this paper, it would be interesting to plot each manuscript’s allusions to the Book of Esther and see if any chronological or geographical patterns emerge in the way in which Haman and the story of Purim are invoked within the texts of *Toledot Yeshu*.

³¹ Livy 1.26, *Dig.* 48.13.7 (Ulpianus libro septimo de officio proconsulis), *Dig.* 48.19.38 (Paulus libro quinto sententiarum); see Meerson’s article in this volume and the discussion in Kogman-Appel, “The Tree of Death,” 187 and 191.

³² The deaths of Haman and Jesus can also be connected linguistically through references in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. In the Book of Esther, Haman is hanged *‘al ha’ets*, that is, on a tree (wood) or gallows (also wood) (Esther 7:10); Jesus, too, dies on a wooden cross. In fact, in Galatians 3:13, Paul quotes the verse from Deuteronomy 21:23, “Cursed is he who hangs on a tree (*‘al ‘ets*),” in reference to Jesus’ crucifixion. The same Hebrew word (*ets*) is used to describe the manner of Jesus’ death and Haman’s hanging – both are hung *‘al ‘ets*. To readers familiar with these biblical passages, the association is clear.

³³ T. C. G. Thornton, “The Crucifixion of Haman and the Scandal of the Cross,” *JTS* 37 (1986): 421. The Greek σταυρός is a cross or instrument for crucifixion.

3:13; *crucem* and *cruci* in the Vulgate's translation of the Book of Esther at 5:17, 8:7, 9:25; examples appear also in Paulinus of Nola, Eucherius of Lyons, Isidore of Seville, Rabanus Maurus, Sulpicius Severus).³⁴ Thus the two forms of death penalty – hanging and crucifixion – were conflated such that Haman is described as crucified, and, eventually, associated with Jesus' death on the cross. A medieval piyyut recited on the fast of Esther (the day preceding Purim) captures the image poetically in four short words: *lohem veninav nitlu tsluvim*, "the belligerent one (Haman) and his offspring were hanged crucified."³⁵ An early modern Yiddish alternative title of *Toledot Yeshu* – "Mayse Tole" (The Story of the Hanged One) – encapsulates the opposite phenomenon, that is, presenting Jesus as hanged, like Haman, rather than Haman crucified, like Jesus.³⁶

As early as the fifth century, there is evidence of anti-Christian rituals performed by Jews on Purim inspired, perhaps, by earlier traditions linking Haman and Jesus through the image of crucifixion.³⁷ In 408, Emperor Theodosius II banned the Jews from burning an effigy of Haman on Purim.³⁸ The law reads:

The governors of the provinces shall prohibit the Jews, in a certain ceremony of their festival Aman in commemoration of some former punishment, from setting fire to and burning a simulated appearance of the holy cross, lest they should associate the sign of our faith with their revels; they should restrain their rites from bringing Christian law into contempt; they will certainly lose what has been permitted to them up until now unless they refrain from unlawful actions.³⁹

The text of the law indicates that certain Jews – how many, we do not know, but enough to garner the attention of the emperor – performed a ceremony to commemorate Haman's hanging that entailed reenacting the scene of his death. Whether the Purim ritual only *appeared* anti-Christian because the burning of the effigy resembled the burning of a cross, or whether it was actually *intended* to ridicule and offend Christianity is unclear. A few years before Theodosius' decree, Socrates, the fifth-century Byzantine historian, records a similar such occurrence in a Syrian town called Inmestar. He writes thusly in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* (VII.16):

³⁴ Thornton, *ibid.*, 421–22.

³⁵ The title of the poem is "*bimte mispar*," authored by the otherwise-unidentified "Me-shullam." The poem can be found in *Seder 'avodat yisra'el*, Western Ashkenazic version (ed. Seligman Bär; Rödelheim, 1868), 621.

³⁶ See Michael Stanislawski's article in this volume.

³⁷ In my presentation of the material, I rely exclusively on primary sources; scholars have been too creative, in my opinion, in reconstructing Purim celebrations based on a few scattered references; on this phenomenon, see Elliott Horowitz's historiographical remarks in "The Rite to Be Reckless: On the Perpetration and Interpretation of Purim Violence," *Poetics Today* 15 (1994): 9–54, and *idem*, *Reckless Rites: Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

³⁸ Horowitz, "The Rite to Be Reckless," 24.

³⁹ Latin text and translation in Thornton, "The Crucifixion," 423.

Sometime after this, the Jews renewed their absurd and impious practices against the Christians, and were punished (again). At a place called Inmestar, situated between Chalcis and Antioch in Syria, the Jews were amusing themselves in their usual way with a variety of sports. In this way they indulged in many absurdities, and at length, impelled by drunkenness they were guilty of scoffing at Christians and even Christ himself. In derision of the Cross, and those who put their trust in the Crucified One, they seized a Christian boy, and having bound him to a cross, began to laugh and sneer at him. But in a little while they carried away their fury, and they scourged the child until he died under their hands.⁴⁰

According to Socrates, the Jews amuse themselves by crucifying a Christian boy and burning him to death. Though Socrates never mentions the holiday of Purim, he accuses the Jews of drinking, a ritual certainly associated with Purim.⁴¹ Given the description in the Theodosian rescript, it is possible to imagine a similar circumstance here: Socrates accuses the Jews, in their drunken revelry, of reenacting something that resembles a mock crucifixion. Socrates heightens the stakes by describing the victim not as an effigy of Haman-confused-for-Jesus but as an actual young Christian boy instead! Socrates very well might be inventing the details – he seems to be most concerned with emphasizing the Jews' punishment, a theme with which he begins and ends the section – but this account reveals that, at least according to this Christian author, the Jews marked the holiday of Purim by engaging in anti-Christian behavior.⁴²

In another contemporaneous source – Evagrius' *Altercatio Simonis Iudaei et Theophili Christiani* (5th c.) – the Jewish character, Simon, refers to Haman's crucifixion on Purim and the annual Jewish practice of celebrating his downfall, but denies (presumably because of accusations to the contrary) that such festivities equate Haman's death to Jesus' crucifixion:

We know plainly that Haman, cursed by our ancestors, was crucified through his own offense. He had driven our race into ruin, and on the occasion of his death every year we rejoice and hold festivals of prayer, which we have received by ancestral tradition ... However, if Christ endured the yoke of this death and hung from the cross, why have we not heard this very fact from our ancestors or found any passage in our scriptures so that we would rejoice as if he were an enemy to our race?⁴³

⁴⁰ Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* VII.16. Günther Christian Hansen, *Sokrates Kirchengeschichte* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995), 361; English translation in Eusebius, *The History of the Church, from Our Lord's incarnation, to the twelfth year of the Emperor Mauricius Tiberius, or the year of Christ 594* (London: Awncsham and John Churchill, 1709), 377.

⁴¹ As early as rabbinic literature, e. g. b. *Megillah* 7b.

⁴² Socrates insinuates by the placement of this episode a connection with the murder and dismembering of another Christian, a teacher named Hypatia, renowned and admired for her philosophical genius (about which he writes in the section immediately preceding). The trope of the Jews killing or sacrificing a human is not uncommon, and functioned as stock polemics. Apollonius Molon (apud Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.148), for example, accuses the Jews of sacrificing a Greek at the Jerusalem temple each year. See John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 272.

⁴³ For the text and translation, see William Varner, *Ancient Jewish-Christian Dialogues: Athanasius and Zacchaeus, Simon and Theophilus, Timothy and Aquila: Introductions, Texts,*

Though the *Altercatio* does not preserve a historical dialogue, the text might reflect the way in which Jewish Purim celebrations – whatever rituals they entailed – could have been interpreted by some neighboring Christians, and the ways in which such accusations were denied by Jews.

Later texts attest to persistent fears concerning rituals commemorating or re-enacting Jesus' crucifixion on Purim among Jews during the medieval period. An eighth-century Byzantine formula of abjuration reads: "I next curse those who keep the festival of the so-called Mordecai on the first Sabbath of the Christian fasts (Lent), nailing Haman to wood and then mixing with him the emblem of a cross and burning them together, subjecting Christians to all kinds of imprecations and a curse."⁴⁴ According to this source, too, Purim ("the festival of the so-called Mordecai") was marked by hanging Haman and burning him along with a cross. During the season of Lent, when Christians prepared for the upcoming commemoration of the death and resurrection of Christ (with prayers, almsgiving, self-denial), the Jews had the audacity to busy themselves with dramatic performances (or parodies) of the crucifixion, as if the first time was not enough. Thus Haman is Christianized and Purim is presented as an anti-Christian festival, a day on which Christians were cursed by Jews – indeed, an anti-Lent!

So far, all of our sources for anti-Christian behavior on Purim were written by those accusing the Jews of offensive behavior and blasphemy. A passing reference to the burning of Haman's effigy also appears in a fragmentary Geonic responsum from the Cairo Geniza, in the context of a discussion about *molekh* and *b. Sanhedrin* 64b. In this responsum, its Jewish author describes the intricacies of the ritual, confirming that some Jews did, in fact, hang Haman and burn him on the holiday:

... the young men make an effigy of Haman, and hang it on their roofs for four or five days. And on Purim they build a bonfire, into which they cast this effigy, while the young men stand around joking and singing, and holding a ring hung into the fire, waving it and jumping from side to side through the fire.⁴⁵

This passage confirms the act of performing Haman's hanging. Their intent may be surmised by texts such as the later commentary of one of the last Tosaphists, Rabenu Avigdor of Vienna (13th c.), who elaborates on the connection between Haman's hanging and Jesus' crucifixion in his exegesis of the verse in Deuter-

and Translations (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 2004), 113. On the dating of *The Disputation of Simon and Theophilus*, see Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik eds., *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 569–70; see also Andrew S. Jacobs, "Dialogical Differences: (De-)Judaizing Jesus' Circumcision," *J ECS* 15 (2007): 291–335.

⁴⁴ Thornton, "The Crucifixion," 424; for the text, see *PG* 1:1457c; see also Jean Juster, *Les juifs dans l'empire romain: leur condition juridique, économique, sociale* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1914), 1:115–19.

⁴⁵ Louis Ginzberg, "Genizah Studies. First Article: Geonic Responsa," *JQR* 16 (1904): 652. The text is a thirteenth-century fragment from a collection of Geonic responsa.

onomy 21:23 (“cursed is he who hangs on the tree”).⁴⁶ Rabenu Avigdor justifies the commandment to curse Haman on Purim (found in rabbinic literature) by arguing, contra the usual interpretation of the biblical verse, that because Haman was hanged, he *must* be cursed according to the biblical verse. The Babylonian Talmud, the author reminds his reader, “makes this clear: anyone who has not said ‘cursed be Haman’ has not fulfilled the obligation” of Deuteronomy 21:23.⁴⁷ Rabenu Avigdor then shifts his focus to Jesus:

... the Torah is teaching us that it is proper to curse a certain hanged man, who made himself into a god, for he was not hanged the way that most convicted criminals are hanged. For most are hanged on a tree, and God was concerned that their honor not be utterly disgraced, so He commanded: thou shalt not let the hanged man’s corpse stay on the tree overnight. But this man, Jesus, was hanged not on a tree, but on a [cabbage stalk]; and concerning him, God commanded us a positive commandment to curse him any time that we need to mention him, and thereby to fulfill this positive commandment. And he was called Yeshu, which is [an acronym for] ‘may his name and memory be blotted out.’ And anyone who mentions a wicked person, and does not immediately follow the name with a curse, violates a positive commandment, as it is written, ‘let the name of the wicked rot’ (Proverbs 10:7).⁴⁸

As opposed to all other criminals who are hanged on trees and removed before night, as per the biblical commandment, and are therefore *not* cursed, Jesus was hanged on a cabbage stalk instead of a tree and left overnight, and thus he *is* a curse (“for an impaled body is an affront to God ...”) and must *be* cursed by others.⁴⁹ The end result, of course, is that there is a commandment, a biblical sanction, to curse not only Haman but also Jesus. Though Rabenu Avigdor does not specify that such cursing should occur *on* Purim, such a custom would make perfect sense to those who follow the logic of this kind of argument. Moreover, Rabenu Avigdor’s discourse on Jesus’ crucifixion on a cabbage stalk relies on the same tradition from *Toledot Yeshu*; here, again, *Toledot Yeshu* is linked to the story of and practices associated with Purim.

Beginning in the fifth century and continuing through the medieval period, the celebration of Purim was, as our evidence suggests, entangled with anti-Christian rituals, and Haman was often identified with Jesus. Purim, with its increasingly carnivalesque features and reversal of social roles, continued to be a day for acting

⁴⁶ Avigdor ben Yitshak haKohen, *Sefer perushim upesaqim 'al hatorah lerabenu avidgor tsarfati* (ed. I. Hershkovitz; Jerusalem: Mekhon Harere Kedem, 1996), 414. This is, admittedly, a late source. I bring it here to illustrate one of the many ways that Haman and Jesus have been paralleled, not to suggest that this source preserves an older interpretation or introduces the association of the two figures for the first time.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*; the commandment to curse Haman is found more explicitly in *Bereshit Rabbah* 49:1.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* The brackets within the text indicate that the text has been reconstructed according to printed editions and manuscripts. The last line refers to a passage from *Bereshit Rabbah* 49:1.

⁴⁹ The section about Jesus’ crucifixion on a cabbage stalk relies on the tradition from *Toledot Yeshu*.

out anti-Christian sentiments well into the early modern and modern periods. For example, a 1705 document preserved in the Berlin State Archive depicts Jews celebrating Purim during Holy Week with masquerade, music, and the hanging of Haman, and the 1750 charter of Frederick the Great of Prussia urged the Jews to abstain from various practices that offended Christians, including “all improper excesses in their festivals, particularly during the so-called Feast of Haman, or Purim.”⁵⁰ Haman – mocked, hanged, burned on Purim – was perceived by many Jews during these times as a double or counterpart of Jesus. Moreover, Haman became a *prototype* for Christianity more generally in the medieval period.⁵¹ Not only was Purim highly polemical, it also contained elements of hope and perceived strength. The Book of Esther – the story of the salvation of the Jews from the hands of the evil and dangerous Haman – and the celebration of Purim thus also symbolized the hoped-for triumph of the Jews over their present-day Christian enemies. *Toledot Yeshu*’s use of tropes and motifs from the texts associated with the holiday of Purim, then, can be understood not as aberrant exceptions but as part of a broader, widespread, and long-lasting historical trend.

Let us end this historical section with one last vivid visual example that parallels in several ways *Toledot Yeshu*’s use of allusions to the Book of Esther. In the Worms Mahzor (late thirteenth century), the hanging of Haman and his ten sons is depicted almost identically to contemporaneous Christian images of Jesus and the Tree of Jesse, and several other *mahzorim* (e.g. the Dresden-Wroclav Mahzor, the Leipzig Mahzor, and the Hammelburg Mahzor) depict Haman’s hanging in ways that strongly parallel, and thus invert, Christian manuscript illuminations of Jesus and the Tree of Life from the same period.⁵² Haman is *visually* conflated with Jesus in these Jewish manuscript paintings, again reinforcing the association of the two characters in the imagination of the artists and then of those who used the manuscripts. Kogman-Appel interprets the message of these images in two ways. On the one hand, they invert the Christian anti-Jewish implications that the original images of Jesus held by presenting the scene as the humiliating denouement of Haman’s plans. On the other hand, however, the violent illustrations also served to dissuade Jews from accepting Christianity through demonstrating the violent punishment of Haman-as-Jesus (it is no longer

⁵⁰ Horowitz, *Reckless Rites*, 39. One need not look to the medieval or modern period, however, for Purim’s carnivalesque character. Already the Babylonian Talmud records Rava’s instructions, that a person must get drunk on Purim until he cannot distinguish between “cursed be Haman” and “blessed be Mordecai,” and then recounts a story about two rabbis who became so drunk that one killed the other (*b. Megillah* 7b). Celebration and violence are already intertwined in this text (the story might attempt to temper the injunction).

⁵¹ See Kogman-Appel’s vivid demonstration of the association of crusaders with Haman in medieval midrashim, “The Tree of Death,” 196–99.

⁵² See the images collected by Kogman-Appel in *Between the Picture and the Word* (Figures 262–67), and her analysis of the texts (“The Tree of Death,” 187–203). On other depictions of Haman’s hanging, see Horowitz, *Reckless Rites*, 93–99.

the tree of everlasting *life* that is depicted in these Jewish images but the tree of violent *death!*). These two goals – retelling a Christian narrative on Jewish terms (both mocking the Christians and empowering the Jews), and discouraging affinity with Christianity by those who were attracted to the faith – are two concerns shared by *Toledot Yeshu*, as I have argued above. Rather than beginning with the Book of Esther and incorporating inverted Christian symbols, as these *mahzorim* do, *Toledot Yeshu* is an example of the reverse phenomenon: the text begins with an inverted story about Jesus and incorporates allusions to Haman and the Purim story. Both draw on the association between Haman and Jesus and the long tradition of anti-Christianity on Purim to convey their anti-Christian ideas and sentiments, but in different – indeed opposite – ways.

Toledot Yeshu as Megillah

The allusions to the Book of Esther may not have been utilized only to foreground certain themes in *Toledot Yeshu*. There may have been another purpose, or another reason, and here I begin a tentative suggestion that I propose with some hesitation due to the inconclusive nature of the evidence. Perhaps these allusions to the Book of Esther within the text of *Toledot Yeshu* hint at the liturgical use of *Toledot Yeshu*, similar to the use of the *Megillah* of Esther, a text read aloud liturgically on the holiday of Purim. In medieval Europe Jewish communities celebrated their triumphs in various local disputes with Christians by establishing festivals in the month of Adar, around the holiday of Purim, called “Special Purims” or “Second Purims.” In honor of these days, they wrote accounts of the events that led them to the celebration and then recited the accounts publicly, as one would the Book of Esther in synagogue.⁵³ They equated their own situations with the story of Esther such that the Christians assumed the roles of Haman and his sons in the different renditions. For example, when the Jewish community was saved in 1236 from an anti-Jewish riot following the murder of a Christian fisherman by Jews, the Jews of Narbonne, in Southern France, declared a Special Purim to commemorate their salvation.⁵⁴ *Toledot Yeshu* might be seen in a genre similar to that of Second Purim megillot, even if it was not associated with a particular Second Purim celebration as such.⁵⁵ The allusions to the Book of Esther would thus point to a performative use of the text of *Toledot Yeshu*.

⁵³ Joshua E. Burns, “The Special Purim and the reception of the Book of Esther in the Hellenistic and early Roman Eras,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 37 (2006): 15–16; Yosef H. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 47–48.

⁵⁴ Yerushalmi provides numerous other examples as well, *Zakhor*, 47–48.

⁵⁵ I write “similar to” because the phenomenon of “Second Purims” begins later than the typical dating of *Toledot Yeshu*’s earliest compositions and because there is no evidence that “Second Purims” applied to past historical events such as the life or crucifixion of Jesus.

If *Toledot Yeshu* was recited or even performed, when might this have occurred? One possible communal context for the reading of *Toledot Yeshu* beyond the month of Adar is the fast of the 9th (or even 10th) of Tevet, commemorated during the winter, often around or sometimes even on Christmas day. *Megillat Ta'anit Batra* states that on the 9th day of Tevet, fasting is required, but rather than providing an explanation for the fast, as it does for all the other fasts it lists, it suspiciously adds that “the rabbis did not record why.”⁵⁶ Some medieval Jews believed that this date was the day of Jesus’ birth (in 1122, Abraham bar Hiyya calculated that 25 December fell out in certain years on the 9th of Tevet, including the year of Jesus’ actual birth).⁵⁷ It would be reasonable to read *Toledot Yeshu*, which begins in most manuscripts (though not in the Aramaic fragments) with Jesus’ birth narrative, on the day on which he was said to have been born. This theory of the ninth of Tevet as the day on which *Toledot Yeshu* might have been recited is further supported by the fact that others associated the ninth of Tevet with the day on which Shimon Qefa, the hero of the *Toledot Yeshu* narrative, died (a tradition traceable to the eleventh century).⁵⁸ To be sure, these explanations are not mutually exclusive. Jews may have at once linked the day with Jesus’ birth and with the death of Shimon Qefa. The connection between both the problem (Jesus) and the solution (Shimon Qefa) on the same day would have made the ninth of Tevet a most appropriate date for the recitation of this text. Further strengthening the link between this text and the holiday of Purim, it is worth noting that the ninth of Tevet was also considered by some (including R. Moses Isserles) to be the day on which Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, based on Esther 2:16.⁵⁹

While the ninth of Tevet was not among the most popular fasts of the year, the tenth of Tevet, just one day later, was widely commemorated as the day on which a siege was placed on Jerusalem during the time of Nebuchadnezzar. This day, too, became an opportunity for reciting anti-Christian liturgy in the synagogue because of its proximity in certain years to the celebration of Christmas, Jesus’ birthday. Avraham Fraenkel, in a comment on a piyyut most likely composed for the Fast of the Tenth of Tevet, writes that the poem’s anti-Christian character is not surprising, given that it was recited on this particular day:

This fast day often falls right around the time of Christmas, according to the Julian calendar (though it did not in the year 1044 [the year of this poem’s composition]). In twelfth-century Ashkenaz, there was a phenomenon that *paytanim would write bitterly anti-Christian piyyutim to be recited on the Tenth of Tevet ...*⁶⁰

⁵⁶ For a detailed study of the significance of the fast of the 9th of Tevet, see Sid Z. Leiman, “The Scroll of Fasts: The Ninth of Tebeth,” *JQR* 74 (1983): 174–95.

⁵⁷ Leiman, *ibid.*, 182–85.

⁵⁸ Leiman, *ibid.*, 185–92.

⁵⁹ Leiman, *ibid.*, 180.

⁶⁰ Avraham Fraenkel, *Piyyute R. Yehi’el bar Avraham meroma: avi R. Natan ba’al he’arukh* (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 2006), 57, n.10, emphasis added. Fraenkel has indicated that

Again, *Toledot Yeshu* would complement such anti-Christian poetry written for the fast of the Tenth of Tevet.

Whether or not the Jews chose to recite or perform *Toledot Yeshu* on the ninth or tenth of Tevet, there is (albeit relatively late) attestation of the custom of reciting the text on Christmas Eve. In the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, Johann Pfefferkorn writes that the Jews read *Toledot Yeshu* secretly on Christmas night, as does the Jewish convert to Christianity Ernst Ferdinand Hess in his 1598 *Juden Geissel*.⁶¹ Samuel Friedrich Brenz and other converts mention this custom in the early seventeenth century as well.⁶² In addition to these secondary accounts about this custom, the text of *Toledot Yeshu* might also allude to such a practice. The Strasbourg manuscript preserves the bizarre story in which Judas Iscariot defeats Jesus following a magical flying contest by urinating on him.⁶³ The story ends with an etymology: Christmas is called *Weihnachten* because the Christians weep (*weinen*) on this night (*nacht*), to commemorate Jesus' defeat and defilement.⁶⁴ It is possible that the author concludes his story with this (incorrect) etymology because the story (along with the rest of the text) was recited on Christmas day. In another version of *Toledot Yeshu*, it is not Christmas (*Weihnachten*) that is referenced but Easter (Pascha), perhaps a corruption of the text or a deliberate change that might allude to the text's use on Easter night, another

he plans to elaborate on the subject of these anti-Christian poems composed for the tenth of Tevet in a future publication.

⁶¹ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 9 ff.; Marc Shapiro, "Torah Study on Christmas Eve," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 8 (1999): 334–35.

⁶² Samuel Friedrich Brenz, *Jüdischer Abgestreifter Schlangenbalg* reprinted in Johann Wülfer, *Theriaca judaica ad examen revocata* (Nürnberg, 1681), 2; Stanislawski mentions this in his article in this volume. See also Elisheva Carlebach, *Divided Souls: Converts from Judaism in Germany, 1500–1750* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 213 f., and the references in Marc Shapiro, "Torah Study," 319–53.

⁶³ The act of Judas defiling Jesus could evoke the medieval Jewish practice of insulting images of the Holy Family by connecting them to latrines. Ivan Marcus, "A Jewish-Christian Symbiosis," in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History* (ed. David Biale; New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 479 ff. Marcus mentions that Jesus is already connected to excrement in *b. Gittin* 56b and in Eliezer ben Nathan's account of the martyrs of Worms in 1096: "in the end they regarded the object of the enemy's veneration as no more than slime and dung." He also mentions Rigord's list of reasons for the expulsion of the Jews in 1182 (King Philip Augustus of France's ecclesiastical court biographer) and a letter written by Pope Innocent III in 1205 to the archbishop of Sens and the bishop of Paris detailing the excesses of the Jews as evidence for accusations of this type of behavior (Marcus, "A Jewish-Christian Symbiosis," 479–80).

⁶⁴ In this particularly vivid scene, Jesus and Judas Iscariot engage in a magical flying contest. Jesus raises his hands to the heavens and flies into the sky like an eagle. Judas follows suit, but neither man is victorious until Judas urinates on Jesus, bringing him to the ground. "And because of this act, they weep on their night ..." This line might allude to the cries of the Jews as they feared death in the desert and threatened to return to Egypt in Numbers 14:1, "and the nation wept on that night."

time during which Jews did not leave their homes for fear of Christian violence and might have been encouraged by such a tale.⁶⁵

While in the first half of this paper I argued that *Toledot Yeshu's* allusions to the Book of Esther drew connections between the story of Purim and the story of Christianity's origins within the context of existing anti-Christian overtones on the holiday of Purim, in this section I have suggested that the parallel drawn between Yeshu and Haman casts the *text of Toledot Yeshu* as a type of megillah that could be (and may have been) performed in a communal setting, similar to the Book of Esther.

Conclusion

Above, I have made three arguments about the relationship between *Toledot Yeshu*, the Book of Esther and the holiday of Purim. First, I analyzed textual allusions to the Book of Esther in several *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts and argued that the authors of *Toledot Yeshu* had the Book of Esther (among other biblical texts) in mind as they constructed the story of Jesus' life. The references to the Book of Esther served primarily two functions. First, equating the threat of Jesus and Christianity to kill or spiritually destroy the Jews with Haman's plans to decimate the Jewish people served to portray Christianity as an existential threat to the Jewish people. The implicit parallel, however, also suggests that the Jews can defeat Christianity just as they defeated Haman. Moreover, *Toledot Yeshu*, understood not only as a polemic but also as a parody of the story of Jesus' life, fits well with the spirit of Purim, a carnivalesque holiday associated with drinking and merrymaking and, eventually, parodies and mocking storytelling.⁶⁶ In my second argument, I sought to explain *Toledot Yeshu's* references to the Book of Esther in light of evidence that the celebration of Purim was already associated with anti-Christianity as early as the fifth century and through the medieval period. Imperial documents, ecclesiastical accounts, fictional adversus judaeos dialogues, and internal Jewish texts such as a responsum and a biblical commentary confirm that Jews engaged in rituals on Purim that were at least interpreted as, but likely also intended to be, anti-Christian. The association between Purim and anti-Christianity has been noted by previous scholars (as early as Jacques Basnage and Heinrich Graetz, and most recently by T. C. G. Thornton, Elliott Horowitz and Kogman-Appel), but not usually in connection with *Toledot Yeshu*

⁶⁵ See Stanislawski's paper in this volume.

⁶⁶ Daniel Sperber, *Minhagei Yisra'el: Meqorot vetoledot* (8 vols.; Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1989–2007), 6:201–2 (“Purim Spiel” and “Masks”). The Aramaic poem with which I began the paper might be a very early example of this phenomenon as well.

and its narrative construction.⁶⁷ The authors or compilers of the various *Toledot Yeshu* compositions must have drawn on existing associations between Purim and anti-Christianity as they employed allusions to the Book of Esther in their text. *Toledot Yeshu*'s allusions to the Book of Esther, understood within this historical context, thus served not only as isolated allusions but also triggered broader associations between the tale of Esther and Haman and the story of Jesus and the origins of Christianity. Beyond the intent of the *authors*, the *readers* of *Toledot Yeshu* must have understood the text's allusions to the Book of Esther within this broader cultural context as well (the scribal notes above are but two examples). In the third argument, I suggested that *Toledot Yeshu* might have been used liturgically or performatively as a megillah in a similar or parallel way to the use of the Book of Esther on Purim or other megillot on Second Purims. I identified 9 and 10 Tevet, Christmas, Easter and even Purim as likely days of the year on which *Toledot Yeshu* could have been read; at least for later periods, there is some evidence for the recitation of *Toledot Yeshu* on Christmas Eve. This final argument, however, remains merely a tentative suggestion.

Much scholarship on *Toledot Yeshu* has focused on delineating the text's genre and purpose.⁶⁸ Was *Toledot Yeshu* considered a sincere historical account of Jesus' life, a parody of Jesus, a counter-gospel, a polemic, a folktale? Was *Toledot Yeshu* written in order to mock Christian beliefs about their foundational figure or to earnestly tell the ("true") story of Jesus from a Jewish perspective (that is, to reveal what *really* transpired at Jesus' conception and throughout his life)? By studying *Toledot Yeshu*'s use of allusions to the Book of Esther, I have reconsidered the questions of *Toledot Yeshu*'s genre and purpose. Like the Book of Esther, which interweaves history with parody, *Toledot Yeshu* might best be understood as straddling these two genres, presenting the historical story of Jesus' life as worthy of mockery and ridicule. The purpose of *Toledot Yeshu*'s composition, when read through its allusions to the story of Purim, was not only to present a historical-satirical account of Jesus' life but also to emphasize the gravity of Christianity's danger and to encourage the Jews with the promise of their eventual triumph over the competing religion based on the precedent of the Jews of Shushan's defeat of Haman.

⁶⁷ The one exception I have found is Biale's passing reference to *Midrash Esther Rabbah* in his analysis of *Toledot Yeshu*, as discussed above ("Counter-History," 135).

⁶⁸ See for example Biale, "Counter-History," 130–45.

Meaningful Nonsense: A Study of Details in *Toledot Yeshu*

Michael Meerson

A statement that the *Toledot Yeshu* contains many weird passages sounds hopelessly banal, like saying that there is a tree in a forest. Apparently, the authors of *Toledot Yeshu*, whose main goal was to mock and offend their religious opponent(s), could not care less about realistic presentation of anything in their satire. On the other hand, why would they use empty metaphors that would mean nothing either to their enemies or their friends, instead of exploiting contemporary symbolism and well-known circumstances of their lives? Here, the word *contemporary* is key, signifying that not only modern scholars, but, also, medieval scribes and editors of the *Toledot Yeshu*, could be puzzled by separate motifs in this treatise, which, once detached from their original environment, had lost all significance. While most modern scholars ignore these motifs as nonsense, the medieval copyist tried to adjust them to the story, to present them as logical, if not natural, embellishments of the narrative. Why did Judah and Yeshu have to fight in the air?, the reader of the Aramaic *Toledot* might ask, and the later versions readily explain: it is because Yeshu wanted to surpass Judah in magical powers, and to prove that the Biblical passage *ky yqqaheny selah* (Psalms 49:16) refers to him.¹ Why didn't the priests foresee that Yeshu was going to steal the Ineffable Name from the temple? It is because, at the moment of Yeshu's entering to the temple, he already was a skilled magician, able to evade the priests' notice.² Is not Yeshu right, arguing that Moses was inferior to Jethro, since he had learned practical wisdom from him? No, he is not! For the true superiority of Moses was revealed through his ability to learn.³ Such educated

¹ In manuscripts of the Wagenseil group, Yeshu boasts of being able to rise to the heaven, while Judah is not: *ve-'atah yhudah 'al tavo 'shamah* (e. g., London JC 54, Leipzig BH 17.35–51, Paris AIU H 222a). The passage from Psalms 49:16 is quoted in the longer Italian (e. g., Rostock Orient. 38) and the longer Yemenite manuscripts (e. g., Cambridge Univ. Lib. T.-S. Or. 455), and also in Mss. Strasbourg BnU 3974 and Amsterdam Hs. Ros. 414.

² See, e. g., Cambridge Harvard Houghton Lib. 57 (Wagenseil): *'ekh henikhu ha-kohenym bene 'aharon ha-qedoshym likanes 'ella' vadda'y be-shem tum'a ve-kyshuf pa'al 'et ha-kkol*. The "Slavic" version (for this classification see Riccardo Di Segni, *Il vangelo del ghetto*, (Rome: Newton Compton, 1985) explains that Yeshu learned magic in the Galilee before coming to Jerusalem.

³ New York JTS 2235 ("the shorter Italian"): *shelomoh 'aderabbah shom'a le-'etsa hakham*

explanations could more or less satisfy the reader of the *Toledot*, but they still may disappoint the scholar eager to unearth initial *microforms* concealed under the debris of these explanations and embellishments. Thus, the goal of the present study is to treat the apparent nonsense seriously, assuming that the author of the *Toledot* did not speak absurdities because ridiculous things popped up in his mind, but, rather, that he considered these things completely normal because he saw, heard or read them.

The “meaningless” details which I am going to discuss here are far more extreme than those mentioned in the examples above, and, although there are a lot of them throughout the story, I shall focus only on those found in the passage describing Yeshu’s death and burial. The demonstrably earliest narrative of Yeshu’s execution appears in *De Judaicis superstitionibus* of Agobard,⁴ a bishop of Lyon, and stands in total disagreement with all other versions of the *Toledot*: being caught and condemned as a despicable sorcerer, Yeshu was suspended on a *fork* (*furca*), and then killed with a stone in the head. Since it is unlikely that a bishop of Lyon could confuse the *fork* with the *cross*, Agobard must have actually transmitted this peculiar detail from his Jewish contemporaries. But may this observation have more than an antiquarian value?

The Fork

The answer would follow from an explanation of why the authors of Agobard’s *Toledot* had supplanted the cross with the *fork*. According to Plutarch, the *fork* denoted a piece of wood tied to a pole of a wagon – a very vague but the best available description; the rest is the scholar’s conjectures.⁵ Perhaps we can imagine the *fork* as an A-shaped gallows holding a head inserted in the triangle, and hands tied to the side beams. Plutarch also describes how the *fork* was used: primarily, it was considered to be the slave’s punishment, and a slave who had committed a fault was severely scourged and had to carry a *fork* around through the neighborhood. After that, he would be contemptuously called *furcifer*, and no one who saw this slave undergoing his punishment would ever trust him again.

ve-zeh hayah bosh lilmod mi-shefel ha-'anashim ve-ken david 'amar mi-kkol melamde hiskalti ve-nitbatel tto 'anot ha-mamzer be-naqel.

⁴ PL 104:87–88. On this subject see the article of Peter Schäfer in this volume.

⁵ Cor. 24: ἦν δὲ μεγάλη κόλασις οἰκέτου πλημμελήσαντος εἰ ξύλον ἀμάξης ὧ τὸν ὄμιον ὑπερείδουσιν, ἀράμενος διεξέλθαι παρὰ τὴν γειτνίασιν. ὁ γὰρ τοῦτο παθὼν καὶ ὄφθεις ὑπὸ τὴν συνοίκων καὶ γειτόνων οὐκέτι πίστιν εἶχεν. ἐκαλεῖτο δὲ φούρκιφερ: ὁ γὰρ οἱ Ἕλληνες ὑποστάτην καὶ στήριγμα, τοῦτο Ῥωμαῖοι φούρκαν ὀνομάζουσιν. – “And it was a severe punishment for a slave who had committed a fault, if he was obliged to take the piece of wood with which they prop up the pole of a wagon, and carry it around through the neighborhood. And he was called ‘furcifer’; for what the Greeks call a *prop*, or *support*, is called “*furca*” by the Romans.”

In fact, however, not only slaves but also those found guilty of high-treason were sometimes condemned to the scourging on a *fork*. In the *Epitome* of Livy, a deserter was “sent under a *fork*, chastised with rods,” but then again, sold as a slave for one penny, because, as Livy explains, people who refuse fighting for their freedom don’t deserve it, and should be punished in a way appropriate for slaves.⁶ The important thing demonstrated by these passages is that the *fork* was not a tool of death per se. To be sure, the scourging *could* serve as a prelude to the capital punishment, and a criminal, in exceptional cases, *could* be beaten to death.⁷ While the deserter of Livy obviously survived the punishment, another soldier, Horatius, who, in a spasm of patriotism, killed his sister Horatia because she fell in love with an enemy of the state, had to be scourged to death as a usurper or the state’s prerogative of punishment and, therefore, a traitor (*Ab Urb.* 1.24–26). Nevertheless, in most literary sources the suspension on a *fork* appears as a separate punishment that means only the *scourging*, regardless of whether this did, or did not, lead to death.

Speculations aside, the suspension on a *fork* – involving, potentially, either the scourging or the killing – cannot be confused with the standard methods of capital punishment in the Republic and early Empire: crucifixion (causing death from strangulation), decapitation, burning alive, and throwing to wild beasts.⁸ This group of penalties can be found also in the sixth-century *Corpus Juris Civilis* (529 CE), with one difference, however: the *fork* has now supplanted the cross.⁹ Ulpian in his treatise concerning the proconsul’s authority explains that

⁶ *Periochae* 55: *P. Cornelio Nasica (cui cognomen Serapion fuit ab inidente Curiatio trib. pleb. impositum) et Dec. Iunio Bruto coss. dilectum habentibus in conspectu tironum res saluberrimi exempli facta est. Nam C. Matienius accusatus est apud tribunos pl., quod exercitum ex Hispania deservisset, damnatusque sub furca diu virgis caesus est et sestertio nummo venit.* – “When the consuls Publius Cornelius Nasica (whose surname *Serapio* was invented by the irreverent tribune of the plebs Curiatius) and Decimus Junius Brutus were holding the levy, something happened in front of the recruits that served as an example: Gaius Matienus was accused before the tribunes because he had deserted the Spanish army, and was, after he had been condemned, sent under the “fork,” chastised with rods, and sold for one sesterce.”

⁷ E. g., the scene of Nero’s suicide in Svetonius: *Inter moras perlato a cursore Phaonti codicillos praeripuit legitque se hostem a senatu iudicatum et quaeri, ut puniatur more maiorum, interrogavitque, quale id genus esset poenae; et cum comperisset nudi hominis cervicem inseri furcae, corpus virgis ad necem caedi ...* – “While he hesitated, a letter was brought to Phaon by one of his couriers. Nero snatching it from his hand read that he had been pronounced a public enemy by the senate, and that they were seeking him to punish in the ancient fashion; and he asked what manner of punishment that was. Then he learned that the criminal was stripped, fastened by the neck in a *fork* and then beaten to death with rods.”

⁸ See, e. g., Ignatius, *Ad Rom.* 5: πῦρ καὶ σταυρὸς θηριῶν οὐστάσεις ... ἐπ’ ἐμὲ ἐρχέσθωσαν, μόνον ἵνα Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐπιτύχω. – “Let fire and the cross; let the crowds of wild beasts ... come upon me: only let me attain to Jesus Christ”; and Tertullian, *Ad Nat.* 1.18: *Et utique non gladio aut cruce aut bestiis puniendi sunt nomina (i. e., Chrestiani).* – “Surely, surely, names (Christians) are not things which deserve punishment by the sword, or the cross, or the beasts.”

⁹ *Dig.* 48.19.28: *Callistratus libro sexto de cognitionibus: pr. Capitalium poenarum fere isti gradus sunt. Summum supplicium esse videtur ad furcam damnatio. Item vivi crematio: quod*

“persons guilty of sacrilege should be thrown to wild beasts, others be burned alive, and still others be hanged on a *fork*.” Those, however, who deserve such harsh penalties are not petty debauchers, but the leaders of “an armed gang, (who) have broken into a temple, and carried away the gifts of the gods by night.”¹⁰ Another passage from Paul summarizes crimes and punishments in perfect accord with all aforementioned sources from the Early Republic to the Late Empire:

(1) Deserters who go over to the enemy, or who reveal our plans, shall either be burned alive, or hanged on a *fork*.

(2) Instigators of sedition and of tumult, which result in the uprising of the people, shall, in accordance with their rank, either be hanged upon a *fork*, thrown to wild beasts, or deported to an island.¹¹

Taking into account that all jurists whose works were included in the 48th book of the *Digest*, namely, Ulpian, Callistratus and Paul, wrote in the third century CE, one can be surprised to find no mention of the cross (*crux*) among the capital penalties. This must be the result of the editor’s zeal: since the crucifixion was abolished by Constantine, the *crux* was excerpted, and the *furca* interpolated retrospectively in the legal sources. In addition to this, certainly, the *fork* actually took the place of the cross, and a criminal sentenced to the suspension on a *fork* was not only scourged and dishonored as before but *always* scourged to death.

Thus, in the eyes of Agobard, the suspension on a *fork* had nothing to do with the crucifixion: the former was reserved for the vilest criminals of his time, and perhaps still bore the old connotation of the extreme indignity. For the *Toledot Yeshu*, however, everything fell into the right place, for it was a criminal accused of sacrilege, of leading an armed band, of the theft in a temple, and, finally, of instigating a tumult, who should be sentenced to death on a *fork*. It is hard to believe that, on the part of Jews, it was an intentional perversion of the Christian tradition regarding the crucifixion; it was, rather, negligence of this tradition, on

quamquam summi supplicii appellatione merito contineretur, tamen eo, quod postea id genus poenae adinventum est, posterius primo visum est. Item capitis amputatio. Deinde proxima morti poena metalli coercitio. Post deinde in insulam deportatio. – “The following is the gradation of capital crimes. The extreme penalty is considered to be sentence to the *fork*, or burning alive. Although the latter seems, with good reason, to have been included in the term ‘extreme penalty,’ still, because this kind of punishment was invented subsequently, it appears to come after the first, just as decapitation does. The next penalty to death is that of labor in the mines. After that comes deportation to an island.”

¹⁰ Dig. 48.13.7 (6): *Ulpianus libro septimo de officio proconsulis: Et scio multos et ad bestias damnasse sacrilegos, nonnullos etiam vivos exussisse, alios vero in furca suspendisse. Sed moderanda poena est usque ad bestiarum damnationem eorum, qui manu facta templum effregerunt et dona dei in noctu tulerunt.*

¹¹ Dig. 48.19.38: *Paulus libro quinto sententiarum: pr. Si quis aliquid ex metallo principis vel ex moneta sacra furatus sit, poena metalli et exilii punitur. 1. Transfugae ad hostes vel consiliorum nostrorum renuntiatores aut vivi exuruntur aut furcae suspenduntur. 2. Actores seditionis et tumultus populo concitato pro qualitate dignitatis aut in furcam tolluntur aut bestiis obiciuntur aut in insulam deportantur.*

the one hand, and good acquaintance with *contemporary* juristic and punitive practices, on the other.

Not surprisingly, the *fork* could not mean much for those who lived considerably later than the ninth century, and far away from southwest Europe. As a result, it never surfaced again in any of the numerous *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts. In the Aramaic version, Yeshu died on a cross (*tseлива*'), although at a certain point he managed to escape, since he was able to fly. Instantaneously, he took abode in Elijah's cave and closed the entrance, but Judah, who followed him, commands, in quite the Ali-Baba spirit: "Entrance, entrance open up!" Yeshu was recaptured, and the execution continued. Certainly, the *tseлива*' is not the *furca*, but on the other hand, both versions do agree in talking about *one* execution leading to Yeshu's death.

Juxtaposing the Aramaic and Agobard versions of the *Toledot* with their thirteen-century "successors" leaves no place for a possibility of the direct textual transmission. The *Toledot Yeshu* translated in 1285 by Raimundus Martinus¹² and, one hundred and fifty years later, by Thomas Ebendorfer¹³ provides the earliest evidence for a totally different narrative, using some of the familiar motives, but clearly resonating with the canonical gospels, instead of a supposedly genuine source. As expected, Yeshu now undergoes the "normal" bipartite execution, borrowed from the New Testament's flagellation and crucifixion. The author of the *Toledot*, however, split the execution and inserted, in between, the motif of Yeshu's escape, known already from the Geniza versions. Germinating in a fertile soil of a religious satire, this motif soon developed into a story within a story: in all manuscripts of Di Segni's "Primo" group, Yeshu, being arrested, imprisoned and tortured, nevertheless manages to escape to Antioch.¹⁴ He then returns and commands his followers to accompany him on the Passover ascension to Jerusalem. A certain man, Gisa, betrays Yeshu; he get caught, tried again, and finally executed.¹⁵ The *Wagenseil* manuscripts insert also the story of Judah sneaking into Yeshu's camp and stealing the Ineffable Name from his leg.¹⁶ Arguably the latest, and most elaborate *Tam u-Mu'ad* version uses the opportunity to incorporate all suitable traditions that were not yet utilized by the preceding

¹² Raimundus Martinus, *Pugio Fidei* (Paris: Apud Mathurinum Henault, 1651), 2.8.6.

¹³ *Falsitates Judeorum* 1.1–12.16 (See Brigitta Callsen et al. eds. *Das jüdische Leben Jesu, "Toldot Jeschu": die älteste lateinische Übersetzung in den "Falsitates Judeorum" von Thomas Ebendorfer* [Wien: Oldenburg, 2003]).

¹⁴ Including all Yemenite and Bukhara manuscripts plus Di Segni's "Primo b" (Mss. New York JTS 1491, Strasbourg BnU 3974, Budapest Kaufmann 299) and "Primo c" (Mss. Amsterdam Hs. Ros. 414, New York JTS 2221).

¹⁵ Yeshu's disciples are tried in "Primo b" (see above), and he himself is tried by Pilate and the Sanhedrin in "Primo c."

¹⁶ E.g., Mss. Cambridge Harvard Houghton Lib. 57, and a shorter version, Jerusalem Schocken Institute 04088.

portion of the *Toledot*:¹⁷ after the torture, Yeshu escapes to Antioch, and then to Egypt (to learn or upgrade his magical skills). Upon his return to Jerusalem, Yeshu is betrayed, arrested and ... half-executed, for he escapes again, right from the cross, in order to undergo the purifying baptism in the Jordan and regain his magical powers. The sages and Judah then lure Yeshu to Jerusalem (compare to *Wagenseil*); he and his disciples submit themselves to one more trial (compare to “Primo”), and after all, Yeshu is killed.

There is a detail, however, equally meaningless in the Hebrew and Aramaic *Toledot*, regardless of whether it is connected to Yeshu’s escape (as in the Geniza manuscripts), or the final stage of his punishment: the tool of Yeshu’s execution is replaced. The earliest version of this strange act (Ms. Cambridge Univ. Lib. T.-S. Misc 35.87) is a complete puzzle – Yeshu flies away from the cross, but he returns onto a *cabbage root*, where he finally dies. The author indicates no reason for this substitution, allowing the future scribes and interpreters of the *Toledot* to ask why and wonder.

The Flower

A cabbage plant could hardly make a decent gallows. Yet, according to later versions of the *Toledot Yeshu*, it proved to be the only option, because all other trees, thanks to Yeshu’s magical tricks, refused to hold the weight of his body, and broke immediately when sages tried to hang him. Fortunately, Judah recollected that there was a marvelous plant in his garden, big like a tree, though not really a tree – the giant cabbage; and, since cabbages escaped Yeshu’s notion, the plant accepted him and did not break.

The earliest manuscripts of the “second wave” (late medieval) *Toledot* felt compelled to explain this botanical paradox, adopting and slightly rewriting a passage from *b. Ketubbot* 111b that speaks of the Messianic era, when crops will be plentiful and weeds gigantic. “No need to marvel at this,” says R. Hiyya, “for a fox once made his nest in a turnip and when the (remainder of the vegetable was weighed), it was found (to be) sixty pounds in the pound weight of Sopheris.” “Why go so far?” related R. Simeon. “Our father left us a cabbage stalk and we ascended and descended it by means of a ladder.” This conversation was a source of the allusion in the corresponding passage in the *Toledot*:

(Seeing that), they went and brought a stalk of some cabbage that does not belong to the wood but to herbs and hanged him on it. And this is not a miracle because every year one such cabbage springs up in the Sanctuary, and one hundred pounds of seeds fall from it.¹⁸

¹⁷ E. g., Ms. Amsterdam Hs. Ros. 467.

¹⁸ Martinus, *Pugio Fidei*, 2.8.6: *Abierunt itaque et adduxerunt stipitem unius caulis qui non est de lignis, sed de herbis, et suspenderunt eum super eum. Nec est hoc mirum quia singulis annis crescit tantum unus caulis in domo Sanctuarii, ut descendant de eo centum librae seminis.*

Certainly, the giant cabbage stalk *was* considered a miracle, despite the effort of the *Toledot* editors, which at some point was redirected to rid the story of this apparent nonsense instead of making sense of it. In nineteenth-century manuscripts from Baghdad and Yemen, the cabbage stalk turns into a cabbage tree, or a “different tree of cabbage,” or a “carob tree,”¹⁹ while the Italian editor makes it a kind of palm-tree, figuratively called “cabbage,”²⁰ or rewrites the story entirely: Yeshu hid a parchment with the Ineffable Name under the trees in his garden. One of the sages saw this and dug the parchment out. After that, sages were able to hang Yeshu on a regular tree.²¹ At the same time, these eighteenth-century manuscripts still resonate of the explanatory tactics derived from the *Ketubbot* passage: one of the sages *had inherited* a garden with a “cabbage” palm-tree together with a detailed instruction in regards of who should be hanged on it, and why.²² It is clear, that the editors of the *Toledot* were literally wrestling with the tradition of hanging Yeshu on a cabbage.

Similarly, modern scholars approach this botanico-philological enigma with only two options: one, to explain the *importance* of cabbage in the *Toledot* by another textual parallel, and another, to deny the importance, because of a scribal mistake or sheer mockery that supposedly stood behind the first mention of a cabbage as Yeshu’s gallows. The suggestion of Schonfield that *keruv* (with the *kav*) was a misspelling of *haruv* (carob; with the *het*) did not find support among scholars, for the simple reason that there is no *kharuv* elsewhere in the texts, except for one nineteenth-century manuscript from Yemen (see above).²³ The position of folklorists, who believe that the *Toledot Yeshu* chose the cabbage as the most ridiculous plant for the most effective scorn, is better warranted. In the *Targum Sheni*, when Haman was sentenced to death, all trees except of the cedar declined being his gallows.²⁴ As well the story of *Jack and the Bean-Stalk*, with all its possible prototypes, and the Baldur myth come to mind.²⁵ These findings

¹⁹ E.g. Ms. Letchworth Sassoon 793: *ve-kelum gazar 'aleyhem huts mi-'eylan haruv she-lo' 'alah 'al dde'ato laqkhohu ve-talu 'oto 'ad ha-'erev.*

²⁰ Ms. London Brit. Lib. Or. 10457: *u-be-'oto gan hayah 'ets 'ekhad shel keruv she-lo' hayah ets 'amyty nivra' mi-'ets ttamar (or: ttomer).*

²¹ Ms. London Brit. Lib. Or. 3660.

²² Ms. Rostock Orient. 38.

²³ Hugh Joseph Schonfield, *According to the Hebrews: A New Translation of the Jewish life of Jesus (the Toldoth Jeshu) with an Inquiry into the Nature of its Sources and Special Relationship to the Lost Gospel According to the Hebrews* (London: Duckworth, 1937), 221–24. Similarly rejected is a position of Louis Ginzberg, who himself misread *berosh* (cypress) for *keruv*, see “Ma’aseh Yeshu,” in *Genizah Studies in Memory of Doctor Solomon Schechter (Ginze Schechter)* (ed. Louis Ginzberg; 3 vols.; New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1928 [in Hebrew]), 1:324–38.

²⁴ *Targum Sheni* to Esther 7:9 (10).

²⁵ The mother of Baldur, adjuring various plants that may harm his son, overlooked the mistletoe, of which an arrow was made that killed Baldur. James George Frazer, *Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (3 vols., London: Macmillan and Co., 1900), 3:236–50.

of Heller, however, called up a storm of criticism on the part of Krauss, who accused him of picking curiosities regardless of context.²⁶ Indeed, the context is important, unless a folklorist does not mind blending the *Toledot Yeshu* with Nordic tales.

A hypothesis of Newman stands out as the only attempt to treat the *cabbage stalk* as a pointer to a certain cultural phenomenon, however peculiar it may seem. According to Newman, the legend of Adonis' death stands at the basis of the "cabbage-motif" in the *Toledot*: a wild boar had pursued and killed Adonis; after that, Aphrodite buried her lover in a garden of lettuces.²⁷ Finally, Newman concludes that in the *Toledot*, the cabbage stalk appears to point the finger at pagan ideas so amiably appropriated by the Christian tradition. Regardless of whether I do or do not support this conclusion, I would like to emphasize a couple of important details in Newman's argumentation: first, it was the Christian tradition, albeit derived from pagan, that introduced the "cabbage-motif": in addition to John 19:41, there is *Acta Pilati IX 5* (5th c. CE), both talking about a garden (hence Gethsemane) as the place of the crucifixion; and more specifically, there is the Coptic *Book of the Resurrection of Christ by Bartholomew the Apostle* (5th-7th centuries), where a gardener, Philogenes, takes the body of Jesus away from a garden of vegetables, although with noble intentions, to embalm it. Second, most scholarly discussions regarding the *cabbage stalk*, for some reason, overlook the earliest and most important evidence for this tradition: in the Aramaic versions of the *Toledot Yeshu*, the *cabbage* clearly conceals its own, original and unexplained importance, while the tree-conjuration stories come from a later embellishment that rather distract the researcher's attention than help revealing the meaning of a cabbage stalk as Yeshu's gallows. The same holds true for all of the earliest references to the story crystallized in the *Toledot*: "This is He," Tertullian writes, "whom His disciples secretly stole away, that it might be said He had risen again, or the gardener abstracted, that his lettuces might come to no harm from the crowds of visitants."²⁸ Finally, Arnulo repeats this passage, with a particular reference to the *Toledot Yeshu*:

²⁶ See Bernhard Heller, "Über Judas Ischariotes in der jüdischen Legende," *MGWJ* 76 (1932): 33–42, and idem, "Über das Alter der jüdischen Judas-Sage und des Toldot Jeschu," *MGWJ* 77 (1933): 198–210 (esp. 201–4), and Samuel Krauss, "Neuere Ansichten über 'Toldoth Jeschu,'" *MGWJ* 76 (1932): 586–603. Krauss, in his turn, assumes that the authors of the *Toledot* refer to a cherub (*kheruv*) or seraphim that can elevate a worthy person to heaven – showing, at the same time, how different was the *kheruv* that "elevated" Yeshu.

²⁷ See Hillel I. Newman, "The Death of Jesus in the 'Toledot Yeshu' literature," *JTS* 50 (1999): 59–79 (esp. 75–79), where he lists numerous references to this story as well as supportive evidence to the fact that the legend of Adonis was well known among both Jews and Christians, and that the similarity between Jesus and Adonis was obvious in the eyes of pagans.

²⁸ Tertullian, *Spect.* 30.6: *hic est, quem clam discentes subriperunt, ut surrexisse dicatur, vel hortulanus detraxit, ne lactucae suae frequentia commeantium adlaederentur.*

... and their teacher Joshua cried out and ordered that he be quickly taken down from the tree, and he was cast into a grave in a garden full of cabbages, lest their land be contaminated ...²⁹

While Newman was looking for mythological implications of the cabbage, I am going to approach the question from a different perspective, namely, by looking more closely at the cabbage plant. There is, perhaps, a simple explanation for why this direction of inquiry has been heretofore ignored: our common perception of cabbage does not usually go beyond our own dietary habits, familiar, as we are, with only a leafy globe chopped on our plates for soups or salads. Not many of us can answer a simple question of what the notorious cabbage stalk actually looks like, or, if it has flowers, what they look like. The most basic observations about such facts may, however, show our negligence of these questions to be quite ill-advised.

Thus, the cabbage is a biennial plant, meaning that it takes two years to complete its biological lifecycle. The garden cabbage must be harvested during the first year, but the wild cabbage shows what can be expected in the second year of its life – shortly before it begins to die, it shoots out a stem, unusually high for a weed or vegetable, and sometimes reaches ten feet high. In fact, because of this enormous stem, the cabbage was already by the fourth-century BCE considered to be a “tree-herb”:

For of under-shrubs and those of the pot-herb class some have the character of a tree, such as cabbage and rue; wherefore some call these tree-herbs.³⁰

The modern botanist, speaking about cabbage, lettuce, cauliflower, broccoli, and turnip, refers to them as “cruciferous vegetables” or “crucifers,” clearly without any religious connotation.³¹ The yellow, cross-shaped flowers covering the tall, tree-like stem of the cabbage plant can be accounted the origin of the name “crucifer.” Botanists, certainly, are not the only ones who might make such associations, a fact that, itself, could make a decent conclusion to the present inquiry. Yet there is more than this, and the cabbage appears in the *Toledot Yeshu* not only because of its tall stem and cross-shaped flowers.

The next lead can also be found in Theophrastus’ *Enquiry*. He knew three kinds of cabbage: one with a smooth leaf (οὐλοφύλος), another with curly leaf (λειοφύλος), and ῥάφανος ἀγρία – literally, the field cabbage, identified as *wild*

²⁹ Amulo of Lyon, *Liber contra judaeos ad Carolum regem*, ch. 25 (PL 116): (*et conclamante, ac jubente magistro eorum Josue, celeriter de ligno depositum; et in quodam horto caulibus plena, in sepulcro projectum, ne terra eorum contaminaretur ...* On this source also see the article of Peter Schäfer in this volume.

³⁰ Theophrastus, *Hist. Plant.* 1.3.4: τῶν τε γὰρ φρυγανωδῶν καὶ λαχανωδῶν ἔνια μονοστελεχη καὶ οἷον δένδρου φύσιν ἔχοντα γίνεται, καθάπερ ῥάφανος πηγανον, ὅθεν καὶ καλοῦσιν τινες τὰ τοιαῦτα δενδρολάχανα.

³¹ See, e. g., Daniel Zohary and Maria Hopf, *Domestication of Plants in the Old World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 199.

cabbage or wild mustard; surprisingly, both of these names refer to one and the same plant, today known as *Brassica oleracea*, a kind of weed for modern botanists, but a quasi-tree in antiquity.³² To be more specific, modern botanists argue that the wild *Brassica oleracea*, including wild cabbage and wild (white) mustard, have a common ancestor with *Sinapis arvensis*, wild black mustard; while the first of two species has evolved into the cultivated cabbage and turnip (*Brassica rapa*), the second has become the cultivated mustard (*Brassica nigra*).³³ *Brassica oleracea* and *Sinapis arvensis* are hardly distinguishable, especially for an untrained eye of a philologist, being the reason of a persistent inconsistency in commentaries to Theophrastus, where ῥάφανος ἀργία is sometimes identified as wild cabbage and sometimes as wild mustard. This inexactness is all the more vindicated by the fact that the specific word for *black mustard* – σίναπι – is late.³⁴ In Greek literature, its earliest occurrence is in Matthew 13:31, while Latin authors, who themselves knew many species of *Brassica*, borrow the word instead of translating it.³⁵

The famous parable from Matthew 13:31–32 is certainly the climax of my argument:

The kingdom of heaven is like a *mustard seed* (κόκκῳ σινάπεως) that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest garden plant and becomes a *tree* (μεῖζον τῶν λαχάνων ἐστὶν καὶ γίνεταί δένδρον), so that the wild birds come and nest in its branches.

Since, provided the common acquaintance with this gospel, no one would be surprised by an occurrence of mustard in Christian or anti-Christian literature, its twin-sister cabbage plant should not surprise us either. It is impossible to tell exactly how these two branches of one tradition developed. Were there two variants of the parable, both referring to the same plant but with different words? Did they actually mean two different plants – wild cabbage and wild (be it black or white) mustard – which were so similar that one finally supplanted the other? Were cross-shaped flowers ever important for the authors and listeners of the parable (provided that the cross became a manifest symbol of Christianity only in the fourth century)? Although these questions remain without answers, our hypothesis is not undermined: wild cabbage and wild mustard are almost

³² Theophrastus, *Historia Plantarum* 7.4.4; see also Don R. Brothwell and Patricia Brothwell, *Food in Antiquity: A Survey of the Diet of Early Peoples* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 117–118.

³³ K. M. Song et al., “Brassica Taxonomy Based on Nuclear Restriction Fragment Length Polymorphisms,” *Theoretical and Applied Genetics* 75 (1988): 784–94; Geoffrey R. Dixon, *Vegetable Brassicas and Related Crucifers* (Reading: Columns Design Ltd., 2007), 4–8.

³⁴ There is an opinion, however, that both σίναπι (first century CE and later) and νάπι (before the first century CE), refer to *Brassica alba* (white mustard; see *LSJ*) – a direct offspring of *Brassica oleracea*.

³⁵ Pliny (*Nat.*) mentions five, and Ps.-Dioscorides (*De herbis femininis*, and *Curae herbarum*) twelve subtypes of cabbage (*Brassica*).

indistinguishable subtypes of one floral kind; in oral transmission of Matthew's parable, both of them might appear to signify the triumph of Christianity, while, in a satire of this parable, both of them could be effectively used to signify its ultimate failure. It is only, therefore, the luck of the draw that *Brassica oleracea* sprang up as a mustard tree in Matthew and as a cabbage tree in the *Toledot Yeshu*.

An occurrence of the cabbage-tradition in a Christian source, beside anti-Judean attacks of Tertullian and Amulo, may support my argumentation. It is not until the late Middle Ages, however, that we witness such an occurrence – a remarkable story of “the cabbage-stalk of Eppendorf.” In this legend, one female gardener had planted a consecrated bread of Eucharist in her cabbage garden in the hope that her cabbages would grow better, but, instead, a cabbage stalk resembling the crucified Jesus grew up in the place where she had planted his “body.” This cabbage stalk was revered by the Cistercian nuns of Harvestehude during the fifteenth century and was subsequently acquired by the Emperor Rudolph the Second for the Imperial *Schatzkammer*.³⁶ Such an amazing mirror reflection of the Tertullian's lettuces could hardly travel from its source to the Cistercians via the *Toledot Yeshu*, and must, therefore, testify to the existence of a Christian tradition (in addition to the Jewish satire) associating Jesus with a cabbage stalk.

Having Yeshu executed, the *Toledot* soon grants us the next oddity. According to Jewish law, a corpse may not remain on a tree overnight. Therefore, the sages decide to bury Yeshu in ... a water trench. This is “generally speaking,” because places of Yeshu's burial vary in different versions of the text.

The Water

According to Agobard's version, Yeshu was buried next to an *aqueduct*. On the following night the aqueduct was flooded, Yeshu's body disappeared, and was never found. In an approximately contemporaneous version of the Geniza manuscripts, the place of burial is indicated as *rahata' de-mayya'* (Cambridge Univ. Lib. T-S Misc 35.87), *bet shaqeyya' de-mayya'* (New York JTS 2529.1), and *barezya'* (New York JTS 2529.1³⁷ and 2). These terms are not as unambiguous as *aqueduct*, but ultimately can hardly mean anything else but a *water conduit* or a *reservoir*. In both the aforementioned versions, Pilate commanded the Jews to find Yeshu's body, and, while they failed in Agobard, R. Judah of the Geniza

³⁶ Otto Beneke, *Hamburgische Geschichten und Sagen* (Hamburg: Perthes-Besser & Mauke, 1854), 153–56; Eduard Krohse, “Der Verbleib der wunderbaren Kohlwurzel aus Eppendorf,” *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Hamburgische Geschichte* 10 (1908): 58–60; Silke Urbanski, *Geschichte des Klosters Harvestehude 'In valle virginum'* (Hamburg: Universität Hamburg, 2001).

³⁷ This one reads *barevy'a'*.

version proved able to demonstrate Yeshu to Pilate (since it was he who removed the body). After that, Judah reburied the corpse in the same water installation, *arguably despite* the strict order of Pilate to bury Yeshu in a proper place, that is, a cemetery. This persistent disobedience to the order of Pilate is all the more strange because of the dubious importance of the act of disobedience. Was it really so significant to put Yeshu's body in water instead of earth, such that Judah was willing to risk his life for it?

As in the case with the *cabbage stalk*, the authors of the *Toledot Yeshu* were struggling to explain the situation, which in the later versions involves the aqueduct of Agobard, the garden of Amulo, the water trench/reservoir of the Geniza, and even a sewer. Ms. Strasbourg BnU 3974, and the entire Wagenseil group³⁸ tell that Yeshu was initially buried at the place where he was stoned, but R. Judah reburied him in his garden under an aqueduct, dissembling it first, and then restoring it on the top of Yeshu's body. Mss. Amsterdam Hs. Ros. 414, New York JTS 2221, and all Yemenite manuscripts³⁹ have this differently: Yeshu was buried *near* the Pool (or river) of Siloam; after that, either Judah or an anonymous gardener stole his body to stuff a hole in his garden fence. Another explanatory version is presented by Huldreich:⁴⁰ Judah himself took down the body of Yeshu from the tree and threw it into a sewer in order to fulfill the prediction of sages sentencing Yeshu to boil in excrement in hell (*b. Gittin* 56b–57a). The arguably latest editions of the *Toledot* present thoroughly sanitized versions of Yeshu's burial: in Ms. Philadelphia University Lib. 361 ("Slavic" version), Judah buries Yeshu in his garden *under* a water-pipe that just happens to be there, while the Italian manuscripts simply get rid of the "aqueduct-burial" as they have got of the "cabbage-stalk-crucifixion" – Judah steals the corpse and buries it in his garden, in the family burial chamber!⁴¹

It is remarkable that some protestant scholars, Baldensperger and then Kennard, trying to reconstruct the historical burial of Jesus on the basis of the gospels, present the same picture that appears in the reductionist Italian version.⁴² Kennard's analysis starts from the statement that "the empty tomb may point rather to a removal of the body from the place where the women had seen it laid and to its burial elsewhere." Then, Kennard argues that the events of Jesus' death and burial can be restored in the following order: since 12:30 pm is the deadline

³⁸ E. g., Mss. Cambridge Harvard Houghton Lib. 57, Jerusalem Shoken 04088, Leipzig BH 17 35–51.

³⁹ E. g., Mss. Cambridge Univ. Lib. T-S Or. 455, New York JTS 2343, Princeton Firestone Lib. 19.

⁴⁰ E. g., Mss. Amsterdam Hs. Ros. 442, Frankfurt Hebr. 8 249, Princeton Firestone Lib. 24.

⁴¹ E. g., Rostock Orient. 38: *ve-hevy'a 'et pelony miqevero ve-qavar 'ota be-gano be-qever yhudah ha-ganan.*

⁴² Guillaume Baldensperger, *Le tombeau vide: la légende et l'histoire* (Paris: F Alcan, 1935); Joseph Spencer Kennard, "The Burial of Jesus," *JBL* 74 (1955): 227–38.

for a Passover-offering,⁴³ Jesus must have been taken from the cross no later than 1:00 pm, and these were the soldiers who “took him from the tree, and laid him in a tomb” (Acts 13:29). When “evening had come,” Joseph of Arimathea, “a respected member of the council” (Mark 15:43), “took courage” (Mark 15:42) to come to Pilate and ask him for the body of Jesus. Authorized by Pilate, Joseph “took away”⁴⁴ the body and placed it in his own sepulcher.

In addition to this speculation on account of the two-fold burial, there is a far more certain attestation to the ancient tradition of Jesus burial in a water reservoir: “But they blaspheme more (saying that) he was cast in a well,” wrote Commodian (Gaza, 3rd c. CE [?]) in reference to an opinion of his contemporaries.⁴⁵ Thus, the picture presented in the *Toledot Yeshu* may eventually lead to an antique source of any kind, which we must try to reveal. This means that in addition to considering a figurative meaning of a burial in a water reservoir, it might be useful to consider actual water conduits and cemeteries in first-century Jerusalem.⁴⁶

In that time, two aqueducts brought water to the city. The high-level aqueduct, which conveyed the water from the Pool of Siloam, was built by the Hasmoneans and improved by Herod,⁴⁷ and the lower, as Josephus reports, was built by Pilate, who used the temple’s money for its construction:

At another time he (Pilate) used the sacred treasure of the temple, called *korban*, to pay for bringing water into Jerusalem by an aqueduct from a distance of four hundred *stadia* (*B. J.* 2.175–77).

Even more sacrilegious than usurping the temple’s fund, however, was the route of this aqueduct for it cut its way through a cemetery that was evidently in use in that period, and even went directly through one of the family tombs which, of course, ceased to be used at that moment.⁴⁸ It was the fact of building the water conduit through the unclean grounds that led to a legal reform, starting from a regulation that forbids building an aqueduct at a cemetery:

⁴³ “Six hours and a half” (*Pesahim* 5.1).

⁴⁴ ἤρσεν instead of κατέθηκεν (*take down*): John 19:38; Mark 15:46.

⁴⁵ Commodian, *Carmen apologeticum* 440: *Sed magis infamant: In puteum misimus illum.*

⁴⁶ Newman, “The Death of Jesus,” 74, summarizes the hypotheses concerning Yeshu’s burial in a “water channel”: Erich Bischoff connects it to a local Jerusalem tradition locating the grave of Jesus in the vicinity of the Siloam springs (ap. Samuel Krauss, 1902. *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* [Berlin: S. Calvary, 1902; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1977]), 30. Schlichting considers the abyssal waters beneath the temple (Günther Schlichting, *Ein jüdisches Leben Jesu* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1982), 218, and Krappe compares Yeshu’s burial to the burial of Alaric in a river bed (Alexander Haggerty Krappe, “Les funeraillles d’Alaric,” *Annuaire de l’institut de philologie et l’histoire orientales et slaves* 7 [1939–44]: 234).

⁴⁷ Ehud Netzer, *The Architecture of Herod, the Great Builder* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 136.

⁴⁸ Joseph Patrich, “A Sadducean Halakha and the Jerusalem Aqueduct,” *The Jerusalem Cathedral* 2 (1982): 25–39. See also David Amit, et al., *The Aqueducts of Israel* (Portsmouth, R. I.: Journal of Roman Archaeology; Supplement series 46, 2002).

People do not conduct an aqueduct out from the graves, and one shall not make there a way. (*Ebel Rabbati* 14)

Then to the controversy:

The Sadducees say, "We protest against you, Pharisees, for you declare clean the *nyzoq*." The Pharisees say, "We protect against you, Sadducees, for you declare clean the aqueduct that comes from among the graves." (*Yadayim* 4.7)

And eventually to a new law ruling that water attached to the ground is not subject to contamination:

R. Nehemia said: why is it said that the purity did not depart? Since water in [that vessel] is not subject to contamination until it is detached from its source, the purity prevails over defilement. (*t. Miqva'ot* 1.1)

In any case, the building of the Jerusalem aqueduct through the cemetery was a remarkable event to be noticed and remembered. In fact, inhabitants of Jerusalem enjoyed the use of this aqueduct until the 16th century, contemplating the close neighborhood of tombs and the water conduit. Isn't it the most natural explanation of why Yeshu's body was buried near an aqueduct, or even in an aqueduct, and why Judah, being required to rebury Yeshu in a proper cemetery, brought him back to the aqueduct's surroundings? For indeed, it was a proper cemetery.

In summary, "deciphering" the *Toledot's* "nonsense" may have a two-fold significance: on the one hand, it demonstrates that the *Toledot Yeshu* does contain ancient traditions, which present interest for researchers of both Roman Christianity and Judaism, and, on the other, it shows that, by the time that these traditions were crystallized and coalesced into a literary form, their readers were unable to digest them. It was this inability that started a chain of interpretative additions to the story that appear so simple and coherent in the Agobard's *Supersitiones*, and so complex and repetitive in the *Tam u-Muad*.

Despite its importance, a study of details in the *Toledot Yeshu* must be limited to non-strictly-textual details. In other words, since the exact correspondence of the text in different *Toledot* manuscripts is rather an exception than a rule, it does not make sense to discuss, for example, whether Yeshu was buried *in*, *under*, or *beside* some water installation, and whether this *water installation* was designated with a proper name meaning specifically an aqueduct, an irrigation equipment, a water-pipe, or a channel. The manuscripts contain all of these, and only the forthcoming comprehensive study of all the available manuscripts shall be able to guide our preference.⁴⁹

It must also be noted that the inevitably speculative argumentation, involved in a study of *one specific detail*, cannot help to date the composition and to re-

⁴⁹ This edition is currently in preparation, see <http://www.princeton.edu/~judaic/toledotyeshu.html>

veal the origin of its traditions. There will always remain a place for a different approach and interpretation. A number of details, however, can be organized like *tessarae* in a mosaic, provided that only matching *tessarae* can display a comprehensible picture, while mismatches must be adjusted. It is likely that there were antique traditions connecting the death and burial of Jesus with the Jerusalem aqueduct-cemetery and with the mustard-cabbage tree; yet the *Toledot* as a complete narrative seems to adapt these traditions in a later period, when the cross-shaped flowers became symbolic, the *furca* supplanted the *crux*, while the Jerusalem aqueduct was still functional.

Judas Iscariot: Revealer of the Hidden Truth*

Ora Limor and Israel Jacob Yuval

Tristram Shandy, in Laurence Sterne's famous novel by that name, dwells upon the reasons of his father, Walter Shandy, in giving him his name. First, he elaborates on his father's theory of names: "His opinion, in this matter, was, That there was a strange kind of magic bias, which good or bad names, as he called them, irresistibly impressed upon our characters and conduct."¹ To sustain this argument he brings as an example the name Judas:

Your son! – your dear son, – from whose sweet and open temper you have so much to expect. – Your BILLY, Sir! – would you, for the world, have called him JUDAS? (...) – Would you, Sir, if a Jew of a godfather had proposed the name for your child, and offered you his purse along with it, would you have consented to such a desecration of him? (...) – If I know your temper right, Sir, – you are incapable of it; – you would have trampled upon the offer; – you would have thrown the temptation at the tempter's head with abhorrence. Your greatness of mind in this action, which I admire, with that generous contempt of money, which you shew me in the whole transaction, is really noble; – and what renders it more so, is the principle of it; – the workings of a parent's love upon the truth and conviction of this very hypothesis, namely, That was your son called Judas – the sordid and treacherous idea, so inseparable from the name, would have accompanied him through life like his shadow, and, in the end, made a miser and a rascal of him, in spite, Sir, of your example.²

A somewhat similar claim was put forward lately, though for different reasons, by the noted Israeli author, Abraham B. Yehoshua. In an article published in the newspaper *Ha'aretz*, Yehoshua issued a call to forego the description of Israel as "the Jewish state." In his opinion, the name "Israel" is the proper name of the country and of the people who reside in it. According to Yehoshua, since the time of the Bible and throughout the age of the Exile, the word "Jew" has carried a negative connotation, because it evokes "the memory of Judas Iscariot."³

* A shorter Hebrew version of the last part of this article (the figure of Judas in the Golden Legend) was published by us in 2005: "Oedipus in Christian Garb: The Legend of Judah Iscariot in the Golden Legend," *Zmanim* 91 (2005): 12–21.

¹ Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (ed. Graham Petrie; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 77.

² Sterne, *ibid.*, 78.

³ *Ha'aretz*, 10 June 2009.

Yehoshua's claim is a striking example of how images travel from one camp to the other. Astonishingly, in his statement, Yehoshua internalizes the Christian position, whose origins are to be found in the New Testament, according to which Judah, the name of Judas Iscariot, arouses associations with the Jew, a traitor, with one who greedily pursues wealth, with Satan.

Judas' figure does, indeed, loom large in Christian imagination, and, in view of its implications, there is little wonder that it reverberated in Jewish culture as well.⁴ In what follows, we shall examine the image of Judas Iscariot in three literary works, one Jewish and two Christian. *Sefer Toledot Yeshu* will be at the center of our discussion; to this we shall add the *Legend of the Finding of the True Cross* and the "apocryphal" biography of Judas in the Golden Legend. Our claim is that, despite the dispute between Jews and Christians regarding the ethical qualities of Judas, a broad agreement exists regarding many facets of his personality, behavior, and his central role in the story of Jesus. This agreement is based upon an evidently unchallenged axiom, according to which the man Judas represents the Jewish people, and his behavior represents the Jewish attitude to Christians and to their savior. As in the New Testament, so too in these texts, Judas is presented as a subversive figure, who acts clandestinely in order to destroy Christianity and to save Judaism or, on the contrary, to destroy Judaism and to save Christianity – all depending upon the identity of the text.

Who is Judas Iscariot in Christian eyes? If every great drama revolves around the titanic struggle between good and evil, then in the Christian drama Judas plays the role of evil – and not just mundane evil, but the worst possible evil, diametrically opposed to Jesus, who represents the absolute good. Judas' evil is, indeed, great. As one of the twelve disciples, he was among those who were particularly close to Jesus, but he betrayed Jesus for the sake of a handful of coins, turning him over to the Jews who were pursuing him, then tortured him and precipitated his crucifixion by the Romans. Judas thus represents the Jews, as indicated by his name. According to the Christian tradition, Qeriyot (from which derives the name, "Iscariot," *Ish-Qeriyot*, "the man from Qeriyot") is the city in Judaea mentioned in Jehoshua 15:24. If so, Judas was the only one among Jesus' disciples to come from Judaea rather than from the Galilee. The Galilee was the cradle of the faithful, while Judaea was home to the Jews and traitors.⁵

⁴ For a recent survey on Judas Iscariot's role in the Christian anti-Jewish imagination see: Jeremy Cohen, *Christ Killers: The Jews and the Passion from the Bible to the Big Screen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 255–61. Interest in Judas figure increased lately, following the publicized discovery of the Gospel of Judas. See inter alia, Bart D. Ehrman, *The Lost Gospel of Judas Iscariot: A New Look at Betrayer and Betrayed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Nevertheless, it seems that this text that raised much interest in academic circles, is not destined to change the long accepted, traditional image of Judas as the arch-traitor of Christian culture.

⁵ Hieronymus, *In Matheum* 10.4 (CCSL 77; eds. D. Hurst and M. Adriaen; Turnhout: Brepols, 1969), 64.

Another theory explains that the name Iscariot implies that Judas was a member of the Sicarii.⁶ This theory, however, is problematic chronologically.

Judas' great sin was his betrayal of Jesus. The lowest level in Dante's *Inferno* is named Iudecca, after Judas Iscariot, in which all those who betrayed their masters are punished. Lucifer, the archetype of all betrayers, who is placed in the center of this level, is also punished there. All the rivers of guilt flow towards him. Lucifer has three mouths, in each one of which an arch-traitor is ground in his teeth: Judas Iscariot, Brutus, and Cassius. Judas is stuck in the central mouth, as the worst of these three traitors; indeed, he is the worst of all the sinners in Hell.⁷

The Christian Gospels do not elaborate upon the story of Judas. The information about him is spread among several different books, and the details are not always consistent with one another. Nevertheless it is possible to put them together from the following story: Judas was one of the twelve disciples, whom Jesus appointed as a kind of treasurer, who held the collective money-purse (in Christian art the purse is one of his known attributes). This task enabled Judas to deceive the others and steal from them, and even act in a miserly manner in using the money to serve Jesus. In the final analysis, as he betrayed trust regarding money so he betrayed trust in general. Tempted by Satan, Judas committed the greatest sin of all – he betrayed his master. He turned to the high priest, offered to turn Jesus over to him, and in return received thirty coins. That evening, Judas participated in the Last Supper together with the other disciples, and Jesus, who knew what was going to happen, gave Judas bread dipped in wine, saying that the one who would receive the bread would betray him, even asking that he hasten the deed. Judas left the table to meet the priests, while Jesus went with his disciples to Gethsemane, where he prayed. His disciples fell asleep. Soon Judas returned with the entourage of the high priest and kissed Jesus, thereby identifying him and turning him in. Jesus was arrested, tried, tortured and executed. After Judas saw that Jesus had been convicted, he regretted his betrayal, threw the money down in the Temple, and hung himself. With the money the priests bought a field for burying strangers, which they called “the field of blood” (Aramaic: *hakel dama*). According to the account in Acts (1:15–26), it was Judas who bought the field with the money he received for the betrayal and then, “falling headlong, he burst open in the middle, and all his bowels gushed out.” After Judas' death, Matthias was chosen in his place and joined the disciples.

⁶ Robert Eisenman, *James. The Brother of Jesus* (New York: Penguin, 1998), 516, 811–16.

⁷ Dante, *Inferno*, 39. See Sylvia Tomasch, “Judecca, Dante's Satan and the dis-placed Jew,” in *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages* (eds. Sylvia Tomasch and Sealy Gilles; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 247–67.

Sefer Toledot Yeshu

In *Sefer Toledot Yeshu*, Judas Iscariot plays a far more central role than he does in the New Testament. This Jewish text reworks the facts related in the New Testament: its dispute is not about the facts, but rather about their interpretation. Our reading of the work is based upon two theoretical approaches. The first is a historical approach, based in large part on Amos Funkenstein's famous definition of the genre of "counter-history."⁸ *Toledot Yeshu* clearly belongs to this genre; indeed, Funkenstein himself used it as an example to characterize the genre. The second is a literary approach, building on the work of Frank Kermode, who sees the various versions of the Gospels as a midrashic attempt to reinterpret the tradition that stands before them – and this, not by interpretation of the text, but by the addition of various elements to the plot that create a different story.⁹ Following this approach, we consider *Toledot Yeshu* also a midrash and as such as an open-ended text that has different versions and is subject to various additions and deletions. Similar to the New Testament itself, *Toledot Yeshu* is a text of an exegetical nature but, unlike the Gospels, where alongside the story of Jesus' life we find parables, sermons, ethical aphorisms and prophecies, *Toledot Yeshu* expresses its viewpoint by means of narrative alone, using various devices such as thickening of the plot, additions, and changes according to the creative imagination of the various narrators.

Like the Gospels, *Toledot Yeshu* weaves within its plot verses from the Bible which serve as "testimonies" (*testimonia*). Their function is to refute the New Testament claim that the Old Testament had already anticipated the biography of Jesus. *Toledot Yeshu* makes satiric use of these selfsame verses, exposing the distorted use made by the Gospels.

Kermode takes note of the fact that Judas Iscariot is the figure who moves the Passion story forward in the New Testament.¹⁰ Judas is "a case of a character being possessed by his narrative role." The story is moved forward by his betrayal of Jesus; indeed, Judas becomes the very embodiment of treachery.¹¹ The act of betrayal thus acquires a human image, whose life and actions have a narrative of their own. Unlike the New Testament, which creates a story out of an abstract idea, in *Toledot Yeshu* the story already exists, and the function of the narrator is to change its course and meaning and to turn it upside down.

In addition to the New Testament, *Sefer Toledot Yeshu*, in its various versions, engages in dialogue with earlier versions of Jewish legends and stories about

⁸ Amos Funkenstein, "History, Counterhistory and Narrative," *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 32–49.

⁹ Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 75–99.

¹⁰ Kermode, *ibid.*, 84.

¹¹ Kermode, *ibid.*, 94.

Jesus found in the Talmud, and makes use of them. We assume that each of the extant versions of *Toledot Yeshu* confronts and interprets Christian and Jewish texts, by making additions to the plot, reorganizing the narrative, and inserting new emphases, and so on.

As noted, the place attributed to Judas in *Toledot Yeshu* is far greater than the one he is given in the Gospels, at least in terms of the number of words and verses. Unlike the villain that emerges towards the end of the New Testament drama in order to advance the story of the Crucifixion, in *Toledot Yeshu* he appears on the stage earlier in the narrative and disappears later (at least in some of the versions). Moreover, in *Toledot Yeshu*, Judas is the only active figure from the Jewish side among those participating. He alone saves the Jews with his own powers.¹²

Judas “stars” in three central scenes in *Toledot Yeshu*. In the first, he reveals the fact that Jesus is a deceiver who performs miracles by means of deceit, by his having stolen the Shem Hameforash – the holy name of God. No inverted mirror image of this scene appears in the New Testament. It copes with the miracles that Jesus performed, by whose means he acquired his followers. The background to this section comes from the law of the false prophet in Deuteronomy 13, which warns against believing in false prophets who perform miracles. With the Sages’ consent, Judas decides to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and to imitate his dastardly acts. He enters the Holy of Holies, and he too steals the Shem Hameforash. A competition ensues between the two figures, in which each of them uses the Shem Hameforash to fly in the air, while attempting to make the other fall to the ground.¹³ Judas contaminates Jesus by urinating or ejaculating semen on him – the various versions differ on this point – causing Jesus to fall to the ground.¹⁴ This scene, with its homosexual overtones, may contain echoes of Judas’ kiss in the New Testament.¹⁵ Judas thereby removes the mask from Jesus’ face, and heroically destroys his claim to be the Son of God. Judas’ acts are justified by means of the verses in Deuteronomy 13:7–12: “If your brother, the son of your

¹² Bernhard Dieckmann, *Judas als Sündenbock: Eine verhängnisvolle Geschichte von Angst und Vergeltung* (München: Kösel, 1991), 126.

¹³ This scene has its roots in the Christian Apocrypha, in stories such as Simon magus’ flying in the air. See Acta Petri (Acts of Peter) in *New Testament Apocrypha*. Edited by Wilhelm Schneemelcher, et al. (London: Lutterworth, 1963, 1965. 2nd edition: Cambridge: James Clarke; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991, 1992), 290.

¹⁴ This scene goes hand in hand with Christian descriptions of Jews transgression of normative codes of physical conduct, especially through spitting. According to Anthony Bale, “the spitting Jew may have an intertext in late medieval images of the ‘judas kiss’; Judas’s kissing was certainly discussed in terms of defilement of Christ’s body ...”: Anthony Bale, *The Jew in the Medieval Book: English Antisemitisms, 1350–1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 152. Susan Gubar elaborates on oral and anal motives in Judas image, describing him as “leaky Judas.” Susan Gubar, *Judas: A Biography* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009), ch. 3 (esp. pp. 107–10).

¹⁵ On the homosexual motive see Gubar, *ibid.*, 158–210.

mother ... entices you secretly, saying: Let us go and serve other gods ... you shall surely kill him." Jesus is thus exposed by Judas as an impostor and a false prophet. He is also described as "the son of your mother," following the words of Deuteronomy concerning the false prophet; this reference also relates, of course, to Jesus' depiction as a son without a father.

The second scene is that of Jesus' betrayal by Judas. Whereas, according to the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus came to Jerusalem only once, on which occasion he was crucified, according to the Gospel of John he had visited there in the past, and even aroused the hatred of the Sanhedrin, who sought to kill him (John 5:16–18). According to this version, Jesus' return to the Galilee was essentially a flight from Jerusalem. This being the case, why did the Sanhedrin need Judas in order to identify Jesus? Wasn't he already known to them? The Gospel according to John gives no answer to this question, but in some versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, an explanation is offered. According to the Wagenseil version, after Judas exposed Jesus' deceit and Jesus is condemned to death, Jesus goes to the Jordan River and purifies himself anew, thus recovering the magical powers that Judas had taken from him. Wagenseil's version continues in a consistent manner to the next stage. If urinating or ejaculating semen do not help, it becomes necessary to deprive Jesus of his magical powers by taking the Shem Hameforash away from him by force. Here, Judas again volunteers to act on behalf of the Sages and secretly, in the dark of night, while Jesus is sleeping, tears the Shem Hameforash from his flesh.

Jesus, left with none of his magical powers, understands that the hour has come and his destiny has been sealed. He therefore decides to return to Jerusalem, the city from which he had fled. This time, however, he and his disciples arrive in disguise. The motif of the disguise does not appear in the New Testament, and it should be seen as a dramatic device intended to explain why Judas and his act of betrayal were needed in order to identify Jesus. The Jewish version thus invents a secret visit of Jesus and his disciples to Jerusalem – perhaps in order to steal again the Shem Hameforash. Judas continues to act on behalf of the Sages and identifies Jesus again; that which is portrayed in the New Testament as treachery is shown here as a heroic mission.

The course of the story in *Toledot Yeshu* matches only the Gospel of John. According to the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 3, Mark 1, Luke 3), Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist at the beginning of his activity, even before he performed miracles. In contrast, according to John, Jesus had previously visited Jerusalem, aroused the wrath of the Jews (2:13–25), and only thereafter was he baptized in the Jordan (3:22). Moreover, as we noted, according to John, the Jews already sought to kill Jesus after his first visit in Judaea (John 5:16–18; 7:1), a sequence that *Sefer Toledot Yeshu* follows.

The third scene in which Judas plays a central role is the story of Jesus' burial in Judas' garden. Here, too, a number of versions follow the Gospel of John, as

only in that account is Jesus buried in a garden (19:41–42). In order to prevent Jesus' followers from stealing the body and claiming that he had risen from the dead, Judas conceals his body and buries it beneath a water conduit in his garden. The Jewish narrator thus admits that Jesus' grave was found empty, but has his own explanation as to how this came about. The discovery of Jesus' body in Judas' garden is intended to refute the claim of the Resurrection. Here, too, Judas both conceals and reveals.

From all that has been said thus far, it is clear that the main purpose of *Toledot Yeshu* in general, and of the portrayal of the character of Judas in particular is, as Funkenstein put it, to present a counter-narrative to the Christian story. But alongside this central design, there exist other, secondary aims that are expressed in several scenes behind which there is no original Christian story.

The Burial

According to one of the versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, Judas buried Jesus in his garden, in a cesspool. This is a fulfillment of the words of the Talmud, "One who mocks the words of the Sages is judged in boiling excrement."¹⁶ However, the Talmud speaks of a punishment imposed upon Jesus in the World to Come, whereas *Toledot Yeshu* speaks of his being shamed and insulted in this world. Judas is the one who actively fulfills the words of the Sages and does not wait for Heavenly punishment. Moreover, whereas the Talmud deals with Jesus and his punishment, *Toledot Yeshu* is concerned also with the actual place of burial. The site of Jesus' burial – the Holy Sepulcher – is the holiest place of Christianity, a site of adoration and pilgrimage. It is the Christian alternative to the Temple (in Jerusalem), and takes its place.¹⁷ *Sefer Toledot Yeshu* mocks the cult of the holy place by transforming the Holy Sepulcher into a latrine.¹⁸ In the Hebrew sources relating to the First Crusade, the redemption of the Holy Sepulcher is portrayed as the main goal of the Crusaders;¹⁹ this version of *Toledot Yeshu* may thus reflect a Jewish answer to the Crusader enterprise, and may help to explain the appearance of this motif of the cesspool in Christian tales of the High Middle Ages.

¹⁶ Johannes Jacobus Huldricus, *Historia Jeschuae Nazareni* (Leiden: J. du Vivie, 1705), 88; b. *Gittin* 57a.

¹⁷ Ora Limor, "Conversion of Space," in *Conversion: Practice and Perceptions* (eds. Miri Rubin and Ira Katzenelson; forthcoming).

¹⁸ Interestingly, Muslims ascribed to the Holy Sepulchre the name: Kanisat Al-Qumamah – Church of Dung (a play on the name Kanisat Al-qiyamah – Church of Resurrection).

¹⁹ Eva Haverkamp, ed., *Hebräische Berichte über die Judenverfolgungen während des ersten Kreuzzugs* (MGH, Hebräische Texte aus dem mittelalterlichen Deutschland, I; Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2005), 561.

Much has been written about the cesspool as a place to humiliate, disgrace and profane the most sacred assets of the other religion.²⁰ In Christian imagination, the Jews throw icons to the latrine; they stab Hosts (thus reconstructing the crucifixion) and leave it in the cesspool in order to disgrace it, and they kill Christian children, throwing their saintly bodies to the privy. An example of the connection between disbelief and filth is brought forth also in the Christian widespread exemplum about a Jew who fell into a latrine on Saturday “but would not permit himself to be extracted out of reverence for his Shabbath.” The Lord of the place “did not permit him to be extracted the following Sunday out of reverence for his Shabbath. And so the Jew dies.”²¹

The burial of Jesus in a cesspool in *Toledot Yeshu* should be analyzed in the framework of the Talmudic motif on the one hand and the medieval Christian libels and anti-Jewish exempla on the other. In a more direct way it could also be a Jewish reaction to the description of Judas’ loathsome death in acts: “and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle, and all his bowels gushed out.”²² As Anthony Bale writes, “the reciprocity of the narrative forces us to link Christian and Jew, speaking an identical language.”²³

The Curse

An example of the tendency to add narrative elements to create a new and richer story is found in the Huldreich version. This version was most probably created in a German-speaking environment, as Jesus is referred in the text as “Yesus” and it is related that the Jews of Worms advised the king not to kill Jesus. This anecdote coincides with a local tradition from Worms, according to which a Jewish community already existed there in the time of Jesus, so that the Jews of this city cannot be blamed for the Crucifixion. The medieval background likewise emerges from the Vienna version, whose origin seems to be Italian, as Judas is referred to as “Judas Scarioto.” In this version it is stated that all the sages of the Gentiles “curse and revile Judas Iscarioto, and when they have a quarrel or

²⁰ Israel J. Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 196–97; Christoph Cluse, “‘Fabula Ineptissima’ Die Ritualmordlegende um Adam von Bristol nach der Handschrift London, British Library, Harley 957,” *Aschkenaz* 5 (1995): 293–330; Bale, *The Jew in the Medieval Book*, 30–43.

²¹ See Anthony Bale’s illuminating analysis of “The Jew of Tewkesbury” exemplum: Bale, *ibid.*, 23–53.

²² Acts 1:18. See Gubar, *Judas*, 110–27; Annette Weber, “The Hanged Judas of Freiburg Cathedral: Sources and Interpretation,” in *Imagining the Self, Imagining the Other: Visual Representations and Jewish-Christian Dynamics in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period* (ed. Eva Projmovic, Leiden: Brill, 2002), 165–88.

²³ Bale, *The Jew in the Medieval Book*, 33.

rivalry with one another they say: ‘May it be done to you as Judas Iscariot did to Jesus.’”²⁴

A legal curse directed against a person who violates a commitment, that his lot shall be like that of Dathan and Abiram, Gehazi and Judas Iscariot, was already widespread in late Antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages. In the *novella* of the Justinian Code, following the section of the obligations, a series of curses against one who makes a false oath is presented:

But if I will not observe all these things, may I dwell henceforth under the awesome judgment of the Lord, the Great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ. And may my portion be together with Judas, and may I be struck with the leprosy of Gehazi, and with the dread of Cain, and may I be subject to the punishments written in the book ...²⁵

Curses that mention Judas as a trope for punishment were widespread in the Middle Ages. Judas’ name was part of a judicial-magical sanction: Whoever violates his oath will suffer as Judas. Such a curse is mentioned in the Middle Ages, for example, in a legal document from 11th century Lucca:

sit deme[rsus de altitudine celi in profundo inferni, sit socius cum] Iuda sch[ariotim qui prop]ter cupiditatem vendidit Dominus et Magistrum suum et cum diabolum qui in infernum ligatus est.²⁶

May you be thrust down from the heights of Heaven to the depths of Sheol; may you be a neighbor of Judas Iscariot who, because of his greed for wealth and money, sold his master and teacher, and is chained to Satan in Hell.

In the Christian curse, Judas is portrayed as a scoundrel who gets his just due. The author of *Toledot Yeshu* knows full well that, in the Christian curses, Judas is the one who is accursed as, according to his words, the Sages of the Gentiles “curse and revile Judas.” However, when he invokes the language of the curse, he turns it upside down and says: “May it be done to you what Judas Iscariot did to Jesus.” According to this text, Judas is the one who punishes and Jesus the one who bears the punishment – a position consistent with the overall tendency of the entire work to turn things around, making Judas the one who is blessed, and Jesus – the one who is accursed.

²⁴ Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1902; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1977), 74.

²⁵ *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, vol. 3, nov. 8, tit.3. on Judas’ curse see: Archer Taylor, “The Judas Curse,” *AJP* 42 (1921): 234–52; On Judas’ curses inscribed on tombstones in Southern Atica: Bradley McLean, “A Christian Epitaph: The Curse of Judas Iscariot,” *OCP* 58 (1992): 241–244.

²⁶ We are grateful to Katrin Dort of Trier for this information. See another example: Auguste J. Bernard and Alexandre Bruel, eds., *Recueil des Chartes de l’abbaye de Cluny* (6 vols; Paris: Collection de documents inédits sur l’histoire de France, 1876–1903), 3, no. 1753, 20: “Et si ullus homo qui carta ista contradicere voluerit, ... et otoritatem Patri et Filii et Spiritus Sanctus sit excommunicatus, et cum Datan et Abiron permanead in infernum, et cum Juda, traditore Domini, in infernum sit demergatus.”

The Joke

Another example is the following story that is told in the Huldreich version. During the course of their journey to Jerusalem, Jesus, Peter and Judas look for a place to sleep. They come to an inn and wish to eat, but the inn-keeper has only one roast goose, which would be adequate for only one of the three figures. How shall they divide it? Jesus proposes that they go to sleep on an empty stomach, and the one who has the best dream will get the entire goose. In the middle of the night, Judas gets up and eats the goose. The next morning Peter relates his dream, in which he was sitting at the feet of the throne of God. Jesus says: my dream is better than yours, because I dreamt that I am the son of God and that you are sitting at my feet; therefore the goose is mine. Then Judas says: and I dreamt that I ate the goose.²⁷

This joke relates ironically to the treacherous image of Judas in the New Testament, of a person who takes care of himself and behaves sneakily with Jesus. But unlike the New Testament text, the Jewish version portrays a figure with whom it is possible to identify, perhaps a figure one might even like; it joins the well-known genre of Jewish jokes about the clever rabbi who deceives the priest and thereby proves the superiority of Judaism over Christianity.²⁸

The Pogrom

In another version, published by Samuel Krauss in *Revue des Études Juives*,²⁹ an independent passage is added to the story of the hiding of Jesus' body and its discovery by Judas. After the empty tomb was discovered, the Jews claim that the body had been stolen in order to invent the resurrection of Jesus. Queen Helena gives the Jews a reprieve of three days during which they are to present the body – and if not, she would kill them all, not leaving their slightest remnant. The plot develops as a story of salvation and deliverance, in which the danger

²⁷ Huldricus, *Historia Jeschuae*, 51.

²⁸ The story of the goose could be a far echo of the ancient legend about Judas and the cock that appears first in *Acta Pilati*: Judas returns home after betraying Jesus. His mother is devastated by his deed, claiming that he handed over the son of God and if he indeed will rise from the dead they all will suffer terrible punishment. Judas swears that the cock which is being roasted in the oven would rise more easily than Jesus. Immediately the half roasted cock flies out of the oven, grows back his feathers and cockscomb and heralds Jesus' resurrection. The same cock later cries trice at the negation of Peter. Seeing this, Judas goes out and kills himself. See Paul Franklin Baum, "The English Ballad of Judas Iscariot," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 31 n.s. 24 (1916): 181–89 (Baum believes the story to be of oriental origin); Paul Lehmann, "Judas Ischarioth in der lateinischen Legendenüberlieferung des Mittelalters," *Studi Medievali* n.s. 2 (1929): 289–346; Dieckmann, *Judas als Sündenbock*, 34–36.

²⁹ Samuel Krauss, "Une nouvelle recension hébraïque du Toldot Yeshu," *REJ* 103 (1938): 65–73.

passes at the latest possible moment. At the last moment, Judas hears about the edict and discovers the place where the body had been buried in his garden; it is tied by its hair to a donkey, dragged to the queen, and presented to her – a reverse picture from that of Jesus entering Jerusalem as the Messiah, riding on a donkey.³⁰ The victorious Judas also returns to his home riding on a donkey – again, a reversal of Jesus' triumphant entry to Jerusalem.

At this point, this version adds a detailed description of what can only be described as a pogrom perpetrated by the Jews against the Christians in Jerusalem, during the course of which “the Jews killed among the Christians several thousand people, including women and children.” Following the pogrom “there did not remain from among the Christians even one from a city and two from a family,” and Jerusalem remained empty of Christians. The description brings to mind the story of the Book of Esther, and especially the motif of the reversal, in which the Jews are transformed from potential victims into victors who take vengeance against their enemies. Undoubtedly, the narrator takes pleasure in this fantasy, which he adorns with numerous details that add to the picture and strengthen its expressive power.

What is the significance of this imaginary pogrom perpetrated by the Jews against the Christians, appearing in a medieval Jewish source? One may perhaps see the story as a distant reflection of the slaughter inflicted by the Jews against the Christians of Jerusalem in 614, upon its conquest by the Sassanian Persians.³¹ This incident has occasionally received the attention of historians, almost always with a certain feeling of unease. According to what is told in Christian sources – and there alone – the Jews participated in the Persian campaign against the Byzantine Empire, and then presented the Christians of Jerusalem with the alternative of conversion to Judaism or death. The Christians preferred to die as martyrs; the number of those who were killed has been estimated from anywhere between 4,000 and 90,000 people. At the site of the slaughter – Mamila Pool – a mass grave was discovered in archaeological excavations conducted some time ago.³²

However, the historical connection between the story of the pogrom in *Toledot Yeshu* and the Persian conquest of Jerusalem is rather dubious, and it seems more reasonable to assume that the story is no more than a product of the imagination. However, even fantasies speak history. One can see in this story testimony to a militant Jewish consciousness, whose wishes are remarkably similar to the acts of the Christian rioters against Jews, reflecting the wish to do to the Christians

³⁰ Luke 19: 29–39.

³¹ Brannon M. Wheeler, “Imagining the Sasanian Capture of Jerusalem,” *OCP* 57 (1991): 69–85; Averil Cameron, “The Jews in Seventh-Century Palestine,” *SCI* 13 (1994): 75–93.

³² Yoram Tsafir, “The Topography and Archaeology of Jerusalem in the Byzantine Period,” in *The History of Jerusalem: The Roman and Byzantine Periods (70–638)* (eds. Yoram Tsafir and Shmuel Safrai, Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1999), 341.

what they had done to the Jews. As opposed to the myth of the passive victim that has gained wide acceptance in modern Jewish historiography, the Jews who wrote and read this text sought vengeance, if only of a virtual kind. This text is outstanding in its clearly non-apologetic nature, which fits well with the general tendency of this work to compete with the Christian story, without claiming self-justification and weakness. The pogrom against the Christians takes place after proving their error, and it brings the religious victory to its realization through the removal of the Christians from the Holy City.

The Legend of the Finding of the True Cross

In many versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, there appears the enigmatic figure of Queen Helena, who serves as a kind of mediator between the followers of Jesus and the Jews. At times, she is convinced by Jesus' miracles and believes in him, while at other times the Jews, led by Judas, have the upper hand. Who is this Helena? Is she Helena, queen of Adiabene, who converted to Judaism during the first century CE, not long after Jesus' crucifixion?³³ Or is she the mother of Constantine, whose highly publicized visit to Jerusalem was a landmark in the Christianization of the city? If so, how are we to understand the anachronism in this Jewish text?

The presence of Helena in *Sefer Toledot Yeshu* may be related to another well-known Christian legend, which likewise tells of a momentous discovery – the legend of the finding of the true Cross.³⁴ In the most famous version of this legend, a Jew named Judas discovers the location of the Cross. According to this legend, Helena came to Jerusalem in order to find the Cross. She gathered together all of its inhabitants, including the Jews living there and in its environs, and preached a Christian sermon to them in which she rebuked them for seeing darkness rather than light, and asking them to send her one thousand learned Jews. After she had preached to these thousand Jews in a similar manner, she demanded that she be presented with scholars who were truly learned in the Torah. This time, five hundred learned Jews were chosen, and she preached to them as well, and again asked to be presented a chosen group from among them. One of these Jews, named Judas, understood what the queen wanted. He explained to the other Jews that she wished to locate, with their help, the Cross

³³ Josephus Flavius, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20, 2–4.

³⁴ Jan Willem Drijvers, *Helena Augusta. The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of her Finding of the True Cross* (Leiden: Brill, 1992); Stephan Borgehammar, *How the Holy Cross was Found: From Event to Medieval Legend* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1991); Han J. W. Drijvers and Jan Willem Drijvers, eds., *The Finding of the True Cross: The Judas Kyriakos Legend in Syriac: Introduction, Text, and Translation* (CSCO 565, Subsidia 93, Louvain: In aedibus Peeters, 1997).

upon which Jesus had been crucified, and warned them that its discovery would be the end of Judaism. Judas, according to the legend, was a relative of Stephen, the first martyr, who believed in Jesus and was thus stoned by the Jews; Judas' ancestors had also believed in Jesus as the Messiah. The Jews prohibited Judas from revealing the place of the Cross, but when the queen threatened to kill all of them they turned him over to her. The queen demanded that Judas show her the site of Golgotha; when he replied that he did not know where it was he was thrown into an empty well where he was left to starve for a week. Exhausted by hunger and by fear of death, Judas revealed his secret. He went to the place and prayed to God that, if the Cross was indeed buried in the place to which he had pointed, then a fragrant odor should arise from it. Immediately, a thunder clap was heard and a wonderfully sweet and fragrant smell ascended from the place. Judas began to dig until he found three crosses: that of Jesus and of the two thieves who were crucified with him. At Judas' suggestion, the crosses were placed one after another upon the body of a young man who had just died. When the third cross was placed upon him, he rose from the dead, to the frustration of Satan, who now intervened in the story and scolded Judas: "By the hands of the first Judas I brought about treachery and caused the world to sin, while now I am pursued by the second Judas." In the wake of the discovery, Helena built a magnificent church at the site, expelled all the Jews from Judaea, and showered gifts upon Christian Jerusalem. Judas was baptized and, when the bishop of Jerusalem died, he was nominated bishop of the city and was renamed Kyriakos – "of the Lord." In the days of Julian the Apostate, Judas died as a martyr for his new faith.

As in *Sefer Toledot Yeshu*, this legend also features the pair Helena and Judas – Helena is the one who seeks, while Judas is the one who reveals. In *Toledot Yeshu*, Judas reveals the body of Jesus and then hides it in order to reveal it anew at the decisive moment, thereby refuting the Christian claim that he had been resurrected from the dead. In the *Legend of the Finding of the Cross*, Judas' function is to reveal to Helena the place of the grave and the Cross. In this Christian legend, it is Satan who draws an analogy between Judas Iscariot and Judas Kyriakos: whereas the first Judas was encouraged by Satan, the second Judas defeats him. In this way Judas who discovers the Cross redeems the sin of Judas who betrayed Christ. It is thus clear that the name Judas is not accidental, and that in both stories it has representative significance – he represents Judaism. Whatever may be the theological significance of the story of the finding of the Cross, it expressed an optimistic prospect as to the possibility of correcting the satanic acts of Judas Iscariot. Judas the Jew is the one who knows the truth, reveals it to Helena, converts to Christianity, and brings about the conversion of all the Jews. The transformation of the negative figure of Judas Iscariot to a positive one also underlies *Sefer Toledot Yeshu*. Similarly, it takes Judas Iscariot of the New Testament and proposes a positive alternative, changing him from an ally of Satan into a redeemer. In both stories, the truth is found in the hands

of Judas, as representative of the Jews. It is Judas who knows the location of the Cross in the Christian story and, in the Jewish story, knows the location of Jesus' body and his falsehood and deceptiveness. This image of him is consistent with a rooted Christian concept according to which, by virtue of their antiquity, the Jews possess arcane knowledge that they pass down from generation to generation; this knowledge is essential for confirming the fundamental principals of the Christian faith.³⁵ One expression of this approach may be found in the idea of the Hebrew Truth, the *Veritas Hebraica* – acceptance of the authority of the Hebrew version of the Bible as the authentic text.

This similarity of concepts and ideas may imply that *Toledot Yeshu* was familiar with the *Legend of the Finding of the Cross* and used several of its motifs in order to create a Jewish counter-narrative, just as it did with the New Testament. The assumption that *Toledot Yeshu* relies, in one way or another, upon the *Legend of the Finding of the Cross* also explains why, in addition to the discovery of the chicanery of Jesus, *Toledot Yeshu* attributes to Judas the discovery of Jesus' body as well. Whereas, in the New Testament, Judas plays no role in the story of the burial and resurrection, in the *Legend of the Finding of the Cross* he is the one who discovers the grave and the Cross.

The suggested connection between the two legends may explain the surprising presence of Queen Helena in several versions of *Toledot Yeshu*. The authors of *Toledot Yeshu* incorporated her name in an anachronistic manner, in order to counterpoise the Christian legend with another Jewish story about Judas, the revealer of the truth – only the truth that he reveals is not that of the Cross, but rather that of the false nature of the Christian religion as a whole.

The connection between these two legends was already noted by the author of one of the versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, preserved in a Vienna manuscript from the 18th century, in which a Jewish version of the legend of the finding of the Cross is brought.³⁶ In this version, the Jewish story confronts the famous Christian legend with a counter-version, which reverses its message. When Helena threatens the Jews with death if they do not reveal to her the location of the Cross, the Jewish Judas – referred to here as “R. Judah the Elder” – suggests to the Jews that they take three crosses and bury them. When the queen tortures Judas so that he will reveal the site of the Cross, he asks for three days to pray, and then points to the place where the three crosses had been hidden, as if it was revealed to him from Heaven. Using the power of the Shem Hameforash which he had learned previ-

³⁵ Ora Limor, “Christian Tradition – Jewish Authority,” *Cathedra* 80 (1996): 31–62 (in Hebrew); Ora Limor, “Christian Sacred Space and the Jew,” in *From Witness to Witchcraft. Jews and Judaism in Medieval Christian Thought* (ed. Jeremy Cohen, Wolfenbütteler Mittelalter-Studien 11; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996), 55–77; Andrew S. Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 14, 178–82.

³⁶ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 141–43.

ously, Judas revives the dead person upon whom the cross had been placed – and thus everybody believes that this is the true Cross. When the Christians, who had supposedly seen the power of the Cross, decide to kill all the Jews, Judas offers to give his own life for his people and disguises himself as one of the disciples of Jesus. Here too, this anti-Christian legend preserves all the details of the Christian story, but gives them a new interpretation, reversing their significance. Judas, the hero of the Christian story, is also the hero of the Jewish legend – but not because he discovered the Cross and converted to Christianity, but because he outwitted the Christians and fooled them, and because he pretended to be a Christian and thereby saved the Jews. Ram Ben-Shalom has shown recently that the Legend of the Finding of the true Cross was known to Jews in the 15th century.³⁷ In view of the wide circulation of the legend in the Christian world, it is only reasonable that Jews will know of it and try to cope with it.

The Biography of Judas in the Golden Legend

In the Legend of the Finding of the True Cross, the figure of Judas undergoes a transformation: from a traitor who betrays his master, he becomes the one to discover the truth about his master. The assumption that Jewish existence in the Christian world is temporary and that the Jews will in the near future overcome their blindness and convert to Christianity is what underlies the Christian doctrine of tolerance towards them. However, this optimistic assumption gave way in the Middle Ages to a far more pessimistic stance, according to which the sin of the Jews is terminal and not subject to atonement.

An echo of the loss of Christian hope in the conversion of the Jews, and of the aggravation of Christian attitude to the Jews in general, is expressed in the third text presented here, which takes us into the twelfth and thirteenth century.³⁸

The New Testament does not relate where Judas came from, who his parents were, or how it came about that he joined the circle of Jesus' disciples. As the biographies of heroes, even of negative ones, inevitably arouse great interest in human hearts, it is not surprising that such a biography found its way into the *Legenda Aurea* (The Golden Legend), a collection of stories of saints that was gathered and edited in the thirteenth century by Jacobus de Voragine, bishop of the city of Genoa and a Dominican monk.³⁹ The collection also includes the

³⁷ Ram Ben-Shalom, *Facing Christian Culture: Historical Consciousness and Images of the Past among the Jews of Spain and Southern France during the Middle Ages* (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2006 [in Hebrew]), 195–202.

³⁸ On the image of Judas in the Christian Middle Ages see Dieckmann, *Judas als Sündenbock*; Peter Dinzelbacher, *Judastraditionen* (Vienna: Selbstverlag des Österreichischen Museums für Volkskunde, 1977).

³⁹ Jacobus a Voragine, *Legenda Aurea* (ed. Th. Graesse, Dresden and Leipzig: 1846), 183–86; English translation: Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*

Legend of the Finding of the Cross. Judas was, of course, not a Christian saint, and his story is brought in the book as an aside, in connection with the story of Matthias, the disciple who was chosen to join the other eleven in place of Judas. The origins of the legend are unknown. The editor himself, who refers to it as "apocryphal," casts doubt upon its validity, leaving the reader with the choice as to whether or not to accept its authenticity. Indeed, at the last moment his doubts become stronger and he proposes rejecting it.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, he himself overcame his doubts, and included the story in his collection, thereby leading to its wide dissemination in the medieval Christian world.

According to the legend, Judas was born in Jerusalem to his father, Reuben (or Simeon) from the tribe of Dan, and to his mother, Cyborea. Before he was born, his mother had a dream that she would give birth to a son who would destroy his people. In order to prevent the realization of this dream, his parents abandoned him. They placed him in a basket in the sea, and the waves of the sea carried him off to an island known as Iscariot. The queen of the island, who was childless, discovered the basket with the child in it and adopted him as her own son. Thereafter, the queen had a child of her own, and enmity developed between the two boys. Judas was in the habit of tormenting the true son and, when it became known in public that he was a foundling, killed his "brother." He then fled to Jerusalem, where he became Pontius Pilate's right-hand man. One day, Pilate desired an apple he saw in a garden beneath his palace and sent Judas to bring it. A quarrel broke out between Judas and the owner of the garden, who happened to be Reuben, Judas father, and Judas killed Reuben without realizing that the latter was his father. Pilate gave Judas all of Reuben's property, including his wife, Cyborea, whom Judas married. After discovering his true identity, Judas sought atonement for his sins from Jesus and joined Jesus' disciples.

From here on the legend follows the New Testament stories, with a few variants: Jesus made Judas his disciple and chose him as apostle. Judas became a favorite of him to such an extent that he became his purse-bearer. Judas held the purse and used to steal from the alms donated to Jesus. Angered by the fact that the ointment of the value of three hundred pence was bestowed upon Jesus and was not sold, he betrayed his master for thirty pieces of silver, each of them worth ten pence. Another explanation is that Judas used to take a tenth part of all monies entrusted to his care and thus sold Jesus for the profit which would have come to him had the ointment been sold. Then he regretted his deed, gave back

(trans. William Granger Ryan; 2 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 1:166–71. On the Golden Legend, see Sherry L. Reames, *Legenda Aurea: A Reexamination of its Paradoxical History* (Madison, Wis: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); on Judas' legend, see "Judaslegende," *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon* 4 (1983), 882–87; Migne, *Dictionnaire des Legendes du Christianisme* (Paris: 1855, reprint: Brepols, 1989), 714–726; Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 104–25; Gubar, *Judas*, 141–57.

⁴⁰ Jacobus De Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 1:168.

the money and hung himself from a tree “and burst asunder in the middle, and all his bowels gushed out.” Thus, the legend brings together both New Testament versions concerning the form of his death – the hanging⁴¹ and the gushing-out of his bowels.⁴² The narrator adds an explanation to this horrible death: “Thus his mouth was spared defilement since nothing came out through it, for it would have been incongruous that a mouth that had touched the glorious lips of Christ should be so foully soiled. It also was fitting that the bowels that had conceived the betrayal should burst and spill out, and that the throat from which had emerged the voice of the traitor should be strangled by a rope. Moreover, Judas perished in the air, so that the one who had offended the angels in heaven and men on earth was kept out of the region belonging to angels and to men, and was left in the air, in the company of demons.”⁴³

The Golden Legend was very popular throughout Europe during the High and Late Middle Ages. About a thousand Latin manuscripts of it have survived and it was also translated to the various spoken languages. The Judas legend has also come down to us in dozens of other Latin manuscripts unrelated to the Golden Legend. Beginning in the thirteenth century vernacular versions started to be circulated alongside the Latin ones. It was known all over Western Europe and survived also in Greek and in East European languages.⁴⁴ In England, the legend continued to be published until 1828, and was especially popular in the eighteenth century.⁴⁵ True, one does not find it in theological or exegetical literature. Nevertheless, we may assume that it was used in sermons in the churches, and its negative influence may only be imagined.⁴⁶ If Judas was, as is implied by his name, the archetype of the Jew, then his negative qualities represent the qualities of the Jews as a whole.⁴⁷

The roots of the “apocryphal” parts of the legend can be sought for in the story of Oedipus, and it also echoes the stories of Cain and Abel, of the birth of Moses, and the Christian legend of the Antichrist. A literary analysis of the legend will take the reader along exciting paths of popular literature, psychoanalysis, and the

⁴¹ Matt 27:5.

⁴² Acts 1:18.

⁴³ Jacobus De Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 1:168–69.

⁴⁴ Paull Franklin Baum, “The Mediaeval Legend of Judas Iscariot,” *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 31 n.s. 24 (1916) (reprinted 2008): 481–632; Lehmann, “Judas Ischarioth.” According to Lehmann, the earliest version of the legend comes from twelfth century France (p. 312); Richard Axton, “Interpretations of Judas in Middle English Literature,” in *Religion in the Poetry and Drama of the Late Middle Ages in England* (eds. Piero Boitani and Anna Torti, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 179–97.

⁴⁵ Baum, “The Mediaeval Legend of Judas Iscariot,” 571.

⁴⁶ See Weber, “The Hanged Judas of Freiburg Cathedral.” Weber believes that the figure of the hanged Judas in the west tympanum of Freiburg cathedral was inspired by the Judas legend.

⁴⁷ Kim Paffenroth, *Judas: Images of the Lost Disciple* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 33–57; Mary Flowers Braswell, “Chaucer’s Palimpsest: Judas Iscariot and the Pardoner’s Tale,” *The Chaucer Review* 29 (1995): 303–10.

study of religions. The “biography” of Judas is one example of incest stories that started to appear in written texts in increasing numbers from the twelfth century on. According to Elizabeth Archibald, “this was not merely because of the growing audience for Latin and vernacular narrative fiction in this period, though of course the ‘rise of romance’... must have been a contributing factor. Incest was a very topical subject in the twelfth century because of the Church’s attempt to define marriage in precise legal terms ... There was also a new emphasis in this period on the importance of contrition, inner consciousness of guilt and repentance, and also on the value of confession ...”⁴⁸

Yet, a comparison with other incest legends only accentuates the negative message of the Judas’ legend. Like Judas, Oedipus also committed terrible sins, because of the decree of fate, but precisely for that reason, he enjoys the observer’s sympathy. He suffers despite having done no (deliberate) wrong; he is imprisoned in the chains of a fate imposed upon him from birth.⁴⁹ Such is not the case of Judas who, after sinning repeatedly, is given the opportunity to atone for his sins and to repent – but who then augments his sin by committing the greatest sin of all, the betrayal of Jesus. As a matter of fact, Judas betrays everyone – his father, his mother, his master, his people.⁵⁰ In Kermodé’s words: “Betrayal becomes Judas.”⁵¹

A comparison between the legend of Judas and another legend from the Middle Ages, built of similar materials, only exacerbates the uniqueness of Judas as the arch-sinner. This legend, set down in writing in the Late 12th or beginning of 13th century by the German poet Hartmann von Aue, tells the story of Gregorius I (“The Great,” who served as pope in the years 590–604), who was born as the result of incest between a brother and sister, the children of a king.⁵² The infant, who was born in secret, was placed in a chest on the river together with a tablet disclosing his origins. A fisherman saved him and raised him, and the

⁴⁸ Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, 106.

⁴⁹ Thomas Hahn, “The Medieval Oedipus,” *Comparative Literature* 32 (1980): 225–37; Lowell Edmunds, “Oedipus in the Middle Ages,” *Antike und Abendland* 22 (1976): 140–55; Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints* (trans. Donald Attwater; Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 1998), 63.

⁵⁰ Judas was guilty for fratricide, parricide, and incest, but his gravest sin was betrayal. Hahn reminds us that in the Middle Ages the feudal ideals turned betrayal the most abhorrent sin of all (Hahn, “The Medieval Oedipus”). As Archibald writes, in Judas’ legend, incest and parricide “were clearly added to show what an incorrigible villain Judas was.” His deeds are “extreme transgressions of the fifth, sixth, and seventh commandments” (Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, 108–9).

⁵¹ Kermodé, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, 85

⁵² Hartmann von Aue, *Gregorius*, (ed., Hermann Paul, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1984); English translation: Hartmann von Aue, *Gregorius: A Medieval Oedipus Legend* (trans. Edwin H. Zeydel; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955). The story is also included in *Gesta Romanorum* (eds. and trans. Charles Swan and Wynnard Hooper; London, 1891), 141–54. To the same family of stories belong also the legends of Saint Andreas of Crete and of Saint Albanus. See Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, 119–23.

abbot of the local monastery baptized him and gave him his name – Gregorius. After his origin became known, Gregorius decided to go off and wander about in the world. He arrived at a kingdom of whose queen had been placed under siege by a certain duke whom she refused to marry. Gregorius defeated the duke, married the queen, but continued to be tormented over the terrible secret of his birth. The queen, curious about his unhappiness, discovered the tablet, and it thus became clear to her that she was the mother of her own husband. Gregorius then went into exile. He came to a hut of a wicked fisherman and asked him to chain him to a stone in the sea and throw the key into the sea. Thus he lived over the course of many years. After seventeen years the pope died, and two cardinals, who saw in a dream the intended heir, set out to look for him. They arrived at the fisherman's hut and were invited to dine with him. During the course of the meal they discovered the key in the belly of a fish, which was understood as a sign from heaven that Gregorius's sin had been forgiven. He was then released from his chains, crowned as pope and became an admired spiritual leader. Upon his death he was canonized as saint.

Like Judas, Gregorius also sinned by committing incest with his mother, but he repented and his sin was forgiven. He even became a saint of the church, purified through the power of his atonement. Judas also attempted to atone for his sins, but even after these sins were forgiven he continued to sin. Evidently, sin was imprinted within him. While in the Gregorius legend "the characters retain their nobility and the reader's sympathy throughout,"⁵³ Judas loses both.

What exacerbated Judas' sin in particular was the fact that he committed suicide rather than seeking forgiveness. According to Christian teaching, there is no sin for which one cannot receive atonement, but one must believe in God's kindness and forgiveness and in His ability to atone for sin. Judas did not believe but instead hung himself – and this was the greatest of all his sins. Friedrich Ohly, who in his book *The Damned and the Elect: Guilt in Western Culture*⁵⁴ deals with psychology of self damnation, writes that Judas, unlike Gregorius, "fell far away from God because he did not trust in the grace that follows on repentance."⁵⁵ He despaired and was unable to ask for forgiveness and to believe in it. "The real question is not how one gets into guilt but how one gets out of it," writes Ohly.⁵⁶ This is the difference between the saintly sinner (Gregorius) and the damned sinner (Judas). The historical implications of this difference are brought up by George Steiner in his foreword to the English

⁵³ Archibald, *ibid.*, 118–19.

⁵⁴ Friedrich Ohly, *The Damned and the Elect: Guilt in Western Culture* (trans. Linda Archibald; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1–34; from the German, *Der Verfluchte und der Erwählte: vom Leben mit der Schuld* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1976).

⁵⁵ Ohly, *ibid.*, 31. Indeed, In the Gregorius legend Gregorius warns his mother not to abandon herself to despair (verses 2698–702): "Despair not of God's ends / You shall still find salvation / I've read of consolation / That God will true repentance heed / As penance for each evil deed."

⁵⁶ Ohly, *ibid.*, 5.

edition of Ohly's book: "It is ironic that DR Friedrich Ohly's work itself lies under a certain shadow. Nowhere does he bring himself to touch on the obvious central crux that, of the disciples, only Judas is, by his very name, defined as a Jew ... It is countless Jewish men, women and children who suffered ostracism and martyrdom in the black light of Judas' fate as it has been proclaimed and imaged by Christianity ..."⁵⁷

And, indeed, the appearance of the legend in Europe in the twelfth century and its broad dissemination is further testimony to the aggravation in the Christian attitude towards the Jews at that time. The negative image of the Jews became now a satanic one. The Jews were understood to be sinners and scoundrels by their very nature, without any possible hope of correction. Even if they did repent, like Judas, and even converted to Christianity, nothing could change their sinful nature. All that is left is for Christians to be wary of them and to expel them from their midst.

Students of literature, and particularly of folk literature in past generations, have dealt with this legend, documented its dissemination, and attempted to understand its sources.⁵⁸ The legend also caught the attention of psychologists, who dealt with its psychoanalytic significance.⁵⁹ In 1986, again in a psychoanalytic journal, the medieval scholar Alain Boureau analyzed the significance of the legend for medieval society in the context of feudal laws of inheritance, the cult of veneration of the Virgin, and anti-Semitism.⁶⁰ Surprisingly, the story barely engaged in the interest of scholars who dealt with Jewish-Christian relations, a subject that since World War II has occupied an important place in research, both within the framework of the question of the sources of anti-Semitism, and in the context of recent tendencies towards rapprochement between the two religions.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Steiner in Ohly, *ibid.*, xiii–xiv. Steiner goes on saying: "Half a century after Auschwitz, it seems as if German scholarship is still lamed when it draws near the unspeakable; a condition which gives to this essay on 'life and guilt' constraining paths."

⁵⁸ Baum, "The Mediaeval Legend of Judas Iscariot"; V. Istrin, "Die griechische Version der Judas-Legende," *Archiv für Slavische Philologie* 20 (1898): 605–19; Lehmann, "Judas Ischarioth"; Axton, "Interpretations of Judas."

⁵⁹ Norman Reider, "Medieval Oedipal Legends about Judas," *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 29 (1960): 515–27; Sidney Tarachow, "Judas, the Beloved Executioner," *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 29 (1960): 528–54; Mordechai Rotenberg, "The Oedipal Conflict and the Isaac Solution," in: Mordechai Rotenberg, *Re-Biographing and Deviance: Psychotherapeutic Narrativism and the Midrash* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987), 93–110.

⁶⁰ Alain Boureau, "L'inceste de Judas: Essai sur la genèse de la haine antisémite au XII^e siècle," *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse* 33 (1986): 25–41.

⁶¹ A clear exception is the book recently published by Jonathan A. Silk, *Riven by Lust: Incest and Schism in Indian Buddhist Legend and Historiography* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009). The author, who is a scholar of Buddhism, arrived at similar conclusions as ours. He stresses the anti-Jewish character of the Judas legend and puts it rightly in historical context, as an expression of the deterioration in the Jewish position in the High Middle Ages. An earlier exception is Hyam Maccoby's short treatment of the Legend in his book *Judas Iscariot and the Myth of Jewish Evil* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 101–7.

Modern scholarship of Jewish-Christian encounters follows in the footsteps of former Jewish writing. Indeed, the total silence of Jewish sources with regard to this story is quite surprising. If the Jews knew what Christians were telling about Judas – and it is difficult to imagine that they were not familiar with a juicy, colorful and widespread story as this – why did they not see fit to deny the story, to cast doubt as to its reliability, or at least to point out its absurdities? The Jews' ignoring of this story may be seen as a deliberate strategy, whose significance one is left to ponder. It is consistent with the feeble Jewish reaction towards accusations and libels widespread in the Christian world from the twelfth century on – particularly the ritual murder, the blood libel and libels of the desecration of the Host, as well as poisoning of wells and other acts of treachery. The Jewish responses to all these accusations were few and weak and do not reflect much intellectual interest.⁶²

The absence of a Jewish response to the figure of Judas Iscariot as presented in the Golden Legend is in striking contrast to the colorful response of *Toledot Yeshu* to the New Testament figure of Judas, and should be understood in terms of the exacerbation in relations of the Christian majority to the Jewish minority during the High Middle Ages. Evidence of the existence of internal Jewish censorship and fear of exposing anti-Christian expressions in public can already be found at the beginning of the twelfth century, but a striking change took place in the thirteenth century with the strengthening of Christian pressure on Jews, Christian criticism of Jewish literature and the proliferation of a Satanic image of the Jew. It would seem that Jews lost any interest in confronting such images and did not believe there is a way to refute them. Whereas, in the New Testament, Judas Iscariot is presented as a human figure, treacherous and avaricious as he may be, in the Golden Legend he is depicted as pathologically distorted, a depiction that leaves no place for an answer, much like the tales of ritual murder or the accusations of ritual desecration of the Host.

Hence, in place of the open and frank discussion found in Late Antiquity, when various versions of the life of Jesus and of Judas developed (the period during which the apocryphal Christian stories concerning them were themselves born), the High Middle Ages developed a strangling and depressing atmosphere which allowed no place for alternative narratives. Rather than a competition among narratives, we now find a denial of the other and of his narrative, and feelings of frustration as to the very possibility of changing the position of the other side. It would seem that Jews now preferred to ignore the Christian neighbor rather than to answer him. Indeed, some versions of *Toledot Yeshu* continued to be circulated among Jews even at the end of the Middle Ages and into the begin-

⁶² Israel J. Yuval, "‘They Tell Lies: You Ate the Man’: Jewish Reactions to Ritual Murder Accusations," *Religious Violence Between Christians and Jews* (ed. Anna Sapir Abulafia, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2002), 86–106.

ning of the modern period, and it seems quite likely that at least some of them were created during this period. They thereby preserved a genre that was born in the distant past and dealt with ancient story, but was unable to provide an answer to the new narratives that prevailed now in Christian culture, representing the Jew as ally to the Satan – sinful from birth, desecrating the body of Christ, and requiring the blood of Christian children.

When Christians in medieval Europe listened to the abhorrent story about Judas the arch-traitor, the betrayer of the son of God, Jews of the same countries listened clandestinely to the story of *Toledot Yeshu*, in which Judas is the hero and savior. The same Judas thus assumed two radically opposed images, and his character expressed in a concise manner the deep chasm that opened up between believers of the two religions.

Epilogue: Judah, Jew, and Israel

These two opposed stories, as well as the story about Judas who discovered the Cross in the legend of Helena, assume their full significance in view of the identification between the individual hero who carries the name Judas, and the Jewish collectivity.⁶³ A quick look at the sources shows that the term “Jew” (Yehudi, Yehudim; Iudeus, Iudei) was widespread in Jewish literature throughout the Second Temple period.⁶⁴ In tannaitic and amoraic literature, however, we note a significant change – the term “Jew” is hardly encountered at all, in its place we find “Israel.” While “Jew” is mentioned only once in the Mishnah, “Israel” appears hundreds of times. Moreover, in those isolated cases when “Jew” is mentioned in Talmudic literature, it is almost always in a derogatory way and put in the mouths of non-Jews. A similar process occurs with regard to the name of the land. The term “the Land of Israel” is rarely found in biblical and Second Temple literature, the land being referred to by the names of its various regions – Judaea and Galilee – whereas in Mishnaic literature it is referred to almost exclusively as *Eretz Yisrael*. These developments acquire their full significance when compared to Christian literature, which uses almost solely the term Jew (and not Israel) for the Jewish people.

⁶³ See Dieckmann: “Die mittelalterliche Tendenz, Personen typologisch zu deuten, führte dazu, Judas als Typ, als Inbegriff des jüdischen Volkes zu betrachten. Ansätze dazu gibt es schon in der Alten Kirche, etwa bei Augustinus und Hilarius von Poitiers” (Dieckmann, *Judas als Sündenbock*, 69).

⁶⁴ Graham Harvey, *The True Israel. Uses of the Names Jew, Hebrew and Israel in Ancient Jewish and Early Christian Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); David Goodblatt, *Elements of Ancient Jewish Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Martin Goodman, “Romans, Jews and Christians on the Names of the Jews,” in *The Other in Second Temple Judaism: Essays in Honor of John J. Collins* (eds. Daniel C. Harlow, Karina Martin Hogan and Joel S. Kaminsky; Grand Rapids, forthcoming).

In medieval Jewish literature, the term “Jew” gradually came to assume a somewhat more central role. In Ashkenazic sources, “Jew” is often used, especially in the Responsa literature, which deals with concrete cases and occurrences. The same holds true for *Sefer Hasidim*, which brings daily anecdotes and exempla. However, its use seems to be limited to defining the ethnic identity of the contemporary individual or group, whereas “Israel” remains the definition used for the religious, mythic and historical identity. Proof of this can be found in Jewish liturgical literature – the *Siddur*, the *Mahzorim* for the various holidays, and the *piyyut* – in which the term “Israel” is used exclusively to refer to the Jewish people. In his *Mishne Tora*, Maimonides uses the term “Israel” more than 2000 times, whereas “Jew” is mentioned only six times. The book of *Zohar* mentions “Israel” 5700 times and “Jew” only 20 times.

Why did Jews refrain from using the term Jew, which was widely used by their Christian neighbors? We can think of several answers to this question:

The first is that what we have here is an internal Jewish development – still in need of explanation – that has nothing to do with the Christian world. Jews preferred the term Israel for their own internal reasons and the Christian label did not bother them at all.⁶⁵

On the other hand, another answer could be that the Jews felt the need to refrain from using the term Jew because of its negative connotations. The name Israel thus served for them both as a declaration of their identity as the true Israel and as a means of eliminating the negative connotations that Christianity affixed to all Jews because of Judas Iscariot.

If so, then it would seem that Jews had two ways of tackling the negative Christian portrayal of Judas. One is the route taken by *Toledot Yeshu*, which adopts the Christian standpoint, but in an inverted manner: In all versions of that work, Judas Iscariot is the explicit representative of the Jewish people and its leadership: he is both hero and leader. This is a bold attempt to reverse the negative image of Judas by turning the picture portrayed in the New Testament upside down. The second way was to refrain from using the name Judas altogether. This was the solution adopted by the Sages, as well as by many, although not all, medieval writers and some modern ones as well.

Thus the circle is closed. What a contemporary Israeli author (Abraham B. Yehoshua) felt about the term “Jews” was also felt in Late Antiquity and the

⁶⁵ Eyal Ben Eliyahu, “Judea and Israel: The Territorial Dimension of National Identity,” *Zion* 72 (2010): 127–151 (in Hebrew). According to Ben Eliyahu, the alteration in name from Judah to Israel during the tannaitic period derived from the moving of the religious and political center of the Jews in the land of Israel from Judaea to the Galilee. Israel J. Yuval is of the opinion that the change in the name of the land is related to a change in the sense of self-identity and the desire to propose an alternative geographical definition to the Roman name, “Palestinian Syria,” following the Bar-Kokhba rebellion. See “The Myth of the Jewish Exile from the Land of Israel,” *Common Knowledge* 12 (2006): 16–33. This tendency was weakened in amoraic literature, in which the term “Jew” is again used alongside “Israel,” albeit in a much lower intensity.

Middle Ages by many Jews, for whom the term “Israel” represented their mythical, liturgical and historical identity. The term “Jew” remained risky, because it could easily be used derogatively by those who identified it with Judas Iscariot.

Simon Peter, Founder of Christianity or Saviour of Israel?

John Gager

My goal in this paper is to trace a remarkable transformation of the figure of Peter and to ask two questions: (1) How did the first Christian martyr, the first pope of the Roman Catholic Church and the leading disciple of Jesus in the early gospels become an underground double-agent of the Jewish sages? How did this pseudo-believer bring about the final separation of Christianity from Judaism – first by passing himself off as the leading disciple of Jesus, and then single-handedly creating Christianity as little more than a deformed Jewish heresy with but one valid teaching, to wit, that Jesus had commanded his followers to leave Jews in peace and to cease doing them any harm?¹ (2) How did he come to be regarded as the composer of numerous liturgical poems (*piyyutim*) and of the Yom Kippur liturgy, the most solemn service in the Jewish calendar?

But before beginning this task, I need to make a couple of things quite clear. First, I don't actually believe any of this: there were no popes for at least 100 years after Peter's death; there is no solid evidence that Peter was ever in Rome, let alone martyred there; and there is just as little evidence that he played the role of a Rabbinic double-agent who saved Israel by giving birth to Christianity and then insisting on their total separation. I should note in passing, however, that there is one significant point of contact between these two radically opposed images of Peter – and I will come back to the issue of such contacts later on – namely, that in both cases he is treated as the primary founder of Christianity – in one case as an authentic faith, i. e., Judaism, in the other as an inauthentic religion, i. e., Christianity.² Second, we need to keep in mind one fundamental fact

¹ I have benefitted from the following studies, each dealing with the figure of Peter in Jewish tradition: Julius H. Greenstone, "Jewish Legends about Simon-Peter," *Historia Judaica* 12 (1950): 89–104; Simon Légasse, "La légende juive des Apôtres et les rapports judéo-chrétiens dans le haut Moyen Age," *BLE* 75 (1974): 99–132; Wout van Bekkum, "The Rock on which the Church is Founded: Simon Peter in Jewish Folklore," in *Saints and Role Models in Judaism and Christianity* (eds. Marcel Poorthuis and Joshua Schwartz; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 289–307; and idem, "The Poetical Qualities of the Apostle Peter in Jewish Folklore," *Zutot* (2003): 16–25. Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1902; repr., Hildesheim: Olms, 1977) remains essential on all aspects of the *Toledot Yeshu* (TY), along with Riccardo Di Segni, *Il vangelo del ghetto* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1985), 33, 51–66.

² In the Vienna manuscript of the TY, Peter is called *ha-pa'pa' ha-'a*, i. e., "the first pope" (Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 87).

that emerges from these preliminary comments, namely, that ‘Peter’ was like a lump of soft clay in the hands of Jewish and Christian writers in the early centuries of the common era. They could shape him into whatever form they liked or needed. He could become – and this is exactly what happened – all things to all people. The number of Peter images in early Christian literature, beginning with the New Testament (NT) gospels and extending well into later centuries, is simply overwhelming. Unlike his counterpart Paul, Peter was unencumbered by the burden of having left behind any solid historical traces. No one possessed any reliable information about him; the best proof of this is the unending series of pious histories of Peter written by Christian authors right down to the present day (I will come back to this one later on, too). And third, all of the various threads in the process of Peters’ literary transformations will lead us to and through the *Toledot Yeshu (TY)*.

I begin with an enigmatic comment in a little known Jewish text of uncertain date – the Hebrew Scroll of Fasts, known in its many versions as *Megillat Ta’anit* or *Megillat Ta’anit Batra*.³ Unlike the better known Aramaic *Megillat Ta’anit* which *pro*-scribes fast days – that is, it specifies days in the Jewish calendar when fasting is prohibited – this one *pre*-scribes fast days, and in most cases gives a reason for the fast, usually as a commemoration of some great hero from the Jewish past. As Sid Z. Leiman, on whose work I rely, has written, there are many peculiarities to this text: our Hebrew Megillah requires fasts on the 8th and 10th of Nisan, whereas the Aramaic scroll expressly forbids fasting altogether from the 8th to the 21st of Nisan; and its opening line states that what follows is a list of days set aside for fasting in the Torah, whereas the Torah contains no such guidelines for fasts as a way of commemorating Biblical heroes. But it is another anomaly in the text which concerns us here; in this case, the only instance in the scroll where a fast day lacks any mention of the reason behind it. For the 9th of Tevet, the text reads: *betish’ah bo lo katvu rabotenu ‘al mah hu* (“On the [fast for] the 9th of Tevet our teachers did not write the reason for it”). This anomaly has prompted imaginative speculations from various readers. One such attempt argues that the fast anticipated by some 1000 years the martyr-death of R. Joseph ha-Levi ha-Nagid in 1066; another states that this was the date when Esther was taken to the court of Ahasuerus. Certainly the most interesting of these traditional efforts was the argument put forward by several 19th century Jewish historians (Leopold Zunz, Solomon Judah Rapoport and Nehemiah Brüll), based on a statement by the 12th century Jewish philosopher and astronomer, Abraham bar Hiyya, that Dec. 25 in the year of Jesus’ birth fell on the 9th of Tevet! In short,

³ See Sid Z. Leiman, “The Scroll of Fasts: The Ninth of Tebeth,” *JQR* 64 (1983): 174–95; Leiman dates the text to the 9th century. On the *Megillat Ta’anit*, see the recent volume of Shulamit Elizur, *Wherefore Have We Fasted: Megilat Ta’anit Batra and Similar Lists of Fasts* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, The Rabbi David Moses and Amalia Rosen Foundation, 2007 [in Hebrew]).

the fast commemorated the birth of Jesus and the rabbis acted out of prudence by suppressing this unfortunate and unacceptable calendrical coincidence.⁴ Having dismissed these and other efforts as baseless, Leiman points us to yet another explanation for our enigmatic saying, an explanation even more outrageous than any of those he has just demolished. This one takes us directly to Peter, or rather, under a different name, to Shimon Kaipha or Simon Peter, as he is known in a variety of NT texts:

- Matt 4.18 – “Simon called Peter/Petros” (= “rock” in Greek).
- Matt 16.18 – “And I tell you, you are Peter, and *on this rock* I will build my church ...”
- John 1.42 – “Jesus looked at him, and said, “So you are Simon, the son of John? You shall be called Cephas” (*kifa* = “rock,” etc. in Aramaic → Cephas in Greek), which translates as Petros (= “rock”).
- Galatians 2.11 – “But when Cephas (= Peter) came to Antioch, I (= Paul) opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned ...”

Leiman’s explanation of the passage in the Hebrew Scroll of fasts begins with two obscure comments by 19th century rabbinical scholars:

Rabbi Baruch Fraenkel-Teomim (d. 1828) reports that he discovered the following gloss in a manuscript of Josef Karo’s (d. 1575) *Shulhan Arukh*: “on the 9th of Tevet, Shimon Qalpos died, the one who saved the Jews from a great misfortune in the time of “the violent ones” (*peritsim*); the day of his death was established in Jerusalem as a fast forever.” And Aaron of Worms, Rabbi at Metz (d. 1861) reports that in a *sefer zikhronot* he found a report that the 9th of Tevet commemorates the death of Shimon Qalponi.

Now it is highly unlikely that either one of these scholars knew who this Shimon was, although in the case of Aaron of Worms it is clear that he is aware of our enigmatic phrase in the Hebrew *Megillat Ta’anit*. But for us the question is, Who is this Shimon ha-Qalpos or Qalponi whose death is commemorated on the 9th of Tevet? The answer would appear to lie in the famous or infamous version of the *Toledot Yeshu* published in 1705 (Leiden) by Johann Jacob Huldreich (also referred to variously as Ulrich and Huldricus), under the title *Historia Jeschuae*

⁴ My colleague, Sarit Kattan-Gribetz, has made a suggestion that deserves to be taken seriously. Her view is that the author(s) of the *Toledot Yeshu* may have chosen the 9th of Tevet as the date of Shimon Kaipha’s death, based on Abraham bar Hiyya’s (d. ca. 1136) calculation, as a polemical thrust against the Christian celebration of December 25 as the birth of authentic Christianity. The Jewish reply would thus be that the real significance of December 25/9th of Tevet lay in celebrating not the birth of Jesus, the false messiah, but rather the death of Shimon, the saviour of Israel! It is also possible that bar Hiyya himself chose to make December 25 coincide with the 9th of Tevet for the same polemical purpose and that he did so based on his knowledge of prior *Toledot Yeshu* traditions regarding the observance of Shimon’s death on that date. See the discussion of bar Hiyya in Leiman, 182–85.

*Nazareni a Judaeis blaspheme corrupta.*⁵ The hero of this version is called Rabbi Shimon Qalpos throughout the text.⁶ When the people of Ai (= Rome) begin to outnumber and oppress the Jews, the sages turn for help to a Rabbi Shimon, identified as an uncle of Jesus and an honored elder among the Jews. I will give here a brief list of the various means by which Rabbi Shimon deceived the Christians in the Huldreich text:

- he spoke to the Christians *al da'at Yesus* which they took to mean that he taught according to the religion of Jesus; but our text comments that in the language of the sages, the phrase *al da'at* means *lashon anus* or something like forced or cryptic speech and thus misleading speech for which one is not held responsible;
- he performed miracles by using the *shem ha-meforash* (the secret and powerful name of god) and thus persuaded the Christians to accept his authority on all matters;
- he informed them that Jesus wanted his followers to cause no harm to Jews;
- he forbade Christians to impose forced baptism on Jews;⁷
- summoned and persuaded by the sages, who take upon themselves responsibility for any sins Rabbi Shimon might commit by becoming the leader of the Christians (the account is much compressed here and is described more fully in other versions), Shimon agrees to lay down bad laws for the Christians and to bring Christian oppression of the Jews to an end;

⁵ Huldreich transcribed a complete version of the *TY* from a Hebrew manuscript; unfortunately that manuscript subsequently disappeared. The Huldreich manuscript is Amsterdam HS Ros 442.

⁶ The name “Qalpos” and its variants is undoubtedly derived, probably through Jewish-Christian channels, from the figure of Shimon son of Cleophas, cited as a cousin of Jesus, and a leader of the Nazarenes, who died as martyr under Trajan. There is good reason to believe that this Shimon was a hero among Jewish-Christians; see Eusebius, *HE* 3.11.2; see also the discussion in Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 171 and Di Segni, *Il vangelo del ghetto*, 134 f. and 209–11. This Shimon, son of Clopas, was in turn probably derived from either the Clopas mentioned in John 19.25 (“Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene”) or the Cleophas cited in Luke 24.18 (“Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, i. e., Jesus, ‘Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have you not known the things which happened there in these days?’”).

⁷ The passage appears in the Vienna manuscript (Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 87): “From now on and in the future you shall not force anyone to come to your teachings or to baptism (*bastomo*) through force; if you do this and the Jews come to your faith, they will harm your faith and it will be clear to them that your faith is not good. For this reason everyone who wishes to come to your faith should come willingly; even if he says that he comes willingly, nonetheless you do not receive him until he has spent 30 days in the house of good people; and he (Peter) instructed that they should take no child under 9 years for a child is does not order his affairs through wisdom.” The issue of forced baptism for Jews had been a controversial matter in Christian circles for many centuries, with strong advocates both for and against. There is an extensive scholarly literature on the issue. Still useful is Bernhard Blumenkranz, *Juifs et chrétiens dans le monde occidental, 430–1096* (Paris: Mouton, 1960; repr., Paris: Peters, 2006), 96 ff.

- he rides on a cloud, complete with thunder and lightning; all of this so impressed the Christians that they agreed to do whatever he might command them; but at one point, when some of the Christians ride with Peter on his cloud, he suddenly splits the cloud in two and the Christians fall to their death;
- he introduced a new alphabet (the letters are given in Hebrew letters but when read aloud it is clear that the alphabet itself is German), under a new name, so that the Christians would understand nothing; in truth, when properly understood, the alphabet condemns Christians as sons of Esau, as “epikouros” (a standard Hebrew term for a heretic), and as believers in a false god;
- in a related tradition, this one attributed to Paul rather than Peter, the apostle commands his followers to replace the Jewish holidays and festivals with new Christian celebrations;⁸
- he wrote a number of false books (clearly the reference here is to the gospels – evangelion/a in Greek) and called them *aven* (= “wrong/perversion”) + *killayon* (annihilation). But the Christians misunderstood the name and called them *even* (= “stone”) + *gilayon* (= “revelation”);⁹
- Rabbi Shimon wrote the book of Yoanus (= the book of Revelation in the NT), once again in a coded language, which proved that Jesus himself is the beast in chapter 13 of that book;
- finally, Rabbi Shimon drove the followers of Jesus away from Jerusalem and, as the text states repeatedly, put an end to Christian persecution of the Jews.

Now there are two further details in Huldreich’s text that support Leiman’s thesis about Peter as the hero celebrated in the *Megillat Ta’anit*. First, at the end of the account, when Rabbi Shimon dies, the children of Israel mourn his death and decree a fast to be celebrated every year thereafter on the 9th of Tevet. This, of course, is exactly what is contained in the two glosses cited just above. And second, the term used consistently to refer to the Christians is *peritsim*, the same term used in the gloss to Karo’s *Shulhan Arukh*: “on the 9th of Tevet Shimon Qalpos died, the one who saved the Jews from a great misfortune in the time of the violent ones (*peritsim*); the day of his death was established in Jerusalem as a fast forever” In fact, *peritsim* is a virtual technical term for Christians in

⁸ The passage appears in the Strasbourg manuscript (Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 48) and is written in Aramaic, whereas the language of the manuscript otherwise is Hebrew. For an illuminating discussion of the passage see Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, “An Ancient List of Christian Festivals in Toledot Yeshu: Polemics as Indication for Interaction,” *HTR* 102 (2009): 481–96. The fact that this particular passage appears in Aramaic is a strong indication that it represents relatively old material.

⁹ This passage recalls and probably derives from the passage in the Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 116a, which refers to the books of the *minim*, here probably referring to the gospels, as *aven gilayon* = “falsehood of blank page” (or of “revelation”).

numerous versions of the *TY*.¹⁰ As for the name or names of Qalpos/Qalponi/Qalpasi applied to Peter here, there seems little doubt that they were borrowed, perhaps via Christian-Jewish channels, from the figure of Shimon Clopas or Cleopas, identified by Hegešippus as an uncle of Jesus and a martyred leader of the Christian-Jewish community in Jerusalem.¹¹

To sum up this far: Rabbi Shimon Kaipha is the saviour of the Jewish people and his memory is to be celebrated forever with a fast on the 9th of Tevet. This information seems to have been widely circulated, not just in versions of the *TY* but in other Jewish sources as well.

But there is more to the story of Peter than this. No less an authority than Rashi (d. 1105) must have known a version of the story like the one in Huldreich's manuscript for he reports the following in his commentary on the Babylonian Talmud, *Avodah Zarah* 10a:

"Others wrote for them all of the heretical books – Yochanan/John, Paul and Peter. They were Jews. *Lashon*/Speech is *grammatica* (i. e., the Latin), which the priests speak. They changed and complicated this language¹² and created nonsense for them in order to keep them apart from them (i. e., Israel) and to remove them from Israel. They were not heretics/converts (i. e., to Christianity) for they did everything for the benefit of Israel. Rather when they saw Israel in severe distress from the deceptions/trickeries of Jesus, they pretended that they were with him in his piety and ordained for them everything, as is explained in (the book of) The Hanging of Jesus."¹³

In other words, while Huldreich himself, and probably his Hebrew manuscript version of the *TY*, date from the early 18th century, both incorporate traditions that were much earlier, in this case earlier than the 12th century. Rashi clearly knew a version of the *TY* and summarizes a part of it in his commentary on *Avodah Zarah*.

A further measure of how widely known the *TY* was at this time – the 12th and 13th centuries – and in these regions – France and Germany – becomes clear when we survey the widely disseminated references to it by Jewish authors, not

¹⁰ The term originates from a passage in Daniel 11.14: *u-vne paritse amekha* = "the children of the violent ones from your people ..."

¹¹ See above n. 6.

¹² The language here is drawn from Ezekiel 3.6 ("For you are not sent to a people of foreign speech and a hard language, but to the house of Israel – not to many peoples of foreign speech and a hard language, whose words you cannot understand") and Isaiah 33.19 ("You will see no more the insolent people, the people of an obscure speech which you cannot comprehend, stammering in a tongue which you cannot understand"). I am indebted to my colleague, Naphtali Meshel, for his assistance on these matters.

¹³ See Leiman, "The Scroll of Fasts," 191 f. for another translation. Rashi's observation was preserved independently by two authors: by Profiat Duran in his *Kelimat ha-Goyim* 7.3; and by Jacob ibn Habib in his *'En Ya'aqov*, reprinted by Raphael Rabinovicz, *Dikduke Sofrim – Avodah Zarah* (Munich: L. Rosenthal, 1879), 23, n. 9. The translation given here is based on the version of Jacob ibn Habib, as rendered by Rabinovicz.

to mention the numerous manuscripts of the TY itself. At the same time, these further references open up an entirely new dimension of Peter's subversive anti-Christian and pro-Jewish career, this time as the composer of major elements in the Jewish liturgy, including the Nishmat and a hymn (*piyyut*) for Yom Kippur. I offer here a brief survey of the major texts.

1. Rashi's grandson, Rabbenu Tam (d.1171).

a) In a manuscript commentary on the *Mahzor Vitry*, the following comment appears: "In all the works (*devarav*) of Rabbenu Tam (we find) written that Shimon Kaipha is the one who composed the liturgy (*sefer*) for Yom Kippur, (namely) '*eten tehillah*.'"¹⁴ Samuel Luzzatto reports seeing a similar gloss in a commentary to the Machzor: "there is a commentary on the '*eten tehillah* and the '*atah konanta*;¹⁵ at the beginning of the '*eten tehillah* is written, 'Shimon ben Kaipha whom the Catholics of Rome call Piero (*pyero*) produced this hymn of praise (*shevach*) after he ordained the religion of Jesus and he put himself in a tower in Rome for the rest of his life with simple bread and water (as sustenance)...'"¹⁶

2. About the Nishmat, a fundamental prayer in the daily liturgy, two texts report Peter as the author:

a) "Nishmat: I found that Shimon ben Kaipha established it; some say it was Shimon ben Shetach" Herz Treves reports this comment in his Tefillah commentary.¹⁷

b) "Nishmat: I heard from Rabbi Yehuda bar Yaacov that Rabbi Shimon Kaipha established the Nishmat, as far as *mi yidmeh lach!*/"Who is like unto you?""¹⁸

3. Two comments in the *Mahzor Vitry* itself, a collection of halachic rulings produced by Simchah ben Samuel of Vitry (d. 1105), a pupil of Rashi:

¹⁴ The comment is reported by David Oppenheim, "Notizen," *MGWJ* 7 (1858): 468.

¹⁵ '*Eten tehillah* ("I will give praise ..."), attributed here to Simon Peter, is elsewhere attributed to Yose ben Yose; it was introduced into the Yom Kippur liturgy in French circles at an uncertain date in the middle ages. See the discussion in Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy. A Comprehensive History* (New York: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1993) 239. '*Atah konanta* ("You established the world ...") was part of the Yom Kippur liturgy in parts of medieval France and still today in some communities of northern Italy; see Elbogen, *ibid*. There are brief discussions of both poems in Michael. D. Swartz and Joseph Yahalom, *Avodah: Ancient Poems of Yom Kippur* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005); see also van Bekkum, "The Rock," 307 f.

¹⁶ See Oppenheim, "Notizen," 468; Greenstone, "Jewish Legends," 103, n. 25; and van Bekkum, "The Rock," 307. Luzzatto's comments appear in his introduction to the Italian Prayer Book/*Mavo 'le-mahzor ke-minhag bene roma* (Livorno, 1856), 7.

¹⁷ David Oppenheim, "Ueber den Verfasser des Nischmath und das Alter der Piutum," *MGWJ* 10 (1861): 213.

¹⁸ Oppenheim, "Ueber den Verfasser," 217, based on a personal communication from Kirshheim, who found the comment in a manuscript edition of a Tefillah commentary.

a) “There are those who say about this villain, Shimon Peter the ass/donkey (*peter hamor*),¹⁹ that great error of Rome (i. e., the church founded by Peter), that he established this prayer (i. e., the Nishmat) and other prayers when he sat on the rock. God forbid that such a thing could happen in Israel!”²⁰ Here the author is obviously aware of the tradition that regarded Peter as the author of the Nishmat, and expresses his dismay at such a possibility.

b) “It is permitted to expand/add them, such as *qerovot*, *tefilot* and *selihot*, handed down to us by our revered teachers/rabbis from the days of Shimon Kaipha who established the liturgy of Yom Kippur, namely, *'eten tehillah*, and (from the days of) Eleazer Kalir. And he established *qerovot* for the holiday of the New Year.”²¹ This comment appears in the context of a debate over whether it is permissible to add hymns/*piyyutim* to the liturgy. While the substance of the two reports is nearly identical, namely, that Peter composed *piyyutim*, the negative assessment of the first report cited above is missing in the second. Moreover, in this second instance, Peter’s is cited as an authority for settling the debate in favor of those who allowed additions.

There is much more to be said about these texts, but my immediate concern is to show that they reflect a thorough familiarity with versions of the *TY*; that these versions circulated widely in Jewish circles, including distinguished scholars; and that they were taken seriously in those circles. All of the themes and terms in the texts just cited stem from different versions of the *TY*.²² Here I offer a partial survey of those versions of the *TY* that contain these elements of the story:

a) Vienna manuscript (Krauss, 64 ff.):

- Peter/Shimon agrees to take on his mission on behalf of the Jews;
- the Christians build him a tower as his permanent residence;
- he drinks only water and eats only bread;

¹⁹ In his “The Converso as Subversive: Jewish Traditions of Christian Libel,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 2 (1999): 259–83, Ram Ben-Shalom draws attention to a passage in the Ashkenaz *Sefer Hasidim* which directly echoes this reference to Peter as an ass/donkey (*hamor*): “If a Jew converts he is given a disreputable name ... Even a *tsadik* who leads on others is called such.” Thus, Shimon Kaipha becomes *Peter Hamor*, exactly as in the passage from the *Mahzor*. The passage appears in Yehudah Wistinetzki and Jakob Freimann, eds. *Sefer Hasidim* (Frankfurt a. M.: M. A. Vahrmann, 1924), 197. The *Sefer Hasidim* is now available, with all manuscripts and published editions, in Peter Schäfer and Michael Meerson, eds., *The Princeton University Sefer Hasidim Database*: https://etc.princeton.edu/sefer_hasidim/.

²⁰ Shimon Halevi Hurwitz, *Mahzor Vitry* (Berlin: Itzkowski, 1889), 282.

²¹ Hurwitz, *ibid.*, 362. Eleazer Kalir (his date is highly uncertain) a noted composer of liturgical hymns.

²² It must be noted that these themes do not show up in all versions of the *TY*, notably, the Aramaic fragments from the Cairo Geniza; the report of Agobard; the Firkovich manuscript from St. Petersburg, which appears to have been translated from an Aramaic source; and versions of the *TY* that lack any treatment of the Jesus-story after his death, e. g., the Adler manuscript from Yemen (Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 118 ff.). On the Firkovich manuscript and related texts see the discussion of Yaacov Deutsch, “New Evidence of Early Versions of *Toldot Yeshu*,” *Tarbiz* 69 (2000): 177–97 (in Hebrew).

- he writes many songs and hymns and sent them out to Jews in the exile where they were received and used with delight;
- this Shimon was called Saint Peter/S. Pierro (*s pyyerro* ') by the *goyim* (= Christians).²³
- b) Strasbourg manuscript (Krauss, 38 ff.):
 - Peter/Shimon agrees to take on his mission on behalf of the Jews;
 - the Christians build him a tower as his permanent residence;
 - he drinks only water and eats only bread;²⁴
 - he wrote many songs and hymns and sent them out to Jews in the exile where they were received and used with delight.²⁵
- c) Slavic version:²⁶
 - Peter/Shimon agrees to take on his mission on behalf of the Jews;²⁷
 - the Christians build him a tower as his permanent residence;
 - he drinks only water and eats only bread;
 - he writes many songs and hymns and sends them out to Jews in the exile where they were received and used with delight;
 - Shimon is opposed by an evil man, clearly the figure of Paul;
 - Shimon receives an honorific title, *Rashbaq*, for “Rabbi Shimon son of Kuphi.”²⁸
- d) Tam u-Muad:²⁹
 - Peter/Shimon agrees to take on his mission on behalf of the Jews;
 - the Christians build him a tower as his permanent residence;
 - he drinks only pure food;
 - he writes many songs and hymns and sends them out to Jews in the exile where they were received and used with delight;
 - Shimon is opposed by an evil man, called Abba Shaul, clearly meant to represent the figure of Paul;

²³ Ch. 21 of the Vienna manuscript; Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 87 f.

²⁴ One interesting feature in this account of Shimon’s eating habits is the comment that food was placed in a basket and lifted up to him, a practice long observed by Christian monks who chose to live as hermits, often high on cliff faces accessible only by ladders and ropes.

²⁵ The passages appear in ch. 12 (chapter headings are Krauss’ addition); Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 48 ff.

²⁶ Published by Samuel Krauss, “Une nouvelle recension hébraïque du Toldot Yêšū,” *REJ* 103 (1938): 65–90. Krauss came into possession of the manuscript through private hands.

²⁷ Krauss comments that Shimon/Peter “travaille pour le bien du judaïsme et se sacrifie pour sa cause,” Krauss, “Une nouvelle,” 71.

²⁸ The passages appear on pp. 86 f. of Krauss’ edition.

²⁹ In the excellent edition, with full commentary, German translation and a synopsis of themes in the major versions of the *TY*, of Günter Schlichting, *Ein jüdisches Leben Jesu: Die verschollene Toledot-Jeschu-Fassung Tam ū-mū ‘ād* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1982).

– another figure, Yochanan,³⁰ appears in some manuscripts where he performs many of the same functions as Shimon/Peter.³¹

By now several things have become clear: first, that the *TY*, whatever its origins, was not just a “popular” text; second, that it was well known in both Jewish and Christian circles³² no later than the mid-9th century; third, that it was taken seriously on both sides; and that it produced a long series of Christian responses. It was, in the words of Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, “a worldwide bestseller”³³ among both Jews and Christians, at least from the mid-9th century when Latin versions first appear in Agobard and Amulo, successive bishops of Lyon.

But now we must face another question: how did this remarkable transformation of Shimon/Peter take place? How did the leading disciple of Jesus in the NT gospels, the prototype of the Christian martyr and first pope in Rome, how did he become a subversive pseudo-convert to Christianity, the creator of Christianity as a false religion, the author of numerous Jewish liturgical poems and the saviour of the Jewish people? Is this purely a product of Jewish imagination? I will not be able to do anything more than offer an outline of my answer, but my basic premise is that this was not a difficult transformation to bring about at all.

My answer requires several initial assumptions: first, that Jews and Christians were in regular contact with each other; second, that Jews were familiar with Christian texts, practices and beliefs; third, that Christianity in its many forms was seen as a serious threat by Jews; and fourth, that from the very beginning Jews felt obligated to respond to the Christian threat in a variety of ways. What I want to focus on here is the figure of Peter in the earliest Jesus-movement,

³⁰ Yochanan is described as “one of the great sages of Rome” (Schlichting, *Ein jüdisches Leben Jesu*, paragraph 291).

³¹ The passages appear in paragraphs 345 ff. of Schlichting’s edition.

³² The first Christian author to provide unambiguous evidence of the *TY* as a document is Agobard, bishop of Lyons, in his anti-Jewish writing, *De judaïcis superstitionibus*, written around 830. From that time forward, the *TY* is widely attested in Christian circles; see Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 7 ff. On Agobard’s text, see the discussion in Arthur Lukyn Williams, *Adversus Judaeos: A Bird’s-Eye View of Christian Apologiae until the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), 348–55; text and translation in Hillel I. Newman, “The Death of Jesus in the *Toledot Yeshu*,” *JTS* 50 (1999): 68 f.

³³ Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, “An Ancient List of Christian Festivals in *Toledot Yeshu*: Polemics as Indication for Interaction,” *HTR* 102 (2009): 484. In his essay, “The Converso as Subversive: Jewish Traditions or Christina Libel?” *JJS* 2 (1999), Ram Ben-Shalom remarks that by the 11th century “‘The Life of Jesus’ was well known to both Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities” (270). To this must be added a number of references to the *TY* in Islamic writings as well; see the discussion in Ben-Shalom, “The Converso,” 273 f.; Ernst Bammel, “Eine übersehene Angabe zu den *Toledot Jeschue*,” *NTS* 35 (1989): 479 f.; Samuel Miklos Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār’s Account of How Christ’s Religion was Falsified by the Adoption of Roman Customs,” *JTS* 19 (1968): 176 ff.; and Pieter Sjoerd Koningsveld, “The Islamic Image of Paul and the Origin of the Gospel of Barnabas,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 20 (1996): 200–228.

specifically in the gospel of Mark.³⁴ What do we learn about ‘Peter’ from Mark – not, of course, the historical Peter but the image of Peter as created and projected by the author?

We first meet him in 1.16, under the name of Simon (which would be Shimon in Aramaic or Hebrew), where Jesus drafts him, his brother Andrew and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, to be his followers; at this point nothing more is said of him. Every bit as low-key is the next encounter, in 3.16 ff., where Jesus appoints the enigmatic group of 12 and adds the name of Peter to Simon. But nothing is said of his significance. The fact that his name appears first on the list is simply due to the tradition that had come down to the author. That tradition (“I handed down to you ... what I had received”) is reflected in I Corinthians 15.3–7, written some two decades before Mark, where Paul reports that the risen Christ appeared first to Cephas/Peter and then to others.³⁵ Peter disappears from Mark’s story for the next five chapters only to re-emerge at the literary and theological turning point of the gospel, namely, the Christological lesson and first prediction of Jesus’ suffering and death in ch. 8. Here, for the first time, we learn something substantial about him. When Jesus asks his followers who they take him to be, Peter answers, “You are the Christ/Messiah.” As the overall view of the gospel makes plain and as Jesus’ stern rebuke of Peter emphasizes, this is the wrong answer. “He rebuked (*epitimēsen*) them, so that they would not to talk to anyone about him” (8.30) And the lesson continues with Jesus’ prophecy about the coming suffering of the Son of Man.³⁶ Peter then compounds his misunderstanding of Mark’s Christology, i. e., that Jesus will the achieve glory but only through suffering, by pulling Jesus aside and rebuking him again. And at this point the story reaches its stunning climax in Jesus’ withering repudiation of Peter, “Get behind me, Satan, you are thinking human thoughts, not divine ones” (8.33). It is difficult to imagine a more blatant attack on Peter’s status. I

³⁴ The gospel of John accords even less space to Peter. In 6.28 Peter asks a stupid question, “What should we do to perform the works of God?” Jesus’ reply makes it clear that the issue is not doing ‘works’ but believing in him. Later, in 13.36, Jesus predicts Peter’s denial of him and in 18.17–27 the prediction is fulfilled. Peter’s appearance at the tomb in 20.2–10 is almost certainly a later intrusion into the story, as part of efforts to redeem Peter’s image. Chapter 21, where the resurrected Jesus commissions Peter to “feed my sheep” is certainly part of the same rehabilitation project. Matthew and Luke, each in their own way, seek to burnish the inconveniently negative image of Peter bequeathed to them by their primary source, the gospel of Mark.

³⁵ It may be relevant here to take note of what Paul does with this tradition. While the list begins with Cephas/Peter and ends with Paul himself (verse 8 – “last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me”), in Paul’s own mind he clearly ranks himself ahead of Peter! In other words, Peter’s name at the top of the list does not qualify him for any special status in Paul’s world. Other negative views of Peter appear in a variety of early Christian texts, e. g., the Coptic Gospel of Thomas (sayings 12 and 114) and the various writings associated with the name of Mary Magdalene (see the brief discussion in Smith, 104–7, below note 39).

³⁶ While the figure of the Son of Man may have been understood as someone other than Jesus before the time of Mark, it is clear that the author here understands Jesus to be talking about himself.

take this passage to be Mark's commentary on Peter's role in general.³⁷ And it is hard not to see the very next saying (8.38: "Those who are ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes ...") as directed primarily at Peter.

Immediately after ch. 8 comes the scene of the transfiguration, where Jesus takes Peter, James and John – Peter again comes at the top of the list – as witnesses to his miraculous appearance with Elijah and Moses. Once again, Peter misses the point of the episode by addressing Jesus as "Rabbi" and urging his friends to build dwellings (*skênas*) for the three apparitions. But as the author of the gospel makes clear, Peter has misunderstood the whole affair and has simply reacted out of fear (9.6: "He did not know what to say, for they were terrified"). This series of misunderstandings then continues in 10.28, where Peter boasts of having left everything to follow Jesus, only to be reminded that Jesus' previous saying was not about Peter but about future generations.³⁸ Next, in the story about the cursed fig tree, Peter again addresses Jesus as "Rabbi" (11.21) and seems to assume that the fig tree is a revelation of Jesus' magical power. But the summit of this series is not reached until ch. 14, where, in response to Peter's boast that he will never abandon Jesus, Jesus predicts that Peter will in fact deny him three times that same day. But before Peter has an opportunity to carry out the prediction, he falls asleep three times, while Jesus prays at Gethsemane. Jesus' rebuke here is telling: "Enough! The hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinner ... My betrayer is at hand" (14.41 f.). I find it difficult not to see these words as both proleptic and retrospective, that is, anticipating the scene with Judas that follows immediately and summing up the preceding scene with the dozing Peter. Thus it can hardly be coincidental that in the very next episode, another one of Jesus' own followers – Judas – betrays him into the hands of the "chief priests, the scribes and the elders" (v. 43). And he does so by addressing Jesus, just as Peter had done earlier, as "Rabbi." Surely, by the juxtaposition of these two scenes, the author of the gospel is drawing attention to the close analogy between Peter and Judas, two insider betrayers.

Finally, in the scene of Jesus' arrest and examination before the Sanhedrin (*sunedrion* – 14.55), Peter fulfills Jesus' earlier prediction:

– "You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth.' But he denied it, saying, 'I do not know or understand what you are talking about.'" (14.68)

³⁷ It is more than a little embarrassing to see how modern Christian exegetes ignore or play down this and other passages about Peter in Mark. One can only suspect that apologetic motives have overridden sound interpretation in these cases. For a survey of Petrine debates in the early centuries, see Terence V. Smith, *Petrine Controversies in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985). Smith's conclusion represents one of the few exceptions to the standard apologetic strain: "... Peter, who remains blind throughout the Gospel" (170).

³⁸ Mark makes it clear that Peter misses the point here by stating in v. 26 that the disciples were completely perplexed by Jesus' words, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom" (v. 25).

- “‘This man is one of them.’ But again he denied it.” (14.69f.)
- “‘Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.’” But he began to curse (*anathematizein*) and to swear an oath (*omnunai*), ‘I do not know this man you are talking about’ (14.71). And with this carefully constructed and powerfully phrased, three-fold denial, Peter disappears from Mark’s gospel.

By now and in summing up, the thrust of my argument has become clear. In producing their counter-history of Christian origins,³⁹ Jewish defenders of their faith needed to look no further than the figure of Peter in the gospel of Mark.⁴⁰ A strong reading of that gospel readily yielded a picture of a false believer, in fact two of them, Peter and Judas. In this instance, the authors of the *TY*, who clearly knew the gospel of Mark and had read it carefully, were able to use the weapons of the Christians, i. e., Mark, against the Christians and their elevation of Peter to the status as the founder of in Christianity and the first pope. I note that this inversion of the Christian story, and using Christian texts to do so, also enabled Jews to turn a standard anti-Jewish argument against their Christian opponents. In this reversal, it is the Christians, not the Jews, who have misunderstood their own scriptures and traditions. Finally, the authors of the *TY* made ample use of the universal cultural type or figure of the subversive convert, the undercover double agent, the converso-emissary.⁴¹ Examples of this type were everywhere in ancient Judaism, Christianity and Islam – Joseph in Egypt; Esther in the court of Ahasuerus; Gamaliel as a hidden Christian deceiving his fellow Jews so as to promote his new faith;⁴² the conversos in Spain;⁴³ Jewish pseudo-converts to Islam whose mission was to subvert early anti-Jewish tendencies in the new faith;⁴⁴ and more. This cultural type made it possible to provide an answer to the question, “If it seems obvious that Peter was not a follower of Jesus, what was he

³⁹ I borrow the term from Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 36–40, where he applies the term to the *TY*.

⁴⁰ On the question of whether educated Jews were familiar with Christian literature and teachings, the consensus today is overwhelming in affirming a positive stance. Here I follow Krauss, “das NT war den Juden keine terra incognita und sie lasen es wenn schon nicht griechisch oder lateinisch so doch in hebräische Übersetzung,” “Neuere Ansichten über ‘Toldoth Jeschu,’” *MGWJ* 76 (1932), 600. It may be noted here that the gospel of John presents a similar picture of Peter and that the passages cited from Mark appear also in Matthew. Both of these gospels were well known in Jewish circles; see Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 128 f.

⁴¹ The term is used by Ben-Shalom to designate a broad theory advanced by Abravanel (d. 1508) according to which the conversos were to be seen as a necessary preparation for the final redemption (262 f.).

⁴² See the discussion of this and other examples in William Horbury, “The depiction of Judaeo-Christians in the Toledot Yesu,” in *The Image of Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature* (eds. Peter J. Tomson and Doris Lambers-Petry; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 280–86.

⁴³ See Ben-Shalom, “The Converso,” 259–64.

⁴⁴ Ben-Shalom, “The Converso,” 272–74.

doing among them?" Answer: "He was a subversive double-agent." And one at the very top! Taken together, these techniques eventually produced the quartet of subversive pseudo-converts who engineered the subversion of Christianity and the salvation of Israel in many versions of the *TY* – the mysterious Yochanan, Peter/Shimon, Paul/Elijah, and Judas/Yehuda.

There remains one puzzle in this Peter/Shimon story, namely, how did he come to be imagined to be a refined poet, specifically of liturgical texts. This is a puzzle because in the earliest traditions Peter is a simple Galilean fisherman, anything but a sophisticated liturgical poet! But by the end of the first century or soon thereafter, Peter's name came to be associated with a wide variety of writings – various Acts of Peter, an apocalypse of Peter, a gospel of Peter and several letters attributed to him, including the two that bear his name in the NT. In a way this development was inevitable. Given Peter's elevated status in emerging Christianity and given Christianity's rapid emergence as a literary culture, Peter was destined to assume the role of prolific Christian author.

But still, none of these writings speaks of him as composing Jewish liturgical poetry. And so the puzzle remains.⁴⁵ Various solutions have been proposed and I will review them briefly:

The first is associated with the name of the great 19th century Jewish historian, Heinrich Graetz. Unwilling or unable to imagine an internal Jewish explanation for Shimon/Peter's role as *payyeta*n, Graetz invented an otherwise unattested poet by the name of Shimon Kaipha who was later mistakenly identified with the Christian Shimon Kaipha. In other words, the Shimon Kaipha of the texts discussed above is not Simon Peter at all but rather a Jewish poet of the same name, mistakenly identified at a late date with Peter.⁴⁶ A second solution, proposed by van Bakkum, holds that the Peter story may have been shaped by the story of the legendary Jewish pope Elchanan⁴⁷ and his father R. Shimon. According to one version of the story, the young Elchanan was abducted from his Jewish parents as a young boy, raised as a Christian and eventually elevated to the papacy. But following a *crise de foi* and a reunion with his Jewish father, Elchanan abandoned Christianity and returned to Judaism, whereupon his father, Rabbi Shimon, celebrated the occasion by composing the New Year hymn, *'el hanan nahalato*. This Shimon was further assimilated to yet another poet, Shimon ben Isaac ben Abun of Mainz (ca. 950) and thus came eventually to be connected to

⁴⁵ Van Bakkum, "The Rock," 308 speaks of "the problematic nature of Simon's authorship of so many liturgical hymns."

⁴⁶ Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews* (edited and in part translated by Bella Löwy; 6 vols; Philadelpia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1949), 3:115; also in *MGWJ* 8 (1859): 401 and 9 (1860): 19 ff. See the discussion in Oppenheim, "Ueber den Verfasser," 212–15. Oppenheim's objection to Graetz is summed up in his words that "Unter diesem Namen ist immer der Apostel Petrus gemeint"; see Oppenheim, "Ueber den Verfasser," 221.

⁴⁷ On the Elchanan story see Joseph Bamberger, *The Jewish Pope: History of a Medieval Ashkenazic Legend* (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2009 [in Hebrew])

our Shimon/Peter.⁴⁸ A third solution, proposed initially by Oppenheim in 1861⁴⁹ and followed up by Légasse in 1974,⁵⁰ focuses on those texts which speak of Shimon Kaipha's authorship of the Nishmat, an ancient prayer recited on the Sabbath and other holidays, including Passover.⁵¹ Oppenheim and Légasse, among others, have drawn attention to elements of the prayer that can be read as expressing anti-Christian and specifically anti-Pauline themes. For Oppenheim in particular, the Nishmat is an anti-Pauline composition from the beginning. But whether the prayer was composed originally (Oppenheim) as an anti-Christian hymn or only came to be understood that way later on (Légasse), both see it as the basis for all of the other claims about Peter as *payyetan*.

As a final note, I draw attention to the apocryphal letter of Peter to James that introduces the Homilies, part of the hugely popular Pseudo-Clementines which date from the late 2nd or early 3rd century and circulated widely in later centuries.⁵² In that letter we find most of the themes associated with the role of Peter as poet in the *TY* and other texts:

- he speaks several times of “my books of preaching”;
- he asserts his loyalty to the Torah of Moses (“as though I were of such a mind but did not freely proclaim it, which God forbid!”) and rails at length against those who have misrepresented him as a teacher opposed to the Law;⁵³
- he speaks of his enemy (clearly Paul) from among the Gentiles, who proclaims a lawless, i. e., Torah-free, gospel;
- he sends his books to James for others to read, but only by those carefully instructed and examined.

Here finally, in a “Christian” text we have the full package: Peter as author of liturgical material; his fierce loyalty to Judaism; Paul as Peter's mortal enemy; and the sending of his writings to James, whom we may call the head of the new Diaspora. I believe that we have now located all of the elements that will even-

⁴⁸ Van Bekkum, “The Rock,” 308 f. See his fuller discussion in van Bekkum, “The Poetic Qualities”

⁴⁹ Oppenheim, “Ueber den Verfasser,” 212–24.

⁵⁰ Légasse, “Légende juive,” 115–17.

⁵¹ The prayer is named in *b. Pesahim* 118b, in answer to the question, “What is the *birkat ha-shir* recited over the fourth cup at Passover?” R. Yochanan (d. 279) replies, “The Nishmat.” The same Yochanan quotes a line from the prayer in *b. Berakhot* 59b. Oppenheim observes that the recitation of the Nishmat at Passover, would have been a fitting time and setting for anti-Christian polemic.

⁵² Oppenheim, “Ueber den Verfasser,” 217, mentions the Pseudo-Clementines but not the letter of Peter to James.

⁵³ Surely this statement is directed at the mainline Christian view of Peter and specifically at the NT book of Acts, where Peter is portrayed as undergoing a divinely-inspired conversion (Acts 10), as a result of which he abandons the observance of Judaism and thus his former Jewish identity.

tually coalesce in the figure of Peter as a loyal Jew and the composer of central elements in the Jewish liturgy.

I also believe that we have now answered the questions raised earlier: how did Peter come to be seen in the *TY* as the subversive agent of the Jewish sages, sent on a mission to create Christianity a false religion and to return peace to Israel by separating Christians from Jews and bringing Christian persecution of Jews to an end; and how did he later he come to be celebrated as a great Jewish hero and the author of major elements in the Jewish liturgy. At the same time, the underlying goal of the *TY* becomes clear: to reclaim as Jews the major figures of foundational Christianity. But at the same time, a fundamental contrast between the Jesus narratives and the “Acts” also reveals itself. Jesus is reclaimed as an insolent Jew, deserving of death; Peter is reclaimed as loyal Jew, the saviour of Israel.

Appendix: Dating Issues

The majority of the Hebrew manuscripts of the *TY* comprise two parts: first, the Jesus narratives, from his conception to his burial(s); and second, the “Acts,” which cover a series of figures and events after Jesus’ disappearance, with a primary focus on four figures – Simon Peter, Eliahu/Elijah, Paul and Yochanan/John.⁵⁴ Astonishingly, these figures in the “Acts” function as Jewish heroes, false believers in Jesus and saviours of Israel. There seems little doubt that these two parts were meant to replace – whether as satire and parody and/or as Jewish counter-history – the NT gospels and book of Acts.

Dating issues have accompanied scholarly discussions of the *TY* from the very beginning. The first serious treatment appears in Krauss’ *Das Leben Jesu* (1902). His view was that the two parts belonged together from an early date, just as, from the second century onward, the NT gospels and the book of Acts always appear together.⁵⁵ But we cannot fail to notice that all of these *TY* manuscripts

⁵⁴ As of 1902, Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 263 f., noted that the majority of manuscripts included the “Acts.” He listed the following: W, B, Ms. Adler, the Slavic versions, H, Ms. Güdemann, Agobard, Ms. Strasbourg, Ms. Jellinek, Ms. V, de Rossi 96, and Ms. Jablonski. Those lacking the “Acts” he notes as: Ms. Gaster, Raimundus Martinus, and Hrabanus Maurus. Of course, the number in both categories would be much greater today. At the present time no complete survey is possible.

⁵⁵ The contrary view is taken by Légasse, “Légende juive,” 102–104. He argues (1) that the theme according to which Peter and Paul steal the ineffable name to accomplish their wonders must have been borrowed from earlier Jesus narratives and (2) that the basic goals of the two parts are fundamentally different, i. e., the Jesus part seeks to undermine the founder of Christianity while the “Acts” seek to separate Christianity from Judaism. But as Légasse himself notes (102) the purpose of both parts is to undermine the authenticity of Christianity and to defend Jews against Christian anti-Judaism.

are late, dating from the sixteenth century and beyond. In addition, when we look at the earliest surviving manuscript evidence of the *TY* – the Aramaic fragments from the Cairo Geniza (11th century?); the recently published Firkovich manuscript of the *TY*⁵⁶ which differs significantly from the other Hebrew versions and shows numerous parallels to the Aramaic fragments; and the Latin translations of the *TY* cited in the writings of Agobard and Amulo in the early ninth century – we find virtually no trace of the extensive “Acts” found in the majority of Hebrew manuscripts; only Jesus narratives. And, we should note in passing, that these early witnesses also lack any birth narratives of Jesus. But several other features of these early witnesses are worth noticing and may well point us toward a new model for understanding the composition and dating of the *TY* in both of its parts.

First, the Latin versions of Agobard and Amulo, close associates and successive bishops of Lyon in the mid-9th century, are not identical. This lack of similarity suggests that the two clerics had access to and made use of different versions of the *TY*, even though they lived at the same time and in the same place. Second, both versions do contain brief references to events following Jesus’ death. Agobard comments that Cephas was among Jesus’ disciples and acquired the name Peter (“rock” in both Greek and Latin) “because of his *duritiā* (‘insensibility’) and *hebetudinē* (‘dullness’).”⁵⁷ And Amulo observes that the Jews insist that ‘the tomb of Jesus “stands empty and is fouled with stones and filth, which they are in the habit of throwing in.”’⁵⁸ To be sure, these are not full blown “Acts,” but they can be taken as signs of stories beyond the death and burial of Jesus.

Thus one is tempted at first glance to conclude that in the long literary development of the *TY*, the birth narratives and the “Acts” came into being later than the central Jesus narratives. This tentative conclusion may seem appealing but it is not convincing. Other possibilities need to be considered. One is that the Aramaic fragments from the Cairo Geniza give an incomplete picture of what was available in Aramaic. After all, they are fragments.⁵⁹ It is also possible that Agobard and Amulo knew more than they quote from their versions of the *TY* and that they quoted only those portions that suited their polemical purposes. And so the dating question remains open. What other options are there? Are we

⁵⁶ Deutsch, “New Evidence.” The manuscript was copied in 1536 by Israel ben Yequiel, but its origins are clearly much earlier.

⁵⁷ See the discussion in William Horbury, “Tertullian on the Jews in the Light of *de spec.* xxx. 13,” *JTS* 23 (1972): 455–59, reprinted in idem, *Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), 176–79.

⁵⁸ For the text, see Newman, “The Death of Jesus,” 68 f. The passage appears in Amulo’s *Epistula contra Iudaeos*. For the version of *TY* in the works of Agobard and Amulo, see the article of Peter Schäfer in this volume.

⁵⁹ So also Krauss, “Neuere Ansichten,” 45. He remarks of the Aramaic fragments that they are “nur Fragmente.” See the discussion in the Schäfer’s article.

faced, as Légasse complains, with an impenetrable mass of scrub-brush (*maquis*) and painful confusion?⁶⁰

Recent studies of the *TY* have made it clear that there never was a single, original *TY*⁶¹, or at least none that we will ever recover, and that throughout their history they remained open texts. Even a cursory glance at the Strasbourg manuscript, a typical example of western Hebrew manuscripts of the Wagenseil type, shows that these texts underwent constant revision at various levels – in modifying the details of the narratives as well as in importing whole new blocks of material. It is obvious, for example, that the section of the *TY* in which the sages label Jesus as a *mamzer* (bastard or illegitimate child) and *ben ha-niddah* (conceived during his mother's menstrual period) was borrowed from the rabbinic tractate *Kallah*, one of the so-called minor tractates found in some manuscripts of the Babylonian Talmud.⁶² *Kallah* was written no earlier than the 8th century and so its impact on the *TY* must have taken place after that, perhaps as late as the 9th or 10th century.

Thus a third option regarding the origins and date of the “Acts” of the *TY* may now be considered. One of the striking features of the many *TY* versions, as we have just seen, is the manner of its composition. Quite often the text will finish one block of material or episode and proceed to another with little or no literary transition.⁶³ In other words, the mode of composition somewhat resembles a child playing with building blocks. One block is placed on another, in random fashion, with no apparent connection among the blocks. Thus, for example, immediately following the episode in which Jesus' teacher label him a *mamzer* and a *ben ha-niddah* the narrative jumps to Jesus' successful attempt to steal the ineffable name from the holy of holies in the Jerusalem temple. Other examples occur further on. At one point Jesus flees to upper Galilee where he is summoned to appear before Queen Helen. His followers become incensed and wage war against Jesus' pursuers. But in the very next line, linked only by a recurrence of the phrase “the people of upper Galilee,” we find the familiar story, known from various infancy gospels, in which Jesus comes upon local people making birds out of clay. He pronounces the ineffable name, at which point the birds

⁶⁰ Légasse, “Légende juive,” 102.

⁶¹ This is contrary to the view expressed by Samuel Krauss in his 1938 article, “Une nouvelle récénsion hébraïque du Toldot Yeshu,” *REJ* 103(1938): 65–90. In this article Krauss follows the line developed by Hugh J. Schonfield, *According to the Hebrews* (London: Duckworth, 1937), who argued that the “original” *TY* was written as a response to the ephemeral Gospel of the Hebrews.

⁶² Abraham Cohen, ed., *The Minor Tractates of the Talmud* (2 vols.; London: Soncino Press, 1965). See also David Brodsky, *A Bride without a Blessing. A Study in the Redaction and Content of Massekhet Kallah and its Gemara* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), esp. 148, n. 74 on the relationship of *Kallah* to the *TY*.

⁶³ There are occasional weak exceptions to this rule, such as in the phrase “when the sages heard this.”

come alive and fly away. One final example: following the episode in which one of Jesus' disciples (Yehuda/Judas) offers to reveal his identity to the sages, we find the scene in which his five disciples are questioned as to the origins of their names. The episode, with many variations at the level of detail, appears in various manuscripts of the *TY*, including both Hebrew and Aramaic versions. But it also appears in a totally different context, in the Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 63a.⁶⁴ Whether the *TY* borrowed the episode directly from the Talmud or whether they all relied on an earlier common source cannot now be determined. But the significant divergences in the different versions would appear to point in the latter direction.

The point of this third option should now be evident. Just as the birth stories and the theft of the ineffable name existed as floating independent building blocks, moving from place to place and introduced into the narrative at various points in the long development of the *TY*, so too the "Acts" stories (I emphasize the plural here to make it clear that the "Acts" too were never a single, unified narrative) most likely emerged at an early date, close to the time of the Jesus narratives and came to be attached to these narratives at some later date.

As to the likelihood of a relatively early date for the "Acts," or at least for some of its elements, a recent article by Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra has made an important contribution.⁶⁵ Stökl proposes an early date for the block of material, somewhere between the late 4th and the early 5th centuries. In this block Eliahu (later identified as Paul in the same block of the Strasbourg manuscript⁶⁶) urges his followers to cease observing Jewish religious holidays and instead to substitute a new series of Christian festivals: Easter for Passover, Ascension for Shavuot and so on. Several features of this episode point to an early origin: first, the name of the festivals, both Jewish and Christian, are rendered in Aramaic; and second, the replacement festivals on the Christian side correspond not to the order and names of later, medieval festivals but to a much earlier time when Christian holidays were still in a state of flux; and third, these earlier festivals are attested mostly in the Christian east, from eastern Syria to Babylonia.⁶⁷

A similar argument may be made of another block of material, which shows up in some but not all of the Hebrew manuscripts, namely, the so-called Nestorius account. Stephen Gero has demonstrated that that the story attached to Nestorius in the *TY* was originally told of Barsauma of Nisibis and only later transferred

⁶⁴ See the discussion of the Talmud version in Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 75–81. A serious treatment of the mutual relations among the various versions of this material remains to be done.

⁶⁵ Stökl Ben Ezra, "An Ancient List," 481–96.

⁶⁶ This identification of Elijah with Paul comes at the very end of the passage and is clearly a later gloss; see Krauss, p. 48. In Krauss' Adler manuscript (Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 121), Elijah performs the same heroic work for Israel but is not identified with Paul. In the Cambridge manuscript 557, closely parallel to the Strasbourg manuscript, Elijah is identified with Paul.

⁶⁷ As we should expect by now, this block appears in some manuscripts, e. g., Ms. Strasbourg, but not in all.

to Nestorius.⁶⁸ He concludes that the story “can be traced to Babylonia ... in the second half of the sixth or the early seventh century.”⁶⁹

To be sure, these observations cannot prove that a complete version of the “Acts,” such as we find in the many Wagenseil versions, came into being in the 5th to the 7th centuries. But they do show that important elements existed well before the 9th century (Abogard and Amulo) and before the date of the Aramaic fragments from the Cairo Geniza (11th century).⁷⁰ But there is also good reason to suppose that some versions of the “Acts” came into being in the eastern regions of the Christian world and at roughly the same time at the central Jesus narratives. For a time they may well have traveled in separate channels, but at some point, perhaps after the 9th century, the two blocks came together, probably in the West, to create the complete *TY* versions known under the name of Wagenseil and illustrated by the Strasbourg manuscript.

This new model may also shed light on an aspect of the Aramaic fragments that has not received serious attention. Two of the central stories in those fragments – the account of Jesus’ failed attempt to produce a child, without sexual intercourse, in the emperor’s daughter; and the story of his escape from captivity by turning himself into a bird and flying into the cave of Elijah – do not show up in later Hebrew versions of the *TY*. At the same time, these stories, or at least some of them, do underlie the account of Agobard (“he was imprisoned by Tiberius, whose daughter had given birth to a stone although Jesus had promised that she would produce a son without male intervention”) in the 9th century and the text of Ibn Shaprut (“... a woman who has never given birth I can make pregnant without a husband/man. They said to him, ‘Bring her to us.’ He ordered his overseer; he brought her; they [from the Aramaic fragments it is clear that ‘they’ refers to Jesus and John the Baptist] whispered to her and she became pregnant ...”) in the 14th century.⁷¹ But other elements found in the Aramaic

⁶⁸ Stephen Gero, “The Nestorius Legend in the *Toledoth Yeshu*,” *OrChr* 59 (1975): 108–120. This block, too, appears in some manuscripts but not all.

⁶⁹ Gero, “The Nestorius Legend,” 120.

⁷⁰ I should make it clear that these Aramaic fragments were not first composed in the 11th century but much earlier; these fragments are themselves copies of earlier prototypes.

⁷¹ The passage appears in Ibn Shaprut’s *Even Bohan*, a polemical work aimed at Jews who converted to Christianity. Text and German translation in Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 146–49. At this point in his text, Ibn Shaprut is attacking the Jewish convert, Abner of Burgos, known also as Alfonso of Valladolid, who had become an anti-Jewish zealot following his conversion to Christianity. It is apparent that Abner himself had access to and quoted two versions of the *TY* (one in Hebrew, the other in Aramaic; the citations from the *TY* appear in his polemical writing against Jacob ben Reuven), for the purpose of illustrating Jewish anti-Christian texts. Ibn Shaprut begins his counter-attack by quoting Abners’ text: “So you will find among them (= Jews) many books on the (on the miracles and wonders of Jesus), such as the book they composed on the Deeds Of Jesus the Nostri and that he was in the time of Helena the Queen ... (the quotation from Abner continues in Aramaic). And in the *second book* they say ...” See also the Ph. D. dissertation from the University of Toronto by Libby R. M. Garshowitz, *Shem Tov ben Isaac Ibn Shaprut’s ‘Touchstone’ (Even bohan)* (Toronto, 1974), Chapters 2–10 and the brief discussion

fragments – notably, the trial of Jesus’ disciples and the elaborate accounts of Jesus’ multiple burials – do have parallels in the Hebrew manuscripts. In other words, unless we make the unlikely assumption that later authors of the *TY* made use of our Aramaic fragments but eliminated large portions of them, we must conclude that the Geniza fragments did not serve as direct sources for the later Hebrew manuscripts and cannot serve as models for those manuscripts.⁷² And it goes without saying that many themes in the Hebrew versions, e. g., the cursing of trees by Jesus, do not appear at all in the Aramaic fragments. Thus as far as the majority of the later Hebrew manuscripts are concerned, the Aramaic fragments are a dead-end.

Conclusions

The preliminary conclusions that I would draw so far are these:⁷³

(a) We must imagine that materials – small blocks as well as larger ones – that show up in different versions traveled in separate channels. Thus, for instance, in the case of the Aramaic fragments, their channel did not lead to the later Hebrew versions, although their own channels continued well into the 14th century (Ibn Shaprut). Some channels held stories in common with other channels and stories occasionally crossed over into other channels. As we see from the various manuscripts, the process of transmission produced changes in many details of similar stories (e. g., the trials of Jesus’ five disciples). Thus, among the Aramaic fragments, the text first published and translated by Zeev Falk contains several narrative elements not found in other, parallel fragments⁷⁴ and the two parallel texts published by Louis Ginzberg show numerous differences of detail.⁷⁵

in Hanne Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword. Jewish Polemic against Christianity and the Christians of Spain from 1100–1500* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 151–54.

⁷² In his 1933 article, “Neuere Ansichten,” 44–61, Krauss proposes a different explanation, namely, that Jews did eliminate these passages from the Aramaic texts because they were potentially too offensive (44 f.).

⁷³ Three sentences in Newman’s “The Death of Jesus” read like a condensed version of my conclusions. They drew my attention after I had completed this essay. “*Toledot Yeshu* is not a single composition, so much as ‘a process of extended evolution’ (here quoting Di Segni, *Il vangelo del ghetto*, 218). Nor does the process unfold linearly. Rather, we are witness to the simultaneous development of distinct – though occasionally converging – strands of tradition” (59).

⁷⁴ See Zeev W. Falk, “A New Fragment of the Jewish ‘Life of Jesus,’” *Tarbiz* 46 (1977): 319–22 (in Hebrew) and “A New Fragment of the Jewish ‘Life of Jesus,’” *Imm* 8 (1978): 72–79. Daniel Boyarin published corrections and comments to Falk’s publication, Daniel Boyarin, “A Revised Version and Translation of the ‘Toledot Yeshu’ Fragment,” *Tarbiz* 47 (1978): 249–52. The fragment is T-S n.s. 298.56 in the Cambridge University collection.

⁷⁵ “Ma’aseh Yeshu,” in *Genizah Studies in Memory of Doctor Solomon Schechter* (*Ginzei Schechter*) (3 vols.; ed. Louis Ginzberg; New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1928 [in Hebrew]), 1:324–338. A series of important corrections to Ginzberg’s edition was published by William Horbury, “The Trial of Jesus in Jewish Tradition,” in *The Trial of Je-*

(b) The cumulative evidence discussed above, along with the linguistic arguments presented by Michael Sokoloff in the current volume, points to the likelihood that one version of the “Acts” first took shape in the regions of eastern Christianity – Syria to Babylonia – somewhere between the 5th and the 7th centuries and probably alongside the composition of the central Jesus narratives. A partial confirmation of this conclusion emerges from S. Pines’ comments on connections between the *TY* and Christian-Jewish traditions, probably originating in the region of Mosul (northern Iraq).⁷⁶ Referring to the “Acts” of the *TY*, and in particular to Paul’s role in bringing about the separation of Christians from Jews, Pines writes: “the last section of the *Toldot* seems in great measure to have been composed in reaction to the Jewish Christian views of the events which led to the separation of Judaism and Christianity, and in order to counteract this view.”⁷⁷ Pines’ Jewish Christian text laments the separation, whereas the *TY* celebrates it.

(c) Individual elements in these various channels reach back as far as the early 2nd century, most notably in the Jewish source(s) cited by the pagan philosopher Celsus in his polemic against Christianity, known from Origen’s lengthy response to Celsus (*Contra Celsum*, ca. 250). These elements, all familiar from later versions of the *TY*, include the following: Jesus’ illegitimate birth; accusations of adultery aimed at his mother; Jesus’ sojourn in Egypt during which he learned to perform wonders through magic; Panthera, a soldier, as Jesus’ real father; Jesus’ mother turned out by her fiancé when he learns of her adultery; and so on. Similarly, Tertullian (d. ca. 220), in his *De spectaculis* 30.5–6, recounts a brief tale that sounds very much like the central stories of the *TY*.⁷⁸ In neither case, can it be determined if Celsus and Tertullian derived their information from written Jewish sources, but this latter possibility cannot be ruled out.⁷⁹

(d) As a general rule we should not make too much of the distinction between oral and written stages in the development of the *TY*. Not all books in antiquity were written. Whether their sources were written or not, Celsus and Tertullian clearly knew something like an early version of the *TY*. Moreover, long after the

sus: *Cambridge Studies in Honour of C. F. D. Moule* (ed. Ernst Bammel; Naperville: Allenson, 1970), 103–11. The manuscripts are respectively Cambridge T.-S. Misc. 35.87 and 35.88.

⁷⁶ Shlomo Pines, “The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries According to a New Source,” *PIASH* 2 (1968): 237–307.

⁷⁷ Pines, *ibid.*, 279.

⁷⁸ So also Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 3: “Den ganzen Inhalt der jüdischen ‘Schmähschrift’ ... kennt auch bereits Tertullian ...” He specifies the major elements in Tertullian’s account as follows: Jesus as son of a carpenter; as son of a prostitute; Jesus as violator of the Sabbath and a practitioner of magic; details of the crucifixion; burial in a garden; the role of Judas in taking Jesus’ body; the plan of the disciples to steal Jesus’ body in order to claim that he had risen from the dead.

⁷⁹ In a recent paper, as yet unpublished (“Did Celsus’ Jew belong to the milieu of Jewish scholarship in Alexandria?”), Maren Niehoff has argued persuasively that the Jewish source used by Celsus was written.

first written texts appeared, oral traditions persisted alongside these texts and continued to influence them.

(e) Stephen Gero has pointed to a Christian martyr text, the martyrdom of Conon (5th century?) as relevant to the dating of early versions of the *TY*.⁸⁰ The Roman prefect addresses the recalcitrant Christians as follows: "I have learnt accurately from the Jews what his, i. e., Jesus', family was, the works he showed forth to his people. They brought me his accounts (*hupomnēmata*) and have read (*epanagnōsan*) them to me ..."⁸¹ Further to the dating question, Newman, along with others, notes that the location of Jesus' trial in Tiberias, in the Aramaic fragments, points to a date after the 3rd century when Tiberias became the new center of Jewish activity.⁸² Taken together, these bits of information point not to a single, stable and integrated story but rather accounts with different elements at different places and times.⁸³

(f) The evidence from Origen's *Contra Celsum* and Tertullian's *De spectaculis*, cited above, points to another important conclusion. That evidence, geographically speaking, is Western. This fact points to the likelihood that separate versions, or elements of the "Acts" originated or circulated in the Western and Eastern of the Christian and Jewish worlds. The Peter stories offer an interesting test case. Several authors have taken the reference to the tower constructed for Peter in numerous versions of the "Acts" as pointing to the origin of the story in Syria, that is, the tower is taken to be a reference to the well-known phenomenon of Syrian Christian stylites or pillar-sitters.⁸⁴ But various considerations point instead to a Western origin for this motif. First, the figure Peter was much more important in the West than in the East. Second, the story speaks not of a pillar

⁸⁰ Stephen Gero, "Jewish Polemic in the Martyrdom of Pionii and a 'Jesus' Passage from the Talmud," *JJS* 29 (1978): 165, n. 5. See also the brief discussion in Newman, "The Death of Jesus," 61.

⁸¹ See the translation and brief discussion in Herbert Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 188–91.

⁸² Newman, "The Death of Jesus," 61.

⁸³ Newman, *ibid.*, has pointed to two Coptic texts, both dating from the fifth or sixth centuries, both of which look like Christian responses to the *TY*. In the "Book of the Resurrection of Christ by Bartholomew the Apostle," Philogenes plays the role of the "good" gardener to Judas' "bad" gardener in the *TY*. Mary's question, "If you have taken away his body, tell me where you have laid it" reads like the question put to the sages in various versions of the *TY*. Further, the Jews are said to have taken Jesus' body by night and buried it in a garden. Philogenes then gives the "true" account of what happened to Jesus' body: "the Father came forth out of the height with His tabernacle of light ... and raised Him up from the dead." Newman comments that "'Bartholomew' reads like a Christian rejoinder to the antagonistic claims of *Toledot Yeshu*" (68). The Gospel of Gamaliel, likewise of the fifth or sixth century, reports that Jesus' body mysteriously disappeared while the guards slept; when they awoke they found it buried below water in a garden. When the spot is examined a body is found, along with wrappings from Jesus' corpse; but 'neutral' witnesses reply that the body is that of the robber who was crucified with Jesus. Again Newman comments: "the Christian apocryphon offers its readers a denatured Jewish tradition ..." (71).

⁸⁴ So Newman, "The Death of Jesus," 60, n. 7.

but of a tower. Third, Peter sat *in* the tower, not on it. Fourth, a drawing based on frescoes from the original church of St. Peter in Rome portrays the apostle, holding his key, and standing in front of a tower, while the figure of Simon Magus plunges earthward from the sky.⁸⁵ Fifth, as Légasse has pointed out, numerous details in the Peter story (e. g., his name given as *san pyetro* and his designation as *papa*) indicate an Italian, and more specifically a Roman setting. Finally, there is the curious reduplication of stories about different Jewish heroes (variously Peter, Eliahu, Paul and Yochanan) in the same manuscript, each of whom plays the role of pseudo-disciple of Jesus and each of whom carries out the same task of separating Christians from Jews. This reduplication points to the existence of separate tales about different Jewish heroes; these tales traveled in different channels of transmission and were joined only at a later date. Thus, for example, in the Strasbourg manuscript, Eliahu first comes to Israel's rescue.⁸⁶ That episode is followed immediately by the Nestorius/Bar Sauma account, which then leads directly to the lengthy story of Peter's heroic efforts on behalf of the Jews, with apparent disregard for the fact that just a few lines earlier Eliahu had already accomplished the same deed. We may thus speculate that the Paul version in the "Acts" originated in the east and migrated westward where it was eventually inserted, somewhat clumsily, alongside the Peter version.⁸⁷

(g) We may also speculate that the "Acts" in their eastern guise traveled to the West at the same time and via the same routes that brought the Babylonian Talmud and other rabbinic literature to the West in the ninth and tenth centuries.⁸⁸ Once arrived in the West, the two (and possibly more) traditions were merged, producing the mixed results revealed in the later Hebrew manuscripts.

⁸⁵ The drawing was made by a papal archivist and represents a fresco created in Old St Peter's under Pope John VII (705–7). The archivist's drawing is preserved in the Vatican Library, manuscript *Barberini lat.* 2733, fol. 89 recto. For a discussion see Peter Harbison, *Pilgrimage in Ireland: The Monuments and the People* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1991), 170. Légasse, "Légende juive," 112, presents further literary evidence of a tower in Rome associated with Peter and Simon Magus. I am grateful to my student, Christopher Sahner, for this reference.

⁸⁶ At the conclusion of the Eliahu account the Strasbourg adds "and the Christians call him, i. e., Eliahu, Paul." This final comment is clearly a secondary addition. In the Adler manuscript from Yemen (Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 118–128), Eliahu is the hero but there is no identification with Paul. See the illuminating discussion of the Eliahu/Elijah connection in Légasse, "La légende juive," 104 f., Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 176 f., discusses the various permutations in the names of these rescuers of Israel.

⁸⁷ This solution seems preferable to the one proposed by Légasse, "La légende juive," 103, according to which the Paul version preceded the Peter version and served as its model.

⁸⁸ So, among others, Kenneth Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 138. In an important essay, Robert Bonfil has argued that the arrival of Jewish texts, including the *TY*, in France during or just prior to the time of Agobard, betray a primarily Palestinian character; see "Cultural and Religious Traditions in Ninth-Century French Jewry," in *Jewish Intellectual History in the Middle Ages* (ed. Joseph Dan; Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1994 [Binah, vol. 3]), 1–17.

(h) Finally, along with Newman⁸⁹ and Di Segni, we may dismiss the notion of a single point of origin for the *Toledot Yeshu*. There was no Ur-*TY*. Di Segni speaks of the quest for the “mythic” Ur-*Toledot* as a false problem and a useless academic exercise. Our versions of the *TY* are the products of multiple initial nuclei and a long process of convergence and accretion.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Newman, “The Death of Jesus,” 61 n. 76.

⁹⁰ Di Segni, *Il vangelo del ghetto*, 217 f.

Polymorphic Helena – *Toledot Yeshu* as a Palimpsest of Religious Narratives and Identities*

Galit Hasan-Rokem

Miscomprehension, incomprehension, dead letters, unread masterpieces, absolute heterogeneity of meaning – these are some of the perils of writing in the contact zone. (Marie-Louise Pratt)

The presently available texts that have been understood to compose the corpus of *Toledot Yeshu* impress and puzzle the reader with their intense variability as well as the inconsistency in the logic of the plot and the lack of regularity of the characterization in the texts of the corpus.¹ The inherent irony of the saying “la donna è mobile” notwithstanding, it should not be a surprise that the female figures identified as Helena, including the variants Heleni, Helene, Helenit and Eleni, are a prime example of both the variability and the inconsistency exhibited in *Toledot Yeshu*. Helena is, indeed, one of the most polymorphous figures populating the diverse and scattered *Toledot Yeshu* texts. In the context of some of the texts that will be included in the following discussion, polymorphism means more than a mere formal aspect of literary characterization and may have

* Without the conference of November 2009 at Princeton this article would probably never have been completed, for which I am deeply grateful to the organizers (I hope they are too ...). My work on “Helena” has been inspired by many colleagues, friends and students, especially Oded Irshai, Israel J. Yuval, Tali Artman-Partok, Haim Weiss – all mistakes are mine. I am grateful to Daniel R. Schwartz and Michael Satlow who carefully read the manuscript and corrected many mistakes. My temporary home at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago provided bountiful sources of wisdom. The scholarly environment of the Scholion Center for Interdisciplinary Research in Jewish Studies at the Mandel Institute of Jewish Studies of the Hebrew University has been ideal in every sense. I am especially indebted to the administrative and technical support provided by its wonderful staff. I thank Sharon Katz for outstanding research assistance and Matthijs den Dulk in addition to the same, for making Rabbi Hanina’s words in *b. Ta’anit 7a* come true.

¹ The main resource until the completion of the Princeton *Toledot Yeshu* database is still Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1902; repr.: Hildesheim: Olms, 1977), based on a copy from the University Library of Erlangen. Some bibliographical and textual aspects have since been updated: Riccardo Di Segni, “La tradizione testuale delle *Toledoth Yeshu*: Manoscritti, edizioni a stampa, classificazione,” *La Rassegna mensile di Israel* 50 (1984): 83–100. Separate publications of *Toledot Yeshu* texts not included in Krauss’ compilation will be respectively referred to.

deep religious and ontological resonance, in the sense that the ability to appear in many forms may in and of itself characterize holiness and even divinity.²

I was initially drawn to read *Toledot Yeshu* through the lens of the Helena figure because of my earlier interest in a woman bearing the same name in rabbinic literature, namely Queen Helene of Adiabene.³ I then realized that the Helena(s) in *Toledot Yeshu* also provided an exemplary object of research along the methodological lines known and preferred by me, namely the study of narratives in inter-religious and inter-cultural perspective as vehicles of exchange and dialogue (not necessarily irenic), the consideration of the oral and popular trajectories of cultural creativity and transmission, and the feminist perspective of ancient texts traditionally viewed as productions of patriarchal institutions.⁴ These methodological aspects also enable me to view *Toledot Yeshu* in the context of the wider theoretical perspective pervading most of my scholarly work, that is, Jews and Jewishness as a thought figure of mobility and instability especially as articulated by Jews as well as Christians in the context of Christian civilizations and its dialectic tension with utopian yearnings for eternal stability.⁵

Five not terribly surprising observations have emerged from this study: 1. *Toledot Yeshu* cannot be viewed as one work of literature, but must, instead, be seen as a quite loosely related complex of texts that have been compiled into some kind of an associatively connected whole only by early modern and modern re-

² E.g. The Acts of John, Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha* (trans. R. McL. Wilson; vol. 1: Gospels and related writings; vol 2: Writings relating to the Apostles, Apocalypses and related subjects; rev. ed.; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991–1992), 2:180–181; Jan Bremmer, “Marginalia Manichaica,” *ZPE* 39 (1980): 31 (29–34), refers to Acts of John, Acts of Peter and Acts of Thomas; Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa, “Form(s) of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ,” *HTR* 76 (1983): 281 (269–88).

³ *m. Yoma* 3,10; *m. Nazir* 3,6; *t. Yoma* 2,3; *t. Sukkah* 1,1; *b. Sukkah* 2b–3a; *Bereshit Rabba* 46.11 (Theodor-Albeck, 467). Tal Ilan (*Integrating Women into Second Temple History* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001], 46, 66–71) believes that she was an adherent of Bet Shammai.

⁴ E.g. Galit Hasan-Rokem, “Narratives in Dialogue: A Folk Literary Perspective on Inter-Religious Contacts in the Holy Land in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity,” in *Sharing the Sacred: Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land* (eds. Arie Kofsky and Guy G. Stroumsa; Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1998), 109–30; eadem, *Tales of the Neighborhood: Jewish Narrative Dialogues in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

⁵ E.g. Galit Hasan-Rokem, “*Homo viator et narrans* – Medieval Jewish Voices in the European Narrative of the Wandering Jew,” in *Europäische Ethnologie und Folklore im internationalen Kontext: Festschrift für Leander Petzoldt* (ed. Ingo Schneider; Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1999), 93–102; eadem, “*Ex Oriente Fluxus*: The Wandering Jew – Oriental Crossings of the Paths of Europe,” in *L’orient dans l’histoire religieuse de l’Europe: L’invention des origines* (eds. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and John Scheid; Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 153–64; eadem, “Material Mobility vs. Concentric Cosmology in the *Sukkah*: The House of the Wandering Jew or a Ubiquitous Temple” in *Things: Material Religion and the Topography of Divine Spaces* (eds. Dick Houtman and Birgit Meyers; New York: Fordham University Press, forthcoming).

search.⁶ Hillel Newman has beautifully formulated this fact as follows: “*Toledot Yeshu* is not a single composition, so much as ‘a process of extended evolution’ (quoting Di Segni),” adding the all important observation “Nor does the process unfold linearly.”⁷ This accounts for the variation and inconsistency and almost totally forecloses a consideration of the various texts as regularly transmitted in written form. 2. Even if we assume that in most cases the authors or narrators of the *Toledot Yeshu* were Jews, the heavy dependence on identifiable Christian sources may explain the fact that in many cases the narrative does not necessarily depict the Jews in favorable light and that many Christian claims about the Jews’ conspiring against Jesus and his disciples and followers are confirmed. 3. The

⁶ Stephen Gero, “The Stern Master and His Wayward Disciple: A ‘Jesus’ Story in the Talmud and in Christian Hagiography,” *JSJ* 25 (1994): 287–311 calls it “an extraordinarily fluid text” (308). Incidentally, exactly the same term was used in May 2010 by Hans Dieter Betz to describe the *Acts of Paul* at a seminar led by Margaret Mitchell at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. A similar history of late and external canonization famously characterizes, e. g. *Thousand and One Nights* also known as *Arabian Nights*. Cf. Christine M. Thomas, “Stories without Texts and Without Authors: The Problem of Fluidity in Ancient Novelistic Texts and Early Christian Literature,” in *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative* (eds. Ronald F. Hock, J. Bradley Chance and Judith Perkins; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1998), 273–91. See also eadem, “Revivifying Resurrection Accounts: Techniques of Composition and Rewriting in the *Acts of Peter*,” in *The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: Magic, Miracles and Gnosticism* (ed. Jan N. Bremmer; Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 65–83.

I suggest that the so called book *Toledot Yeshu* actually never existed and unlike other examples of multiple versions for a text, there was never a process of selection producing a privileged version. Thus appropriately, the first mention of the *Toledot Yeshu* is not in a Jewish text but by Agobard of Lyon, on which topic see further in the article by Peter Schäfer in this volume. Anna Beth Langenwaller, *Agobard of Lyon: An Exploration of Carolingian Jewish-Christian Relations* (Ph.D. diss.; Toronto: University of Toronto, 2009) (cited 11 September 2010). Online: https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/19051/1/Langenwaller_Anna_B_200911_PhD_thesis.pdf. According to Langenwaller the *TY* known to Agobard “seems . . . to be a version of the *Toledoth Yeshu* which has otherwise never been written down, or has since been lost” (169). Following Stephan Gero she suggests that “(t)he various versions of the *Toledoth Yeshu* began as oral tales during Late Antiquity, drawing upon materials in the Talmud and a knowledge of New Testament writings, both canonical and apocryphal” and accepts his dating “perhaps in the sixth century.”

Similarly to the Talmudic mentions of Jesus that remain sporadic and fragmented, Jews seem in general not to have devoted full-fledged literary compositions to their negative feelings about the person of Jesus, but rather composed polemic texts against Christian theological precepts, mostly much later than Agobard’s times, and in central Europe rather than in Byzantine and Muslim countries. See for instance Daniel J. Lasker’s review of David Berger’s edition of the “*Nizzahon vetus*” in *Speculum* 56 (1981): 583–85, esp. 583; Daniel Lasker and Sarah Stroumsa, *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest: Introduction, Translations and Commentary* (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1996), 14; see also my review of Schäfer’s book referred to below (n. 21). The text published by Lasker and Stroumsa invites further discussion with regard to the Nestorius episode in a few manuscripts of *TY*, cf. Stephen Gero, “The Nestorius legend in the *Toledoth Yeshu*,” *OrChr* 59 (1975): 108–120.

⁷ Hillel I. Newman, “The Death of Jesus in the *Toledot Yeshu* Literature,” *JTS* 50 (1999): 59. Newman privileges, unlike me, a strictly polemical line of interpretation of the *Toledot Yeshu* literature, possibly correlating to his focus on the, earlier, “Pilate” versions of the narratives and my focus on the “Helena” versions.

traditional attribution of *Toledot Yeshu* to Jewish authors should be revised to include both historically identifiable marginal modes of Jewish identity and cultural practice, as well as areas of intercultural communication between Jews and others, most probably Christians. Notably, the Christians to be taken into account for this discussion naturally also encompass a great variation, including variants that have been termed as heretical in certain institutional formations. 4. The “textual milieu” where *Toledot Yeshu*⁸ best fits in is neither Rabbinic literature nor the canonical gospels, but rather some texts of the early Christian literature known as apocryphal, both the gospels and in particular some of the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, which carry on the prose tradition of the Hellenistic novel,⁹ which has also been found to reverberate, although in less consistent modes in late antique Jewish, rabbinic, literature.¹⁰ The presence of satire, parody, and the grotesque in the context of sacred literature and ritual is prevalent although often considered subversive and thus repressed.¹¹ 5. It is all about Jerusalem.

In the following pages I shall try to lay out some textual evidence for my conclusions.

Multiple distribution, one of the main explanations for variability in the transmission of narratives, has in folklore research been identified as one of the distinguishing features of folk literature. In fact, this mode of distribution is common to most forms of verbal communication preceding the invention of the printing press. Manuscripts, like oral performances of texts, exhibit the instability of verbal forms even in cases where canonization has occurred, and all the more in non-canonized texts. The variation in the texts that have been compiled under the moniker *TY*, seems, however to exceed the concepts of both variant and version that serve in the study of multiple distribution.¹²

⁸ Hereafter quoted in the text as *TY*.

⁹ Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha*. For the connection with the Hellenistic novel, e.g.: 2:78; see also: Hans-Josef Klauck, *The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* (trans. Brian McNeil; Waco, Tx.: Baylor University Press, 2008), 7–14; Oliver Ehlen, *Leitbilder und romanhafte Züge in apokryphen Evangelientexten: Untersuchungen zur Motivik und Erzählstruktur* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2004) who employs a reconceptualized version of Rosa Söder’s typological model from the nineteen thirties to make the comparison especially with regard to the *Protoevangelium Iacobi* and *Acta Pilati* (A and B recensions).

¹⁰ E.g.: Joshua Levinson, “The Tragedy of Romance: A Case of Literary Exile,” *HTR* 89 (1996): 227–44; David Stern, “The Captive Woman: Hellenization, Greco-Roman Erotic Narrative, and Rabbinic Literature,” *Poetics Today* 19 (1998): 91–127; Daniel Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 220–22.

¹¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (trans. Hélène Iswolsky; Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1984), 7–15.

¹² A prime example of a research methodology using these terms is the geographical-historical (“Finnish”) method in folk narrative research, based on the concepts of “motif” and “tale type” which constitute standard forms by which variation is assessed. Antti Aarne, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography* (trans. and enlarged by Stith Thompson; 2d rev. ed.; Folklore Fellows Communications 184; Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1961);

Even given the fact that oral and other popular narratives are often transmitted without any title, the great range of variation in the *TY* corpus of the titles introducing some but not all of the versions may serve as an example of the phenomenon of multiple distribution resulting in variation. While the variation in titles is neither the most substantial nor the most significant of the differences between the various versions of *TY*, it is a concise example of them: *ma'ase yeshu*,¹³ *ma'aseh de-'oto ve-'et beno*,¹⁴ *ma'aseh yeshu ha-notsri*,¹⁵ *'uvda' de-yeshu bar pandera'*,¹⁶ are some of the alternatives suggested in the material. The terms *ma'aseh* and *'uvda'* are both the most frequent respectively Hebrew and Aramaic introductory formulae for narratives in rabbinic literature. Although the *TY* otherwise bears only few marks of connection with rabbinic literature, this would seem to point in that direction. On the other hand the terminological parallel with Acts – *πράξεις*¹⁷ – is also suggestive because of the striking connections between some of the *TY* texts and some of the Christian Acts, especially the Acts of Peter, but also with the Acts of John and Acts of Paul, as well as the canonical Acts of the Apostles.

One of the ways to approach the affinities between *TY* and the above mentioned Christian texts is through the concept of genre. Genre is probably the literary category most often used to classify and to compare literary texts. The criteria for defining a particular genre vary according to the theoretical background of each particular scholarly practice. The scope of this article does not allow for a thorough discussion of the genre issue and I shall thus resort to a phenomenological descriptive genre terminology based more on contents than on analytically stringent structural, functional or contextual criteria, rooted in the study of narratives in classical rabbinic literature, and based on the scholarly corpus of folk literary studies.¹⁸ This theoretical background does not mean that I consider

Hans-Jörg Uther, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography Based on the System of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson* (3 vols.; Folklore Fellows Communications 284–86; Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2004).

¹³ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 118.

¹⁴ Krauss, *ibid.*, 64.

¹⁵ Krauss, *ibid.*, 38.

¹⁶ Krauss, *ibid.*, 146.

¹⁷ NB: *ma'aseh* and *'uvda'* are very common terms in Rabbinic literature and their occurrences cannot be limited to a particular connection with *praxeis*. Moreover, unlike *praxeis* in the plural, both *ma'aseh* and *'uvda'* are in the singular. One should also not forget that *praxeis* as a literary genre is based on classical examples, from the telling about the acts and deeds of the hero Heracles, continuing with many later Greco-Roman examples, e.g. the Acts of Alexander. The Latin terms *res gestae* and *historia rerum gestarum* likewise connect narratives with activity.

¹⁸ Galit Hasan-Rokem, *Web of Life: Folklore and Midrash in Rabbinic Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Eli Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1999).

all narrative in rabbinic literature folk literature,¹⁹ certainly not in the sociologically stereotypical view of folk literature as the literature of the uneducated that fortunately has almost disappeared from scholarly discourse. The phenomenological similarities between the largely orally created scholarly discourse of the Rabbis,²⁰ transmitted for centuries in manuscript form, and various modes of folk literary creativity render, I suggest, many of the research methods of folk literature applicable for the study of Rabbinic literature.

A review of traditional genres extant in late antique Jewish texts that would seem the feasible point of reference for the *TY* texts, do not disclose genre models that will suffice for interpreting the genre character of this particular text. Certainly the major corpora of Jewish texts of the era, the Talmuds and the *midrashim*, provide no firm parallels to the narrative formations recognizable in the *TY*.²¹ Neither the typical midrashic narrative based on a scriptural passage, nor the characteristic enhancement of a biblical motif;²² neither the everyday life account exemplifying a halakhic discussion²³ nor a biographical or hagiographical account about the sages and their milieu,²⁴ a parable or fable,²⁵ or even a historical account of Jewish matters;²⁶ the *TY* texts echo other tunes than the ones known from the classical Rabbinic ones.

The genre of the *TY* is, however, not unique, but its cognates are, as has been briefly indicated above, to be found elsewhere, more exactly in the writings of the early Church.²⁷ Most closely it resembles the Apocryphal Acts of the Apos-

¹⁹ Daniel Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis*, 195–98 conducts an interesting dialogue with my method of folk literary research of Rabbinic narratives, generally representing it adequately, an overly essentializing footnote later in the book (278, n. 69) notwithstanding.

²⁰ Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Foreword by Jacob Neusner; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Martin S. Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism 200 BCE–400 CE* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Yaakov Sussman, “Torah she-beal-pe pshuta ke-mashma’ah: koho shel kutso shel yod,” *Mehqere Talmud* 3 (2005): 209–384.

²¹ Cf. the recent work on Jesus in the Talmud, amply referring to the vast preceding research on the topic: Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), cf. my review of the book in *JQR* 99 (2009): 113–19.

²² E. g. Joshua Levinson, “Dialogical Reading in the Rabbinic Exegetical Narrative,” *Poetics Today* 25 (2004): 497–528; idem, “Literary Approaches to Midrash,” in *Current Trends in the Study of Midrash* (ed. Carol Bakhos; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 189–226, esp. 207 ff.; Richard Kalmin, “Midrash and Social History,” in Bakhos, *Current Trends*, 133–58.

²³ E. g. Barry S. Wimpfheimer, *Narrating the Law: A Poetics of Talmudic Legal Stories* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

²⁴ E. g. Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories: Narrative Art, Composition, and Culture* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

²⁵ David Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).

²⁶ E. g. Hasan-Rokem, *Web of Life*, 146–90.

²⁷ I am using the singular form when discussing *TY* only for convenience, without thereby confessing its unity as a literary work, as stated above.

tles.²⁸ Notably, the kinship between the Christian Apocrypha and *TY* has been recognized by several scholars.²⁹

TY thus introduces into the inter-religious discourse not a dichotomy between gospel and a satire thereof,³⁰ but rather the more diversified scale from gospel as *kerygma* through less canonized and less sacramental forms of narrative motifs of the gospels and the acts. In these forms narrative mechanisms dominate the discourse, abounding in miracle, magic (and once again displaying the interchangeability of the two),³¹ and absurd and grotesque, until at the end of the range satire with its polemical edge appears.

This picture enables – indeed necessitates – us to see *TY* not in the narrow paradigm of polemics, but in the culturally wider context of shared narratives with changing contextualizations, ranging from outright polemic to parody, adaptation, and borrowing – and allowing for multiple combinations of all these.³²

²⁸ I am aware of the caveat formulated by Stephen Gero in his outstandingly informative article “Apocryphal Gospels: A Survey of Textual and Literary Problems,” in *ANRW* II 25.5:3969–3996. On 3995–3996 he states the following: “In fact one must guard against an assumption that ‘apocryphal gospels’ or ‘post-canonical’ traditions represent a distinct literary genre, and that one can make generalizations applicable to the genre on the basis of more or less random sampling.” Gero reveals the target of his attack in note 167: “So E. P. Sanders, *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition* (Cambridge 1969), 258–259, asserting a preference for direct discourse in ‘apocryphal’ accounts, compared to the use of indirect discourse in the synoptic discourse.” A further target is revealed in the closing sentences of the article where he regrets the “sensationalism” involved in the publication of some of the Nag Hammadi materials. Since the concept of genre is here not applied for the classification of the entire corpus of early Christian or late antique Jewish texts, but rather to point out similarities between texts transcending the lines of the canonical and the non-canonical (the NT Acts of the Apostles are also included in the discussion, as we shall see) as well as the borders of religious identity, I don’t think its present use actually conflicts with Gero’s views. Contra Gero’s view: Matthew Baldwin, *Whose Acts of Peter?: Text and Historical Context of the Actus Vercellenses* (WUNT 2.196; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 23 makes a categorical distinction between canonical and apocryphal texts with regard to structure as well as distribution. For contacts with Jewish texts see also Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemics of Nestor the Priest*, 16, about the employing of some apocryphal Acts in the Jewish polemical text *Qissa* that they published.

²⁹ Gero, “Apocryphal Gospels,” 3969–3996, without necessarily formulating the kinship in terms of genre; Hans-Josef Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction* (trans. Brian McNeil; London: T & T Clark International/Continuum, 2003), 211–20 who goes very far by including *TY* in his review of apocryphal gospels.

³⁰ This does not necessarily contradict Amos Funkenstein’s dichotomous proposal to read *TY* as a counter-history in his “History, Counterhistory and Narrative,” in *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 22–49, esp. 39–40, since his discussion relates to the text in the context of a generalized paradigm running from Manetho, through Marx to Nazism, whereas I am addressing the phenomenological particularity of the concrete literary formations.

³¹ The literature addressing this issue is abundant, some of it I have reviewed in my “Did the Rabbis Recognize the Category of Folk Narrative?” *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 3 (2009): 19–55.

³² For the discussion of adaptation to varying contexts folk narrative research has created the concept of ecotype (“oikotyp”) that I shall elaborate on below.

Looking back for roots of the relevant literary modes, the apocryphal Gospels and especially Acts, which have been mentioned as relevant for the comparison with *TY*³³ may be seen as partly inspired by the Jewish Hellenistic genre of the rewritten Bible, offering alternative plots to the canonical text.³⁴ In addition to the Hebrew Bible, the Jewish Hellenistic literature – with its manifold inspirations from classical Greek and Hellenistic sources – constitutes one of the main shared foundations upon which both the writings of the early Church and the literature of the Rabbis extensively draw, especially in their more imaginative and literarily rich parts.

Since the approach developed here addresses questions of inter-religious, inter-cultural, as well as trans-religious and trans-cultural phenomena, it may be useful to employ the concept that Marie Louise Pratt has fruitfully theorized as “contact zones,”³⁵ in her own words “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power.”³⁶ One has to assume that the power relations were indeed asymmetrical in any or all of the locations where *TY* was created, although it is not clear whether it was in a Muslim or Christian realm.³⁷ The case that Pratt analyzes in her 1991 essay exemplifies how an indigenous Andean “took over the official Spanish genre (chronicle) for his own ends.” Although *TY* surely does not resemble the genre of autoethnography and unlike the Spanish text of the conquered that she analyzes *TY* is not written in the hegemonic language but rather in the language of the subaltern, one can discern in it too “a conquered subject using the conquerors (sic) language³⁸ to construct a parodic, oppositional representation of the conquerors (sic) own speech.”³⁹

³³ As mentioned, mainly the (canonical) *Acts of the Apostles* and the (apocryphal) *Acts of Peter, Acts of Paul and Acts of John*.

³⁴ James Kugel, *In Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992); Steven D. Fraade, “Rewritten Bible and Rabbinic Midrash as Commentary,” in Bakchos, *Current Trends*, 59–78; idem, “Rabbinic Midrash and Ancient Jewish Biblical Interpretation,” in *The Cambridge Guide to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature* (eds. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 99–120.

³⁵ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

³⁶ eadem, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” *Profession* 91 (1991): 33–40. Cited 11 September 2010. Online: http://www.class.uidaho.edu/thomas/English_506/Arts_of_the_Contact_Zone.pdf.

³⁷ Cf. Andrew S. Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004) has theoretically illuminated his discussion of the discourse on Jews by Late Antique Christians with Pratt’s insights.

³⁸ The term language must in the case of *TY* be understood in the wider sense of cultural vocabulary.

³⁹ Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone.” Theoretically this discussion could be carried even further by relating to Homi Bhaba’s concept of “mimicry” and James Scott’s model of “hidden scripts” in similar situations, which however must be postponed to another occasion.

Folklore research has developed a concept to interpret adaptations of cultural materials emerging in contact zones that, although originally quite oblivious to the socio-political context of the contact and especially the power relations in which they are embedded, may still be useful for thinking on *TY* in the Jewish-Christian "contact zone." It may also be fruitful to think that the contact zone does not always mark an interface between recognized groupings, but, possibly, cuts through some of the groups that are usually thought of as intact.⁴⁰

The concept of ecotype was formulated by the Swedish folklorist Carl Wilhelm von Sydow⁴¹ and elaborated by Finnish Lauri Honko⁴² and has proven one of the most versatile analytical concepts produced by folklore scholarship.⁴³ Von Sydow engaged a botanical idiom referring to the adaptation of plants to new and strange ecological conditions in order to describe the way adaptation occurs in elements of tradition that are transmitted to new environments. Unlike the earlier dominant geographical-historical school in folklore research that emphasized the quest for the original form and attempted to reconstruct lines of transmission,⁴⁴ von Sydow's study of the ecotype focused on the process of adaptation in a specific *habitus* (to borrow an especially useful term from Pierre Bourdieu).⁴⁵

Due to its many affinities with non-canonical narratives mentioned above, *TY* may be viewed as a particular ecotypical formation of the life of Jesus, adapted to the incompatibility between Jewish beliefs and some of the beliefs underlying the Christian gospel narrative, such as the divinity of Jesus and virgin birth.⁴⁶ Honko's elaboration and refinement of the concept distinguishes between the adaptations to the morphology of the milieu and adaptations to the morphology of the tradition on one hand and functional adaptation on the other hand. The only one of his more specific categories applicable to the analysis of the utterly

⁴⁰ Jewish-Christian, at least; however the Jewish-Muslim and the Christian-Muslim contact zones may have to be considered as well, as I shall point out later.

⁴¹ Primarily in an oral presentation in 1932, and then in writing: Carl Wilhelm von Sydow, "Geography and Folk-tale Oicotypes," *Béaloideas* 4 (1934): 344–55; idem, *Selected Papers on Folklore* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1948), 44–59. Regrettably, recent publications make it very clear that von Sydow's position towards Nazism in Germany was far from steadfastly critical: Nils-Arvid Bringéus, *Carl Wilhelm von Sydow: A Swedish Pioneer in Folklore* (trans. John Irons; Folklore Fellows Communications 298; Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2009), 178–86.

⁴² Lauri Honko, "Four Forms of Adaptation to Tradition," *Studia Fennica* 26 (1981): 19–33.

⁴³ Galit Hasan-Rokem, "Ökotyp," *Encyclopädie des Märchens* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000).

⁴⁴ Kaarle Krohn, *Folklore Methodology* (trans. Roger L. Welch; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971).

⁴⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, "Structures, Habitus, Practices," in idem, *The Logic of Practice* (trans. Richard Nice; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 52–79.

⁴⁶ The application of the concept of ecotype to the variation of the Helena figures in the *TY* texts will be seriously limited by the meager contextual information that we have about the versions with regard to time and place of composition.

context-less *TY* texts is the adaptation to the internal morphology of the tradition. The ecotypical aspect of the Helena figures in the various versions can thus be investigated with reference to the narrative context, i. e., what other figures, motifs and narrative elements surround the specific ecotypical formation.

An attempt to introduce and explicate the appearances of the queen named Helena in the *TY* texts in a systematic manner soon seems like a dog running after its own tail. One relatively concrete method is to investigate the chronological markers associated with the figure. Several texts date the events opening the narrative with a biblically garbed rhetorical formula situating the events under the rule of Queen Helene, without however giving a clue as to the historical context of her own lifetime, leaving the reader to conclude that she was simply a contemporary of the events recounted, i. e. the lifetime of Jesus:

Cod. Hebr. 2240 (Oxford, Bodleiana): “In the fifth year of Eleni.”

Cod. Hebr. B. H. 17 (Leipziger Stadtbibliothek) and Cod. Hebr. 2178, with orthographical changes: “In the fifth year of Queen Helene a great decree was set upon the enemies of Israel.”⁴⁷

The version titled *tam u-mu’ad* that was re-published by Michael Krupp: “In the year 3708 after the creation of the world, that is the year 320 after the founding of the second Temple, Queen Helene of the seed of the Hasmonean dynasty rules and reigns over Israel and Jerusalem.”

Other versions insert Helena’s presence at later stages of the narrative.

In the manuscript titled by Krauss Ms. Vindobona⁴⁸ Helena enters after the complicated birth story: “In those days all the land was under the rule of Queen Helene, the wife of Kostantin (sic).”⁴⁹ In this manuscript she plays a diverse and active role.

Scholars have named some of the versions of the *Toledot Yeshu* “the Helena versions” after her name, and in those versions she as a rule is the legal authority. As clear cut as her characterization may seem, Queen Helena of *Toldot Yeshu* is however a multiply ambiguous figure. Unlike other historical figures appearing in the narrative who are evidently identifiable from the New Testament – Mary, Jesus, Pilate, Peter, Simon, Paul and even Joseph and Yohanan (John) – Queen Helena does not appear in the New Testament. Any attempt to identify her with a historical figure must take into account at least two possibilities: Queen Helene of the kingdom of Adiabene – roughly a contemporary of the events supposedly narrated in the *Toldot Yeshu* – who converted to Judaism, on the one hand, and

⁴⁷ “The enemies of Israel” is a periphrastic expression referring to the Jews themselves, here however possibly ambivalently also referring to Christians. The ambivalence is characteristic of *TY*.

⁴⁸ I shall use Ms. Vienna below.

⁴⁹ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 68, has *Kostantino* as a variant reading from the Gaster manuscript.

Helena Augusta, the mother of Constantine the Great, who began the Christianization of the Roman Empire in the fourth century on the other hand.

The presence of these two possibilities constitutes a hermeneutical palimpsest in the heart of the text, pointing at other ambiguities and conundrums of meaning emerging from this complex and uneasy work of literature.⁵⁰ The two historical queens echoed by the literary figure of Queen Helena of the *TY* involve three various geographical locations: northern Mesopotamia, Constantinople and the Holy Land. Incidentally these are also the major locales to which the emergence of the *TY* text itself has been attributed. This is another ambiguity or tension in addition to the obvious chronological bifurcation that the two queens present.

In the following I shall analyze the different Queen Helena figures in the various *TY* versions, attempting to determine which traits are derived from which one of the historical figures and what the implications of these variations are. But before that I shall present the occurrences of the Helena figures in the texts, following partly the order of the versions as presented in Krauss' edition. In the first example quoted by Krauss the Ms. Strasbourg,⁵¹ Queen Helena appears *in medias res* after the temptation and birth episodes. Ms. Strasbourg:⁵²

And the rule over all of Israel was in the hands of a woman whose name was Heleni⁵³ and in the Temple was the foundation stone etc. ... When the sages saw that the people believed in him so much they took him and brought him before Queen Heleni who held in her hands the Land of Israel.⁵⁴ They told her: "This man holds in his hands sorcery⁵⁵ and he misleads the world. "Jesus answered her, saying: "Already the prophets prophesied how soon 'A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse' (Isaiah 11:1)⁵⁶ and I am that one, and about them (the sages) scripture says: 'Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked'" (Psalms 1:1a). She said to them (the sages): "Does your teaching (lit., your Torah) include what this man says?" They said: There is in our teaching, but it was not said about this man but about him it is written: 'But a prophet who (presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks

⁵⁰ The term palimpsest is deeply related to one of the dominant modes of distribution of the *TY* manuscripts, but this has no implication for the metaphorical use that I have suggested.

⁵¹ Krauss orthography in German "Strassburg."

⁵² Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 38–50 (Hebrew), 50–64 (German). The translations are mine. I am using Krauss' annotation and naming of the versions with minor changes.

⁵³ Krauss, *ibid.*, 40, n. 20 lists the following variant readings: Cod. De Rossi, *Helenit* (the Hebrew feminine noun ending); Codd. Oxford, *Eleni* (*Helenit*?); L – Ms. Sonkilew from Russia; B – Ms. Rawl Or 37 Oxford and Ms. Jablonski from Leipzig *Heleni*; Wagenseil *Helena* (*Olyana*?). I shall provide variant readings only in those cases where a real difference in meaning emerges.

⁵⁴ Krauss, *ibid.*, 41 refers to *m. Yoma* 3:2.

⁵⁵ Krauss, *ibid.*, translates idiomatically: "Dieser Mann übt Zauberei." I have preferred to maintain the Hebrew idiom "holds in his hands" because of the intriguing parallel to the description of Queen Heleni's rule over the land.

⁵⁶ All Bible quotes are from the NIV unless otherwise stated.

in the name of other gods, must be put to death)' (Deut. 18:20)⁵⁷ and '(Then do to him as he intended to do to his brother.) You must purge the evil from among you' (Deut. 19:19). There are signs⁵⁸ to (identify) the Messiah whom we expect and it is written about him: '(But with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.) He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; (with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked)' (Isaiah 11:4). And this (*mamzer*-bastard)⁵⁹ has none of those signs." Said Jesus to her: "My mistress, I am he,⁶⁰ and I shall revive the dead." She sent reliable men,⁶¹ and he revived the dead. Thereupon the queen was frightened and said: "This is a great sign." She scolded the sages and they left her presence ashamed and in great sorrow. More rogues⁶² joined him and there was great discord in Israel.

...

And Jesus said to the horsemen: "Go to your mistress and tell her what you have seen."⁶³ And the wind (spirit?) carried him from the surface of the water and brought him to dry land. And the horsemen went and told the queen all these things and she was mightily amazed and summoned the elders of Israel and told them: You say that he is a sorcerer (*kashfan*) and he produces every day new great signs." They told her: "Our mistress, let not his matters enter your heart. Send envoys and bring him, here shall we reveal his shame. She then sent envoys and in addition to him his evil company appeared with him before the queen and the elders of Israel went and brought a man named Yehuda Iskariota⁶⁴ and introduced him into the House of the Holiest of Holies (the temple) and he learnt the letters of the Name (*shem ha-meforash*) that were graven on the stone of foundation ('*even shtiyya*) and he wrote them on a small piece of parchment and tore up his thigh and said the Name so that it wouldn't hurt, like Jesus had done earlier. As Jesus was sitting with his company by the queen she summoned the sages. Jesus replied (sic) and said: "It was prophesied about me 'Dogs have surrounded me; (a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet).'" (Psalm 22: 16; 22:17 in the Hebrew Bible),⁶⁵ and about me was said "'Do not be afraid of them, (for I am with you

⁵⁷ I am completing the partially quoted verses since very often in Rabbinic literature the "invisible" parts of the verses are as important for the wider meaning of the text as those explicitly quoted.

⁵⁸ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 41, n. 20 quotes variant reading: B – Ms. Rawl Or 37 Oxford: "other signs."

⁵⁹ Krauss, *ibid.*, 41 marks an omission and points out in footnote 22 the B variant, "*man*."

⁶⁰ Krauss, *ibid.*, 42, n. 1 quotes the B variant, "*the Messiah*."

⁶¹ Krauss, *ibid.*, 42, n. 2 quotes the B variant, "*men, (he sent with them and he recited the letters)*."

⁶² Krauss, *ibid.*, 42, n. 4 quotes the B variant, "*the rogues and evildoers of Israel*."

⁶³ Krauss, *ibid.*, 42 the miracles Jesus made while he was in the Galilee.

⁶⁴ Krauss, *ibid.*, 42, n. 26. The various variants in the spelling of this name show the linguistic variations in the environment – but not necessarily the mobility of the text since there were a number of locations in the 7th-12th centuries that could have housed them all! The interesting exception that points at proximity to rabbinic literature, is Eliezer Ish Barthotha (the man of Barthotha) replacing Judas in the Russian Sonkilew manuscript, cf. *m. Avot* 3.7 Rabbi El'azar Ish Barthotha; *m. T'vul Yom* 3.4 Rabbi El'azar Ben Yehuda Ish Barthotha (which is the most frequent form subsequently) who often transmits teachings of Rabbi Joshua; nine occurrences of the name in Tannaic literature, one in Amoraic *midrash*, two in the Babylonian Talmud and another almost a hundred occurrences in rabbinic halakhic texts from various periods and places.

⁶⁵ This is the psalm that opens with "*eli 'eli lama 'azavtani*" quoted in Aramaic (*sabaktani*) by Jesus on the cross in Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34.

and will rescue you,' declares the Lord)" (Jeremiah 1:8).⁶⁶ When the sages entered and Yehuda Iskariota with them they raised their arguments against him and he against them until he (Jesus) told the queen: "About me was said:⁶⁷ '(You said in your heart,) I will ascend to heaven; (I will raise my throne above the stars of God).'" (Isaiah 14:13a);⁶⁸ and it is said: '(But God will redeem my life from the grave;) he will surely take me to himself. Selah.'" (Psalm 49:15 [Hebrew Bible 49:16]).

Follows the flight competition between Jesus and Judas in which Judas prevails by polluting Jesus with urine. "*When the queen heard this she scolded the rogues and told the sages of Israel: 'He is in your hands.'*"⁶⁹ Jesus and the disciples then wander to Tiberias and Antioch, already burdened by the failure at the magic competition. The Talmud passage discussing Jesus disciples is interwoven in the narrative.⁷⁰ They then return for Passover to Jerusalem where the episodes of crucifixion and burial take place without the queen's intervention. It is only after the realization of the disciples that the tomb is empty that she reenters the narrative:

And the rogues went to queen Heleni and told her: "He who was killed was the Messiah, and how many miracles did he (not) show in his life and now after his death he has been buried and is not in the tomb since he has ascended to heaven and it is written 'he will surely take me to himself. Selah'" (Psalm 49:15 [Hebrew Bible 49:16]), thus he prophesized about himself. She summoned the sages,⁷¹ and said: "What have you done to him?" And they said: "We killed him since such was his verdict." She said: "If you killed him, what did you do?" They said: "We buried him." Immediately his tomb was searched and he was not found and she said to them: "Did you bury him in this tomb; and where is he?" And the sages were frightened and did not know how to answer her, since one man⁷² removed him from the tomb and transferred him to his garden and stopped (?) the water that ran through his garden and dug a tomb in the sand and buried him and then returned the water to its route on his tomb. Said the queen: "If you will not show me Jesus, I shall leave neither survivors nor fugitives⁷³ of you." They told her: "Set us a time and a condition." All Israel were weeping in fast and prayer and the rogues were able to say: "You killed God's Messiah" and all of Israel were in great woe, and the sages of Israel were escaping from one place to another out of fear.⁷⁴ One of them, an old man named Rabbi Tanhuma,

⁶⁶ The Strassburg Ms. has "*'al tehat*" (Jeremiah 1:17); the B Ms. has the less idiomatic "*'al tifhad*"; Krauss' annotation refers to Jeremiah 1:8 which reads "*'al tira*."

⁶⁷ Ms. B adds "said King David" to mark the Psalm text.

⁶⁸ It is difficult to assess how much the text expresses the irony of the fact that this is said about the haughty king of Babel.

⁶⁹ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 43.

⁷⁰ Krauss, *ibid.*, 45, b. *Sanhedrin* 43a–b. Cf. Moshe Halbertal and Shlomo Naeh, "The Wells of Salvation: An Exegetical Satire and Reply to the *Minim*," in *Higayon L'Yona: New Aspects in the Study of Midrash, Aggadah and Piyut* (eds. Joshua Levinson, Jacob Elbaum and Galit Hasan-Rokem; Jerusalem: 2006 [in Hebrew]), 179–97; Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 75–81.

⁷¹ Krauss, *ibid.*, 46, n. 3, Ms. B's variant reading adds "and the Sanhedrin."

⁷² Krauss, *ibid.*, 46, n. 5, Ms. B has "gardener" and later "Judas the gardener."

⁷³ Joshua 8:22; the wording of Jeremiah 42:17 is identical in Hebrew however NIV has "not one of them will survive or escape." Cf. also: I Maccabees 7:34–35; II Maccabees 14:30–33.

⁷⁴ The reality described is similar to Herod's purge of the sages in b. *Bava Bathra* 3b–4a.

was walking and weeping in the field. The owner of the garden saw him and asked him: "Why are you weeping?" He answered: "This and that because of that evildoer who has disappeared and now the time set by the queen has arrived and we are all weeping and fasting." Once he had heard that all of Israel were as in mourning and the evildoers said that he had ascended to heaven and the owner of the garden said ... today Israel will be relieved and rejoice, because I stole him so that the rogues could not take him and have a say for generations and generations.⁷⁵ Immediately they went to Jerusalem and told them (the sages?) the good news⁷⁶ and all Israel went out after the owner of the garden and tied him (Jesus) by his legs and they dragged him through the streets of Jerusalem until they brought him to the queen and told her: "Here is the one who ascended to heaven" and they happily left her presence and she mocked the rogues and praised the sages.

This scene which quite systematically subverts the hagiography of the *via crucis* and turns upside down the well known picture of Jesus' female devotees is followed by an account of Jesus' disciples' activities, an account of the transformation of Jewish holidays to parallel Christian ones, the stories of Paul, Nestorius, Simon Kephaz, the description of the Stylite, and the liturgical poetry of Simon Kephaz finally qualifies him to be accepted by the Sanhedrin as well as by the Exilarch!⁷⁷

Ms. Vienna.⁷⁸ Helena first appears in chapter 5 of this version, basically at the same stage in the plot as in Ms. Strasbourg, when Jesus has grown up and has started to gather disciples and masses follow him: "*In those days all the land was under the rule of queen Helena the wife of Constantine.*"⁷⁹ She then reappears only in the beginning of chapter 7:

When the Israelites (sic) saw that some of the peoples believed him they planned together to catch him and they caught him and brought him to queen Helenit⁸⁰ the wife of Costantin (sic) in whose hands the rule remained after Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babel and that was seventy years before the destruction of the temple, and thus they said before queen Helenit: "Our mistress the queen, here is the man named Jesus who is a *manzer* and he holds in his hands great sorcery and he misleads the world with them ... by saying that he is the Messiah and his verdict is death and that is why we caught him and brought him before you to judge him since he is doomed to death. Then Jesus opened his mouth and said: "My mistress the queen, these are the evildoers and about them it was said,⁸¹ 'How long will the wicked be jubilant?' (Psalm 94:3b) and further he said: 'Who will rise up for me against the wicked? Who will take a stand for me against evildoers?'" (Psalm 94:16) and you should know that their words are lies and falsehood and if they had power they would destroy the world and if they had power against me such as I have against them now they would have cut my limbs asunder and you should know, mistress, that I

⁷⁵ Apparently regarding Jesus' resurrection.

⁷⁶ Possibly a parodic use of "good news" – evangel, gospel.

⁷⁷ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 50.

⁷⁸ Krauss, *ibid.*, 64–88 (Hebrew), 88–117 (German).

⁷⁹ Krauss, *ibid.*, 68.

⁸⁰ Krauss, *ibid.*, 70, n. 12 variant reading *helene 'ah*.

⁸¹ Krauss has deleted "(said) my ancestor David."

am the son of God⁸² and no sorcerer and you will find it written thus prophesied about me Isaiah the prophet, 'A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a branch will bear fruit,' (Isaiah 11:1) and you will find that I am from his seed and roots and you should beware of their advice since my ancestor David, peace be on him, wrote: 'Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked' (Psalm 1:1). Then the sages replied to her and said: "The mistress queen, never⁸³ believe his words since he is doomed to be in spirit and not in flesh,⁸⁴ and about him scripture has said: 'Blessed is the man' since 'the man' adds up to⁸⁵ 'Yeshu' and the word Yeshu is the acronym for 'let his name and memory be obliterated' ... and he deserves four deaths decreed by the court." The queen heard their words and said: "Is it written in your teaching 'Act according to the law they teach you and the decisions they give you. Do not turn aside from what they tell you, to the right or to the left'?" (Deuteronomy 17:11) and in another place it says: 'He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked' (Isaiah 11:4b)? and it is also said: 'In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety.' (Jeremiah 23:6). Jesus answered: "I am he, 'I put to death and I bring to life,' (Deuteronomy 32:29) for this is a great sign that no Messiah will be able to do that sign." The queen was frightened and sent trustworthy envoys how he brings the dead to life and they went to the tombs of the gentiles and to the tombs of Israel and they took out dead bodies from the tomb(s)⁸⁶ and the *mamzer* (bastard) uttered the name on them and brought them to life and brought them before the queen, and when she saw that, she believed all his words, that he is God, so she summoned the sages of Israel and spat in their faces and she despised their belief and she planned to destroy and to kill all the Jews, *has ve-halila*,⁸⁷ and they were all mortified and ashamed by her and there was a time of distress⁸⁸ for Israel and more and more was accumulating on them every day, and there was great division in Israel among them were those who said this and those whose said that and most of them were inclined toward vanity. After that Jesus told the queen: "You will be in peace and receive the blessings of my father in heaven and my blessing too, and I want to go to Upper Galilee because I was commanded to do so by my heavenly father." And the queen said: "May your blessing be upon me, go and return."

The next chapter 8 brings the Jews back to the queen and they accuse Jesus of sorcery, and she sends her horsemen and envoys to the Galilee to capture him, whereupon he performs the miracles that were also mentioned in the Galilee episode of Ms. Strasbourg and are famous for their appearance in the various apocryphal traditions about Jesus' infancy.⁸⁹ Chapter 9 takes off from those miracles:

⁸² Orthography: אֱלֹהִים.

⁸³ Translation based on NIV 1 Samuel 20:9.

⁸⁴ Does this possibly refer to some kind of *damnatio memoriae* explicitly spelled out in the next clause? Or is it rather recognition of Jesus' spiritual resurrection?

⁸⁵ Gematria.

⁸⁶ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 71, n. 16, the plural is a variant reading Ms. Gaster (early 19th century, see *ibid.*, 32).

⁸⁷ Roughly: God forbid.

⁸⁸ Translation based on NIV Daniel 12:1.

⁸⁹ *The Infancy Story* (or: *Gospel*) of *Thomas* (translation in Schneemelcher 1:444–49). The multiple manuscript and publishing history of the text is not less puzzling than that of *TY*, *ibid.*, 1:439–443. Notably *TY* supplants these somewhat naïve miracles from the original and suitable childhood milieu to Jesus mature activity creating a somewhat grotesque and ridiculous effect.

And Jesus sailed on a millstone in the sea like a nutshell⁹⁰ and the queen was frightened and mightily amazed and summoned the sages of Israel and the elders.

The sages and the elders convince Helena to capture Jesus and to investigate the truth about him. Judas is enlisted to trap him by encapsulating a parchment with the Name in his body, a debate quoting bible verses ensues and the flying competition takes place.⁹¹ This version makes the sexual affront of Judas on Jesus more explicit than in Ms. Strasbourg, and adds a description of the cursing of Judas among the Christians.⁹² In the fourteenth chapter the followers of Jesus complain before the queen that their God has been murdered.⁹³ She instantly summons the (Jewish) sages and when they cannot find Jesus' body in the tomb where they buried him she threatens to annihilate all Jews, since if they cannot produce the proof for Jesus being a human the disciples who recounted his ascent to heaven must be right in claiming his divinity. In chapter 15, the sages meet Judah the Gardener, who recovers the body and sells it to the sages for thirty silver coins, and the Queen now swings over to the Jewish side. In chapter 16, the Jewish sages obtain from the Queen the permission to take revenge in terms recalling of the end of the biblical Book of Esther, another royal woman possibly looming behind the composite Queen of *TY*. The Queen now seems to disappear from the text for the final four chapters (18–21) whereas some other, surprising figures appear such as the "Papa," a Stylite named Simon, and Peter – Simon Kephaz the first pope who also manages to steadfastly keep Jewish laws and compose liturgical poetry, which earns the praise of both the Sanhedrin and the Resh Galuta (the Exilarch)! But Helena does reemerge in chapter 22 of the same manuscript, which Krauss has chosen to present separately from the main body of the *TY*, under the title "The Legend of the Finding of the Cross."⁹⁴ This chapter definitively tips the delicate balance of the various components of the Helena figure of this version towards Helena Augusta, the mother of Constantine the Great, with whom this legend is associated already about fifty years after her death.⁹⁵ The *TY* version of the legend emphasizes the Jewish input in the finding, including some of the motifs characterizing the version of the legend that Drijvers has characterized with both the one with the greatest area of distribution and the clearest

⁹⁰ Cf. *Acts. Pet.* 6 (Schneemelcher, 2:293) for this motif with reference to Peter.

⁹¹ *Acts. Pet.* 31–32 (Schneemelcher, 2:312–13). In *Acts. Pet.* the contest is between Simon Magus and Peter, and it takes place in Rome, Simon is vanquished by Peter's prayer that he simply breaks a leg in three (!) places, which happens and Simon is then stoned by the Romans who are disappointed by his weak performance.

⁹² For a detailed and systematic study of the figure of Judas in *TY* and its implications for Jewish and Christian communication in the Middle Ages, see the article by Limor and Yuval in the present volume.

⁹³ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 80.

⁹⁴ "Aus Cod. Wien No. 54 'Kreuzauffindungslegende,'" *ibid.*, 141–43.

⁹⁵ Jan Willem Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of her Finding of the True Cross* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 1.

anti-Jewish character,⁹⁶ known as the “Judas Cyriacus Legend.”⁹⁷ The legend is also joined, as are some versions of the legend of the finding of the cross, with an account of Constantine’s healing from leprosy paralleling the tale of his donation to pope Sylvester which belongs to the same tale cluster.⁹⁸ In one of the versions of that legend, Helena is supposedly of Jewish origin!⁹⁹

In the other, more fragmentary versions of *TY* published by Krauss, the presence of Helena is consequently sketchier. Thus, in the Yemenite manuscript named by Krauss Ms. Adler, the wording is very similar to the one found in Ms. Strasbourg, confirming perhaps the classification of both versions as belonging to the “Wagenseil type”:¹⁰⁰ “*and the Land of Israel was held in the hands of a queen called Heleni,*”¹⁰¹ completed by the sages dragging Jesus to the queen accusing him of sorcery,¹⁰² and the queen’s belief in his identity until he is vanquished in the flying competition with Judas.¹⁰³ The search of the absent dead body ends here too in the final siding of the queen with the sages and the dispersion of Jesus’ disciples.¹⁰⁴ Other versions have short references to Helena or omit her totally.¹⁰⁵

In most versions of *TY*, Queen Helena, thus, plays a central role. She is often, indeed, the most powerful person in the narrative and definitely its most powerful woman. Her position and power to act make her a blatant foil to Miriam (Mary) who is the ultimate feminine victim subjected to sexual harassment and, in some versions, even rape.

The particularly extreme variations regarding the women named Helena in the corpus, emphatically point towards the argument for a disparate rather than a related and coordinated existence of the *TY* texts. In the fashion of the conven-

⁹⁶ Drijvers, *ibid.*, 165.

⁹⁷ Drijvers, *ibid.*, 165–71.

⁹⁸ Drijvers, *ibid.*, 23. See also Israel J. Yuval, “Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages: Shared Myths, Common Language. Donatio Constantini and Donatio Vespasiani,” in *Demonizing the ‘Other’: Anti-Semitism, Racism and Xenophobia* (ed. Robert S. Wistrich; London: Taylor & Francis, 1999), 88–107.

⁹⁹ Drijvers, *Helena*, 36–37, who categorically denies the historicity of that.

¹⁰⁰ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 118–21 (Hebrew), 122–28 (German).

¹⁰¹ Krauss, *ibid.*, 118.

¹⁰² Krauss, *ibid.*, 119.

¹⁰³ Krauss, *ibid.*, 120.

¹⁰⁴ Krauss, *ibid.*, 121.

¹⁰⁵ In the short version from the Leiden manuscript presented by Krauss, the queen is anonymous and plays a very slight role (*ibid.*, 128–30). In one of the Slavic manuscript fragments the opening is almost identical with the 18–19th century version of *TY* titled *tam u-mu’ad* republished by Krupp from a 1914 print: *Sefer tam u-mu’ad* (with an introduction by Michael Krupp; Jerusalem/Ein-Karem: Li Ahim, 2002). In the introduction Krupp significantly observes that this is probably the first *TY* version ever published by Jews. Krupp characterizes *TY* as folk narrative and folk legend. In a Genizah fragment, (Krauss, *ibid.*, 143–46) the emperor is healed but Helena is not mentioned.

tion of an imaginary literary world she appears as one woman, but a review of her characteristics, the time of her activity and the acts she performs soon reveal her inter-textual roots in a variety of women named Helena. Her identity encompasses in the various versions (at least) three women bearing the name Helena or its cognates, namely Queen Helene or Helena of Adiabene, Helena Augusta the mother of Constantine and possibly also Helen the lover/spouse of Simon Magus.¹⁰⁶ Since these three women represent three distinctly separate religious identities, Judaism, Christianity and Gnosticism or non-Orthodox Christianity, their interweaving into one narrative *dramatis persona*¹⁰⁷ creates what I have here called a palimpsest of religious narratives and religious identity.¹⁰⁸

The palimpsest both obliterates and reveals the various layers embodied in it.¹⁰⁹ Similarly the figures called Helena in *TY* conceal their religious diversity under the literary convention of the unity of the literary character, but the diversity is now and again exposed in motifs particularly associated with one of them. The indefiniteness and the refraction of the meaning of the palimpsest parallels, perhaps even reflects our inability to resolve the identity of the authors of the texts as well as the period and locale of their creation.

The earliest of these figures is Helena, Queen of Adiabene, who, chronologically, matches the historical framework of the first century CE events in *TY*. The conversion to Judaism of the queen of this north-Mesopotamian kingdom and her special connections with the city of Jerusalem are reported by Josephus Flavius. Five mentions in the *Jewish War* are significantly not of herself but her “monuments” and palace in Jerusalem,¹¹⁰ a theme that will prove significant for the discussion of her affinity to the other major Helena figure relevant to *TY*, namely Helena Augusta the mother of Constantine. Also of interest for our

¹⁰⁶ Some, including Krauss himself, have included Salome Alexandra as possible “contender” as well, in light of the mention of king Yannai as a contemporary of the events in some versions. For a relevant reference see esp. Josephus *A.J.* 13.405 where she places “in their (the Pharisees’) hands all that concerned his (Alexander’s) corpse,” similar to the interaction between Helena and the sages in *TY*. The name that Josephus gives her, “Salina” (13.320), may echo Helena. Cf. David Biale, “Counter-History and Jewish Polemics Against Christianity: The *Sefer Toldot Yeshu* and the *Sefer Zerubavel*,” *Jewish Social Studies* 6 (1999): 135, with reference to Krauss. The gallery of historical figures of the various *TY* versions is colorful, thus in the Huldreich version (Johannes Jacobus Huldricus, *Historia Jeschuae Nazareni*, Leiden, 1705) the reigning king is Herod.

¹⁰⁷ I am consciously using here Propp’s abstraction of the role of a figure in a plot. Vladimir Propp, *The Morphology of the Folktale* (trans. Laurence Scott with a Preface by Louis A. Wagner; new introduction by Alan Dundes; 2nd rev. ed.; Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).

¹⁰⁸ This picture may be complicated even further by the strong pre-Christian substratum included in the figure of Helena the mother of Constantine and her son.

¹⁰⁹ The term palimpsest is deeply related to one of the dominant modes of distribution of the *TY* manuscripts, but this has no implications for the metaphorical use that I have suggested.

¹¹⁰ Josephus, *J. W.* 5.55–56 (LCL, 3:216–17) (monuments); *J. W.* 5.119 (LCL, 3:234–35) (monuments); *J. W.* 5.147 (LCL, 3:242–45); *J. W.* 5.252–53 (LCL, 3:278–79) (palace); *J. W.* 6.354–55 (LCL, 3:478–79).

discussion is the fact that all five mentions in Josephus' *J. W.* inscribing Helena of Adiabene into the topography of Jerusalem characterize the sites bearing her name as limits or margins of some kind: a spot from which Judean soldiers ambushed the Roman soldiers attacking Jerusalem and thus temporarily cut the advance of Titus' forces, being the last point of retreat of the Jews under the attack of Titus at a certain phase of the war; an orientation point of the third wall of the city; the end of the area controlled by Simon son of Arinus; the extent of the spreading of the flames of the fire of Titus' sacking of the city. The last of those images, which defines the site of Helena's palace as the center of the Acra fortress, naturally produces a more ambiguous image of marginality, indeed of the very moment of transforming a center into a margin by destroying it in fire. Also in the last passage mentioned, the fact that Helena's firstborn, Izates, his sons and his brother were rescued by Titus and taken by him as hostages to Rome, adds to the troubled image conveyed about the family.¹¹¹ A figure symbolically moving over limits and re-designing limits of identity, Helena' marking of concrete lines in a contested Jerusalem creates a strong association between her image and personality, religious and national identity, especially with regard to this particular city.¹¹²

Whereas most of the *Jewish War* was, according to research, published close to the war in Jerusalem (in the 70s CE), *Jewish Antiquities* was written from a slightly later perspective (ca. 93–94 CE).¹¹³ Unlike the concise mentions in *J. W.*, the *A. J.* recounts the story of the conversion of Queen Helena and her son Izates at great length in a novella style,¹¹⁴ beginning from her imposed incestuous marriage to her brother Monobazus (Monbaz in rabbinic sources).¹¹⁵ Izates

¹¹¹ *J. W.* 6.356–57 (LCL, 3:478–79).

¹¹² Tim Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire: The Politics of Imitation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 24: "Because cultural identity in the ancient world was (unlike 'nationality' in the modern world) not determined by geopolitical boundaries."

¹¹³ Tessa Rajak, *Josephus: The Historian and his Society* (London: Duckworth, 1983), 62; Seth Schwartz, *Josephus and Judaeon Politics* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 19, 47; Jane Bellemore, "Josephus, Pompey and the Jews," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 48 (1999): 94 (94–118). On p. 96 she suggests that *J. W.* is pro-Flavian, *A. J.* pro-Pharisaic.

¹¹⁴ Louis H. Feldman who edited the Loeb edition quotes a note in his forerunner Henry St. John Thackeray's copy of *A. J.* observing the exceptional stylistic flow of this passage and its affinity with the Joseph story in Genesis (LCL 9:399, note d). The account of Monobazus being seized by lust and marrying his sister also echoes the Amnon and Tamar account in 2 Sam 13. Lawrence M. Wills, *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 206–11 treats "The Royal Family of Adiabene" passages of *A. J.* as a Jewish historical novel. He omits the passage of Queen Helena's journey to Jerusalem as unfitting to the genre (207), and on the other hand compares the "novel" to the *Acts of the Apostles* (208) which he calls a Christian historical novel, especially with regard to missionary motifs. I certainly agree that conversion is a central motif of both texts and lies at the center of our discussion here. Cf. Martin Goodman *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations* (New York: Vintage, 2007), 161: "The story (of the conversion) has elements of romance."

¹¹⁵ Multiple references, e. g.: *m. Yoma* 3.10; *y. Yoma* 3.7 (40b); *b. Yoma* 37a.

(also mentioned in rabbinic sources)¹¹⁶ is like Joseph – the hero of the most developed biblical novella – envied by his brothers and is somewhat unlike Joseph sent by his protective father to a neighboring kingdom where he married the daughter of the king. The elder Monbaz asks to see Izates before his death and bequeaths him the bountiful region of Carron with its mythical connection with Noah's Ark.¹¹⁷ After his death Helena summons the noblemen of the kingdom of Adiabene urging them to choose Izates as the successor, based on Monbaz the elder's explicit wish.¹¹⁸ The assembly advises her to kill the other claimants to the throne but she rejects the advice and appoints the younger Monbaz, the brother of Izates, as king until Izates returns from Carron, and indeed Monbaz makes way for Izates when he arrives in Adiabene. In the meantime Izates and Helena, son and mother, have independently and separately began conversion to Judaism. Helena however warns her son against completing the process by circumcision because of possible suspicion against strange rites by his subjects, and Izates' teacher Ananias (Hananyah) supports her view. However, another Jew, Eleazar from the Galilee, convinces Izates that conversion is not accomplished without circumcision. Izates is circumcised and God keeps him from danger.¹¹⁹

Helena now fulfills her great yearning to go to Jerusalem and to the temple, with the material and spiritual support of her son. Upon her arrival – apparently in the year 45–46¹²⁰ – she provides the population of the city with food during

¹¹⁶ *Bereshit Rabbah* 46.11 (Theodor-Albeck, 467).

¹¹⁷ This may be a possible reference to the Sons of Noah under which title the Rabbis formulated the seven Noahide laws extending unlike the Torah to all humans, *b. Sanhedrin* 56a. Cf. Menahem Marc Hirshman, *Torah for the Entire World* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1999 [in Hebrew]), chapter 6.

¹¹⁸ The life history of Helena of Adiabene as told here follows Josephus, *A. J.* 20.17–96.

¹¹⁹ Jacob Neusner, "The Conversion of Adiabene to Judaism: A New Perspective," *JBL* 83 (1964): 60–66, grounds the conversion in regional Realpolitik, and on p. 63 Neusner compares the conversion of Adiabene and the conversion of Constantine; Lawrence H. Schiffman, "The Conversion of the Royal House of Adiabene in Josephus and Rabbinic Sources," in *Josephus, Judaism and Christianity* (eds. Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata; Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 293–312 concludes that Josephus' account is the life history of Izates and it serves to legitimize the Jewish kings of Adiabene in the eyes of the Jews of Nisibis, and of the Adiabenean princes who remained in Jerusalem among the local population. According to Schiffman the overall function of the tale is to counter ancient anti-Semitism by contradicting the popular claim that Jews hate others; Gary Gilbert, "The Making of a Jew: 'God-Fearer' or Convert in the Story of Izates," *USQR* 44 (1991): 299–313, focuses on the circumcision. See also: David A. Barish, *Adiabene: Royal Converts to Judaism in the First Century C. E.: A Study of the Sources* (Ph. D. diss.; Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 2009). I thank the library of the Hebrew Union College, Jerusalem, for generously lending me their copy "lifnim meshurat ha-din." On the importance of circumcision for conversion for Josephus, see Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Respect for Judaism by Gentiles According to Josephus," *HTR* 80 (1987): 423 (409–30).

¹²⁰ Cf. Kenneth Sperber Gapp, "The Universal Famine under Claudius," *HTR* 28 (1935): 258–65, esp. 260–61; and more generally on famines in antiquity: Peter Garnsey, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 34–42.

the famine and even imports grain from Alexandria¹²¹ and figs from Cyprus. Later Izates' brother Monbaz also converts, and Josephus reports the military and diplomatic successes of Izates, stressing God's help to him. Conversion has led to triumph. The very long unit of the conversion of the royal house of Adiabene ends with the death of Izates, the succession by his brother Monbaz, and the death of Helena. The whole story is crowned by the final account of the building of the three pyramids as burial sites for the three: Helena, Izates and Monbaz.¹²² While the long *A. J.* story has emphasized Helena's support of her son's conversion and her own piety and devotion to the Jews and Jerusalem,¹²³ it also harmonizes with the short *J. W.* accounts which underline her indelible concrete presence in the monuments bearing her name in Jerusalem.

As was already mentioned above, Queen Helena of Adiabene is also well known in Rabbinic literature and remarkably many of the relevant texts are in Tannaitic sources. Her religious devotion is expressed in her rich donations to the temple. While her son Monbaz donates a golden candelabrum to the sanctuary, her own donation consists of a golden tablet on which the Torah passage of the laws regarding the woman accused of adultery (*sotah*; Numbers 5:11–31) are engraved (*m. Yoma* 3.10) and in which the rising sun is gloriously reflected (*t. Yoma* 2.3);¹²⁴ she undertakes the Nazirite vows in order to ensure her son's success in combat and piously repeats the vow upon her arrival in the Holy Land (*m. Nazir* 3.6); she builds a Sukkah performing a Jewish religious commandment, the text emphasizing her gender and her sons all being disciples of the

¹²¹ This is another parallel to the tale of Joseph in Genesis. Helena's purchase of the grain for the Jerusalemites is mentioned again in *A. J.* 20.101, followed by the account of the crucifixion of James and Simon, sons of Judas the Galilean who had raised the people to rebellion during the census of Quirinius.

¹²² The most comprehensive academic study of the Tombs of the Kings in Jerusalem is as far as I know the Hebrew dissertation of Maximilian Kahan, *qivrey ha-melakhim* (the tombs of the kings), presented to the senate of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem Sivan 5705 (May 1945) – in one of the archival notes the erroneous date 5707 (1947) appears. See also: Ruth Jacoby, "The Decoration and Plan of Queen Helena's Tomb in Jerusalem," in *The Real and Ideal Jerusalem in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Art: Studies in Honor of Bezael Narkiss on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (ed. Bianca Kühnel; Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1998), 460–462; Amos Kloner and Boaz Zissu, *The Necropolis of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period* (Leuven: Peeters 2007), 231–34.

¹²³ The short treatment of Helena of Adiabene's conversion in Shelly Matthew, *First Converts: Rich Pagan Women and the Rhetoric of Mission in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001) should be mentioned here because of the special connection between Josephus and *Acts* on which the argument of the book rests.

¹²⁴ Matthijs den Dulk has drawn my attention to the possible connection with the golden *sampsera*, a golden shield with the form of the sun – one of the symbols of the royal house of Adiabene according to Josephus, *A. J.* 20.32 – and Haim Weiss has reminded me of Constantine's images as *sol invictus*; cf. Elizabeth Marlowe, "Framing the sun. The Arch of Constantine and the Roman Cityscape," *Art Bulletin* 88 (2006): 223–42, esp. note 5 on p. 238.

sages (*t. Sukkah* 1.1);¹²⁵ she supports the circumcision of both her sons, Izates and Monbaz (*Bereshit Rabbah* 46.11).¹²⁶

The profile of Helena of Adiabene emerging from the Rabbinic sources is thus consistent with Josephus' description of her, highlighting her contributions to Jerusalem and the temple and her keen involvement in supporting her royal sons in their endeavors for power and their conversion to Judaism. The Rabbinic sources typically lack the chronological precision of Josephus but they all adequately situate Helena of Adiabene and her sons in the period when the second temple in Jerusalem is still undestroyed and active. Her image in Josephus as well as in rabbinic literature is thus of a queen ruling roughly in the period in which the historical Jesus was active. Her connection with Jerusalem is central to the narratives, as are the strong associations to conversion, both being themes that reemerge in the figure of Helena in the *TY* literature.

From a more or less chronological point of view the next relevant woman for the interpretation of the Helena figures in *TY* is Helen, the spouse of Simon Magus. Her reflection in the composite Helena of *TY* is however much paler and uncertain than the presence of the two royal Helena's, queen of Adiabene and Roman empress. Helen is not mentioned in Simon's short and unfavorably described appearance in Acts 8:18–24. The sin he is blamed for is having suggested paying Peter and John for sharing their gift of healing by the laying on of hands, inspired by the Holy Ghost, a suggestion forcefully rejected by Peter. Understandably his name will in later generations signify the sin of buying religious offices – simony. Although it is less clear from the text in Acts how his figure grew into the arch-heretic of the early Church and later in Christian culture in general,¹²⁷ it

¹²⁵ The story is amplified and becomes part of a complex deliberation on the height of the booths in general in *b. Sukkah* 2b–3a; the maximum height of the Sukkah according to the Rabbis, twenty *amah*, parallels the measures of the *dvir* in the temple, cf. 1 Kings, 6:19–20; the arrival of believers and worshippers who are not Israelite is mentioned in Salomon's prayer, 1 Kings, 8:41–42. On Helena's Sukkah, emphasizing gender perspective: Marjorie Lehman, "The Gendered Rhetoric of Sukkah Observance," *JQR* 96 (2006): 309–35; Cynthia Baker, "The Queen, the Apostate, and the Women Between: (Dis)placement of Women in Tosefta Sukkah," in *A Feminist Commentary on the Babylonian Talmud: Introduction and Studies* (eds. Tal Ilan et al.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 169–81. Richard Kalmin, "The Adiabenean Royal Family of Late Antiquity," in *Tiferet Leyisrael: Jubilee Volume in Honor of Israel Francus* (eds. Joel Roth, Menahem Schmelzer and Yaacov Francus; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2010), 61–77, analyzes the Rabbinic material to prove his thesis about the different modes of rabbinization in the Palestinian and the Babylonian sources: "Palestinians portrayed members of Adiabene's royal family as rabbis, whereas Babylonians portrayed them simply as Jews who were obligated to perform *mitsvot*" (p. 77). Kalmin seems not have seen Lehman's and Baker's articles, although he lists a great number of articles of very varying quality in footnote 1 on p. 61.

¹²⁶ Theodor-Albeck, 467.

¹²⁷ Alberto Ferreiro, *Simon Magus in Patristic, Medieval and Early Modern Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

would be logical to think that one who did not gain access to the legitimate ways of magic healing would attempt to achieve that capacity by less legitimate ways.

In the literature of the early church Simon Magus serves the forceful attempt to make a clear distinction between the legitimate miracles of Jesus and his followers and rejected forms of sorcery performed by others. Wonderworks not only constituted a central element in the early stages of the rise of Jesus as a religious leader in the Galilee,¹²⁸ but also served as a major vehicle in recruiting new adherents. Thus Jesus' fame as their performer, even and possibly especially, outside the closest circle of his followers was considerable,¹²⁹ and in fact Palestinian Rabbinic literature's reports on Jesus often address those issues. The troubled borderland between miracle and magic has produced much discussion in the sources and possibly even more in scholarly deliberations,¹³⁰ and it is often the most palpable expression of unstable identities and processes of transformation in specific religious systems as well as in the relationships between neighboring systems. I have in earlier work attempted to systematize the terminology of these related and culturally highly charged concepts by suggesting the triad: miracle (positive) – magic (neutral) – sorcery (negative),¹³¹ which is the usage I follow here.

Simon Magus' prominent role in the Acts of Peter as the major antagonist to the apostle who is the foundation stone of the Church after his master's departure from the human world, peaks (double entendre) in the dramatic scene where he is vanquished in the flying competition with Peter, which is one of the most well noticed parallels (and possibly sources) to Jesus' failed flight in *TY*, where he is toppled by Judas Iscariot.¹³² Krauss, in the outstandingly learned commentary of

¹²⁸ E. g., Matthew 12:13; Mark 5:40–42, however NB verse 43 “He gave strict orders *not to let anyone know about this*, and told them to give her something to eat.”

¹²⁹ E. g. Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978); Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, devotes a chapter to “Healing in the Name of Jesus” (53–62) as a Jewish practice.

¹³⁰ A still very useful and most erudite overview, seriously attempting to eradicate any prejudice against magic, is David E. Aune, “Magic in Early Christianity,” in *ANRW* 23.2 (1980): 1507–57. Aune suggests in the wake of Evans-Pritchard's work that magic is a universal feature of religion (1516), and subsequently he delineates the characteristics of a particular Christian magic (1520). While quoting several studies about Jesus as a magician, his own conclusion is that sociologically Jesus cannot be seen as a magician (1539). However he suggests that David' son (a name attached to Jesus in several gospel texts) could literally refer to Solomon who is known as powerful magician! (1526) Aune points out a relevant fact for our discussion namely that unlike the absence of punitive magic in Jesus' activity in the gospels, Acts and later texts abound in such motifs. For a comprehensive study of early Jewish magic: Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Yuval Harari, *Early Jewish Magic: Research, Method, Sources* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2010 [in Hebrew]).

¹³¹ Hasan-Rokem, “Did the Rabbis ...” 19–55.

¹³² *Acts Pet.* 31–32 (Schneemelcher, 2:312–13). Ferreiro, *Simon Magus*, 25 points out that the magic flight episode is the most stable element of the Simon Magus narrative. See also: Jan N. Bremmer, “Aspects of the Acts of Peter: Women, Magic, Place and Date,” in *The Apocryphal*

his *TY* edition, declares the flying competition one of the “major passages in the narrative of our booklet.”¹³³ He includes the flying competition among a number of other motifs in the chapter on folkloristic motifs.¹³⁴ The other, earlier chapters of his extensive comparative notes on various elements of the *TY* include discussions of the parallels in the gospels, the Talmudic-midrashic literature, the Koran, Karaite texts, and medieval polemical texts.

One of the reasons to include Simon’s Helen in our reading of the composite Helena figure of *TY* is, of course, Simon’s own appearance there both by name and by parallels in other names, especially as Jesus in the flight scene. The earli-

Acts of Peter: Magic, Miracles and Gnosticism (ed. Jan N. Bremmer; Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 10–13 (1–20).

¹³³ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 223.

¹³⁴ Krauss’ decision to include the motif of the magic flight in the folkloristic section is justified and reinforced by the existence of the international tale type number 325 “The Magician and his Pupil” whose second episode involves various modes of magic flights, and in whose fourth episode the student always overcomes the teacher, see: Aarne, *Types of the Folktale*, 113–114. Balaam is the other famous magic flyer, with the kings of Midian, in medieval Jewish literature, e.g. *Tanhuma* (ed. Salamon Buber; Vilnius: Rohm, 1913 [repr. Jerusalem, 1964]), Balak, § 23 (22:144–45); *Tanhuma*, (printed edition; Warsaw: Netanel David Zysberg, 1873), 88; *Bamidbar Rabbah*, Balak, ch. 20, 12; cf. Yonathan Ben-Uziel’s Aramaic translation (*targum*) of Numbers 31:8 and Rashi’s commentary on Numbers 31:6. Balaam is grounded by the Israelites led by Moses who use a device on which God’s name is engraved, similar to the device that Jesus tried to use in *TY* but failed due to Judas defiling him. On Balaam as a “pseudo-biblical figure(s) with prototypical characteristics alluding to Jesus”, see: Israel J. Yuval, “All Israel Have a Portion in the World to Come,” in *Redefining First-century Jewish and Christian Identities: Essays in Honor of Ed Parish Sanders* (ed. Fabian E. Udoh; Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 2008), 114–138, esp. 132, n. 12. Similarly the figure of Simon Magus displays a number of similarities with Elisha’s apprentice Gehazi, especially in 2 Kings 5:20–27 where he aspires to use Elisha’s special gift to cure and expresses greed at the same time. Gehazi’s biblical misconduct is according to Gila Vachman interpreted typologically as religious duplicity in their own time already by the authors of *Brit Dameseq* recovered by S. Schechter from the Geniza: see the detailed discussion of Gehazi in Gila Vachman, *The Vicissitudes of Gehazi* (MA thesis; The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2001 [in Hebrew]). She also reads Matthew 10:8–10 (cf. Mark 6:7–9; Luke 9:1–3) as an explicit warning not to repeat Gehazi’s conduct (her compelling *tertium comparationis* is the two gowns mentioned in each case, although in 2 Kings LXX has σκολάς and all the gospel versions have χιτώνας), in the wake of *Adversus Marcionem* 4, 24, attributed to Tertullian.

NB the somewhat less discussed preamble of the much discussed story of Joshua ben Perahya and Jesus that parallels Gehazi with Jesus and at the same time criticizes rejecting him with both hands! The Tannaïtic text (*baraita*) quoted in *b. Sotah* 47a and *b. Sanhedrin* 107b (Ms. Munich): “*tanu rabbanan* (our rabbis taught): Always let left (hand) reject and right (hand) receive. Not like Elisha who rejected Gehazi with both hands. And not like Joshua ben Perahya who rejected Jesus the Notsri with both hands.” This reflects the blurring of narrative motifs related to Jesus and to Simon Magus on which *TY* is largely predicated. Cf. Elchanan Reiner, “From Joshua to Jesus: the Transformation of a Biblical Story to a Local Myth. A Chapter in the Religious Life of the Galilean Jew,” in *Sharing the Sacred: Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land* (eds. Arieh Kofsky and Guy G. Stroumsa; Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1998), 258–62; this particular passage is briefly mentioned in footnote 87 on page 259; NB Reiner’s reference to the Acts of Pilate in his discussion on some other matters. Cf. Gero, “The Stern Master,” 303–5.

est surviving source of the Simon story after the report in the canonical Acts is Justin Martyr (c.100-c.165), and he also mentions Simon's female companion Helen.¹³⁵ Justin like Simon was born in the Samaria region; Justin in Flavia Neapolis (Schechem, Nablus), Simon in the smaller village of Gitton.¹³⁶ According to Justin's description of Helen she had been a prostitute before she joined Simon and his followers describe her in a Gnostic idiom as "the first idea (πρώτη ἔννοια) generated by him."¹³⁷ There are a number of elements about Simon's Helen that suggest her being a component of the composite Helena of *TY*, although her portion in the amalgam is lesser than that of the other two more royal components. Except for the name and the direct relationship to the figure of Simon who is directly connected with *TY*, her association with a cultic center – in her case in Samaria – renders her a parallel, and possibly a counterpoint of the other two figures.¹³⁸ Helena of Adiabene and Helena mother of Constantine both bear a primary relationship with Jerusalem and its major cultic center for each religion, the Temple to which she endows precious gifts, for Helena of Adiabene, and the church of the Martyrium that she herself establishes, for Helena Augusta.

Since I consider *TY* as trans-religious or inter-religious discourse, rather than merely a document of one religion's opposition of another, Helen of Samaria's role is important in completing the religious map of ancient Palestine repre-

¹³⁵ Justin Martyr, *I Apol.* 26; see also: Stephen Haar, *Simon Magus: The First Gnostic?* (BZNW 119; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 84–85. See also: Marc Hirshman, *A Rivalry of Genius: Jewish and Christian Biblical Interpretation in Late Antiquity* (trans. Batya Stein; Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996), chapter 3 on Justin Martyr and the dialogue with Trypho the Jew.

¹³⁶ Justin's religious and cultural affiliation before his conversion to Christianity was, however, most probably pagan, cf. e.g. Morton S. Enslin, "Justin Martyr: An Appreciation," *JQR* 34 (1943): 179–205, esp. 190. Cf. Gerard Luttikhuisen, "Simon Magus as a Narrative Figure in the Acts of Peter," in Bremmer, *Apocryphal Acts of Peter*, (39–51) 45, n. 21: "In the *Actus Vercelles* Simon is not a Samaritan but a Jew." On the Jewish perspective regarding Justin, extensively: Ben Zion Bokser, "Justin Martyr and the Jews," *JQR* 64 (1973): 97–122, 204–11, no references to Simon Magus; cf. Hirshman, *A Rivalry of Genius* and Daniel Boyarin, *Borderlines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), especially 40–44.

¹³⁷ Justin Martyr, *I Apol.* 26.3.

¹³⁸ Louis-Hughes Vincent, "Le culte de Hélène a Samarie," *RB* 45 (1930): 221–32, calls her an autochthonous goddess (225) and sees in an excavated Kore figure a concrete sign of a cult of her and Simon in Samaria (p. 232); David Flusser, "The Great Goddess of Samaria," *IEJ* 25 (1975): 13–20 points out (19) that Helen the spouse of Simon Magus was also identified with Selene the moon goddess (like Isis) and there in note 40: "The identification of Helene with Selene was evidently also caused by the similarity of the two names. The identification of Simon's Helene with Helen of Troy was invented not only because both women had the same name, but also because of the problematic (sic) character of both." Jodi Magness, "The Cults of Isis and Kore at Samaria-Sebaste in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods," *HTR* 94 (2001): 157–77, esp. 162, n. 35 and 36. Cf. Robert Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire* (trans. Antonia Nevill; Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 252–53 emphasizes the relationship between the Samaritan goddess and the Dioscuri and suggests a special affinity to military cults, which seems rather inconsequential for our discussion.

sented in it with two aspects: her roots in pagan cults (Selene, Venus)¹³⁹ and her adherence to an “outsider” Christian or rather Gnostic cult. The opposition Jerusalem/Samaria is a major symbolical contestation of sacred geography between the Jews and their closest “others,” the Samaritans.¹⁴⁰ Its preservation in the *TY* texts through Simon and Helen, may point at the persisting negotiation of the inner and outer limits of Jewish and other that unsettles this chaotic text.¹⁴¹

It is possibly in Irenaeus’ somewhat longer reference to Simon’s Helen that we can find an early generative kernel of the amalgamation of various Helena figures that characterizes Helena of *TY*.¹⁴² Irenaeus, like Justin, refers to the image of Helen as the first thought (*primam mentis eius Conceptionem*), but records in addition a mythical narrative according to which this first thought has in a typically Gnostic motif been imprisoned in bodies of carnal women from generation to generation, possibly suffering sexual violation and ending up in the body of a prostitute in the city of Tyre.¹⁴³ In her series of “transmigrations” she was, for example, “in that Helen on whose account the Trojan War was undertaken.”¹⁴⁴ Whereas the reference to Helen of Troy may have appealed to persons of polytheistic background, another instance may have appealed to Christians, namely the fact mentioned by Irenaeus, that the adherents of Simon interpreted the parable of the lost sheep (Matthew 18:12–14; Luke 15:4–6; *Gos. Thom.* 107) as a reference to the Samaritan Helen’s erroneous lifestyle.¹⁴⁵

Irenaeus’ *Adversus Haereses* clearly exemplifies the rather well known fact that some religious phenomena and groups are introduced to posterity by their most bitter adversaries rather than by their own proponents. Since these adversaries have a claim to give a truthful account of what they abhor, they often

¹³⁹ Selene is maybe echoed in the “Salina” name given by Josephus to Salome Alexandra, see above; Venus is the goddess on whose temple erected by Hadrian Helena Augusta founds the church of the Martyrion.

¹⁴⁰ The emergence of the real schism between Jews and Samaritans is by some scholars dated to the Roman period: Lawrence Harvey Schiffman, “The Samaritans in Tannaitic Halakhah,” *JQR* 75 (1985): 323–50 studies various halakhic fields and delineates the process of the gradual separation between Rabbinic Jews and Samaritans, due to a Roman *divide et impera* policy and a growing need of the Jews to fortify a separate identity after 70 CE, esp. 350; Frank Moore Cross, “Personal Names in the Samaria Papyri,” *BASOR* 344 (2006): 75–90 esp. 87, points at common cultural practices in the Persian era.

¹⁴¹ Cf. reference to Simon’s activity in “restoring” Mt Gerizim to its proper place and turning away from Jerusalem, in *The Clement Romance* 22:5 (Schnemelcher, 2:512). Daniel R. Schwartz has pointed out to me the structural thematic fact that in the NT *Acts of the Apostles* the first six chapters relate to Jerusalem, then there is a strongly anti-Jerusalem oration in chapter 7, after which the affiliation between locality and sacredness is untangled, followed by a disconnection of sacredness and the Chosen People.

¹⁴² Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.23.2–4; see also: Haar, *Simon Magus*, 89–94.

¹⁴³ Cf. Isaiah 23:15–17.

¹⁴⁴ *Haer.* 1.23.2–4. Cf. Haar, *Simon Magus*, 92–93.

¹⁴⁵ Christoph Markschies, *Gnosis: An Introduction* (trans. John Bowden; London: T & T Clark, 2003), 76. Perhaps an echo of Mary Magdalene and even of the Samaritan woman in John 4:1–42 may not be totally irrelevant for the understanding of the figure of the Samaritan Helen.

transmit a rich and detailed picture that may not seem as abhorrent to readers of later generations as it did to the conscientious apologist and polemicist. This may also happen when the *TY* texts are read in our time.

However, Helen of Simon Magus seems to be the least significant of the components of Helena of *TY*, due to her life occurring close to but still after the crucifixion of Jesus, and her lack of visible earthly power outside the circle of Simon's followers. In addition to her name it is mainly through the figure of Simon Magus that she becomes relevant to the present discussion.

Among the three Helenas that compose the Helena figure of *TY*, Helena Augusta is chronologically the farthest removed from the historical reality proposed in the text. She seems however to be the most present or is at least strongly competing with Helena of Adiabene as a possible historical reference.¹⁴⁶ The comparison between them – and partly of all three – reveals astonishing similarities that may inspire us to think about the perpendicularities of history and narrative. Do later figures consciously (or unconsciously) imitate activities set as models by earlier ones; or do the authors producing the documents by which we are allowed to be introduced to historical figures consciously (or unconsciously) repeat the earlier textual models: or are cognitive structures indeed the generators of events as well as narratives?

But before trying to answer these surely unfathomable questions, let us briefly dwell on the figure of Helena Augusta, the mother of Constantine, on how she is related to the other Helenas in general, and which of her features are indeed incorporated in the *TY*. Drijvers, her biographer on whose work I here largely depend, makes a strong claim by dividing his book into "History" and "Legend," and it is the separation of these categories that is one of the main motivations for his book. Whereas he investigates the sources about her other activities as historical documents, the tradition about her finding of the True Cross is understood through the prism of the genre of legend.¹⁴⁷

One is particularly struck by the initial disqualifying of the legend of the finding of the cross because it "originated only fifty years after her death and must

¹⁴⁶ Drijvers, *Helena*, combines a remarkable historical biography with a meticulous study of the sources; Stephan Borgehammar, *How the Holy Cross Was Found: From Event to Medieval Legend* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1991) provides a thorough textual and tradition-historical analysis, particularly relevant with regard to the "Finding of the Cross" legend included in the *TY* corpus from the Vienna Ms. 54, Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 141–43. The two authors radically diverge concerning the historicity of the legend, which Drijvers absolutely rejects and Borgehammar tries to rescue.

¹⁴⁷ A connection between Helena Augusta and the *Acts of Peter* is created by the following detail relating to two of the major figures appearing in the text: "Among the treasures donated to this church (SS Pietro e Marcelliono) there was a large golden basin, a gift from the empress mother" (CIL 6.1136), see Franca Ela Consolino, "Helena Augusta: From Innkeeper to Empress," in *Roman Women* (ed. with a new introduction by Augusto Frascchetti; trans. Linda Lappin; Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2001), 147 (141–59).

therefore be regarded as historical fiction,"¹⁴⁸ followed soon after by the confession regarding the writing of her biography (the assumedly 'historical' one) that "there are no contemporary written sources. This means we have to turn to sources written after, sometimes even a long time after Helena had died."¹⁴⁹ Let it be understood that I have no intention here to rehabilitate the historicity of the legend of the finding of the cross – I lack the capacity, the motivation or even the belief to do so. This does not relieve me from the task to insist on a less dichotomous division of the materials on Helena, even according to Drijvers' own statement quoted above. It is thus the image of Helena Augusta as accumulated from various sources, all moving between the historical and the legendary – for even the legend of the finding of the cross includes the historical truth of her pilgrimage to the Holy City – which is relevant for her presence in the composite figure of Helena in *TY*, since it is the impression that she made on those who were the consumers of that image that interests us here, especially those consumers who functioned as links in the chain of transmission that finally imported her into the textual realm of *TY*.

Drijvers paraphrases the fourth and fifth century historical sources that he apparently considers reliable¹⁵⁰ and concludes that the contemporary ones are rather reticent about her social background, and indeed her humble origins are first mentioned by a pagan rather than a Christian chronicler, but later all sources are in agreement about her having served as some kind of innkeeper. Her relationship with Constantine's father also seems to have been rather informal. This dubiousness with regard to sexual morals is the first clear point of convergence with Helena of Adiabene, whose relationship with her husband Monbaz, according to Josephus as quoted above, included more than a slight hint of incest. Simon Magus' Helen was of course titled tout court a prostitute.

The sexual motifs, in particular the element of temptation associated with them, surrounding all three Helenas relevant to the Helena figure of *TY*, seem to imply an even more ancient ancestry – namely Helen of Troy, if I may anachronistically invoke Marlowe's much later "the face that launch'd a thousand

¹⁴⁸ Drijvers, *Helena*, 1.

¹⁴⁹ Drijvers, *ibid.*, 3.

¹⁵⁰ Drijvers, *ibid.*, 15–19; his sources for this particular matter include among others the pagan Eutropius and Zosimus and the Christian Ambrose, Eusebius, Gelasius, and Philostorgius (the two last ones, reconstructed from later sources); for the information about her travel to the Holy Land and the construction of churches in Jerusalem and Betlehem, in addition to Eusebius also Rufinus, Socrates, Sozomen and Theodoret. The important role that Eusebius played in historicizing the Christianization of Jerusalem and the Holy Land makes his strong condemnation of the *Acts of Peter*, the connections of which with *TY* have been stressed above, as a heretical book – very interesting, cf. Baldwin, *Whose Acts*, 92–93. Dr. Oded Irshai has kindly drawn my attention to the finding of the True Cross mentioned in the letter of Bishop Cyril of Jerusalem to Constantius II in the year 351, preceding all other sources. While the letter mentions the event having happened under the rule of Constantine the Great, no mention of Helena is included. Edward Yarnold, S.J., *Cyril of Jerusalem* (London: Routledge 2000), 69.

ships."¹⁵¹ The indomitable linking of the female gender, power and sexuality serve in the *TY* to create a woman who is the absolute opposite of the powerless Mary, mother of Jesus, who emerges as a sad and pathetic victim of male vile and violence, and actually of female malice too. Incidentally in a number of versions she is introduced as Queen Helena's relative and neighbor, which emphasizes the contrast between them even more.¹⁵² As a powerless victim of rape, Mary's beautiful face strips her of control rather than endowing her with the power that belongs to Queen Helena. As to Helen of Troy, her power is of course not hers at all but the power and ultimately powerlessness that drives the men enchanted by her into war and destruction, but earns them that most Greek of all gifts – fame.¹⁵³ With regard to Mary the fact that the divine child is born of a poor and powerless woman whose total lack of control makes her conception all the more dependent on the almighty is one of the most powerful elements of the Christian *mysterium fascinans*.¹⁵⁴

The second theme strongly correlating Helena Augusta with Helena of Adiabene, and possibly to a certain degree with Simon Magus' Helena, is conversion. Constantine, Helena Augusta's son, is of course the emblematic figure of the conversion of the Roman Empire. Helena herself is the major agent of the concrete, material conversion from a Jewish holy land to the Christian holy land. Helena of Adiabene's conversion to Judaism constitutes a major topic of Josephus' account in *A. J.* and the Rabbinic sources take it more or less for granted, the exception being a *Bereshit Rabbah* text in which she facilitates her husband acceptance of her sons' – Zoitus' and Monbaz' – circumcision.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ The discussion of the highly intriguing connection of all three Helenas encapsulated in Helena of *TY* to Helena of Troy, and in particular the major transformation from the ancient Mediterranean civilization to medieval Europe as embodied in Helena Augusta's inheriting of classical Helena's space and role, has to be postponed to another occasion.

¹⁵² A parallel image of Queen Helena as the older female protector of a young female saint is the story of St. Nino who brought Christianity to Georgia on her way back from a (Jewish?) pilgrimage to Jerusalem where she met the mother of Constantine: *The Chronicle the Conversion of Kartli* (Translated into Hebrew from the Georgian, with Introduction and Commentary by Constantine Lerner. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2003), 104–5. See also: *The Wellspring of Georgian Historiography: The Early Medieval Historical Chronicle. The Conversion of K'art'li and the Life of St. Nino* (trans. Constantine B. Lerner. London: Bennett and Bloom, 2003). Tali Artman-Partok has in an oral communication reinforced the similar aspects between Mary, Helena of Adiabene and Helena Augusta (and to a certain degree also Helena of Samaria), sexuality being for all of them a lever for various forms of power, and mothering the elected child common to the three first women.

¹⁵³ Jesper Svenbro, *Phrasikleia: An Anthropology of Reading in Ancient Greece* (trans. Janet Lloyd; Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), v. *kléos* in the index.

¹⁵⁴ I have elsewhere interpreted *Yayigra Rabbah* chapter 14 as a Rabbinical attempt to address the fascination of this theme. Galit Hasan-Rokem, "Androgynos and Diprosopon: A Prolegomenon for a Discussion on Pregnancy and Birth in Rabbinic Literature Addressing Leviticus Rabbah 14," forthcoming (Hebrew).

¹⁵⁵ *Bereshit Rabbah* 46, 11 (Theodor-Albeck, 467).

Another detail in the *Bereshit Rabbah* text that reveals a link between this short narrative and Helena Augusta's part in Constantine's conversion, further elaborated below, may be the obscure final sentence: 'amar r(aby) pinhas beshah sheyatsah le-milhamah 'asu lo si'ah piston ve-yarad mal'akh vehitsilo. "Rabbi Pinhas said: When he went to war a *si'ah piston*¹⁵⁶ was made for him and an angel descended and saved him." The appearance of the Greek term is not surprising in and by itself as the Greek language environment in *Bereshit Rabbah* is richly documented.¹⁵⁷ From the various suggestions found in dictionaries I find "treaty made by exchange of assurances"¹⁵⁸ a strong possibility since it underlines the mutual character of the covenant of Abraham into which Monbaz has entered by circumcising. The fact that conversion or an acceptance thereof leads to instant salvation in a situation of war recalls two instances in the life of Constantine, Helena Augusta's son, one in which she is not involved, another one in which she is instrumental. The first instance is documented in the sources that Drijvers would characterize as historical, namely Lactantius' *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* (44.5) and Eusebius' *Life of Constantine* (1.27–31)¹⁵⁹ and has gone down in history as Constantine's victory at the Milvian Bridge (312 CE),¹⁶⁰ where a vision of the cross precipitates his conversion, or at least his use of a

¹⁵⁶ The editors are particularly vague in interpreting this idiom and refer to *Arukh Ha-Shalem*, and suggest a derivation from "septum," however without further interpretation in the context; Marcus Jastrow, 1167 derives from the Greek "a deed of trust" based mainly on later sources; Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1990) does not list the expression. Jacob Levy, *Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim* (Berlin/Vienna: Benjamin Harz Verlag, 1924) 4:70, פיסטון interprets the collocation in this passage itself with the military terms "infantry; footfolk" possibly retaining Nathan Ben Yehiel's understanding of the word, *Arukh Ha-Shalem* (2nd ed.; Berlin/Vienna: Menorah, 1926) 6:378, "pst."

¹⁵⁷ Menahem (Marc) Hirshman, "Greek Words in the Genesis Rabbah," in *Tiferet Yisrael: Jubilee Volume in Honor of Israel Francus* (eds. Joel Roth, Menahem Schmelzer and Yaacov Francus; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2010), 21–33 (in Hebrew) underlines the frequency of Greek words in this particular *midrash* compilation.

¹⁵⁸ Daniel Sperber, *A Dictionary of Greek and Latin Terms in Rabbinic Literature* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1984 [in Hebrew]), 145, *piston*, in harmony with Kohut's addition in *Arukh Ha-Shalem* loc. cit based on Shlomo Yehuda Rappaport's *Erekh Millin*. The meaning of *si'a* remains undecided, as a group of people which is the dominant meaning in the dictionaries, aids the "infantry" translation, but could still be retained with the "treaty" as well. Jastrow's translation "ditch" for *fassaton* may suggest a trap from which he was rescued however the letter *yod* in the text makes this an inferior translation in the passage.

¹⁵⁹ Friedhelm Winkelmann, *Über das Leben des Kaisers Konstantins* (rev. ed.; Eusebius Werke 1; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992); Averil Cameron and S.G. Hall, eds., *Life of Constantine: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1:28–31, especially 28 where the apparition is described and 29 where "Christ of God" (paralleled by *Bereshit Rabba's* angel?) appears in Constantine's dream.

¹⁶⁰ Some claim another date, e.g. Patrick Bruun, "The Battle of the Milvian Bridge: The Date Reconsidered," *Hermes* 88 (1960): 361–70. For a different perspective of the battle: Noel Lenski, "Evoking the Pagan Past: *Instinctu divinitatis* and Constantine's Capture of Rome," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 1 (2008): 204–57.

Christian emblem as his *labarum*, followed by the decisive victory against his brother-in-law and competitor Maxentius.¹⁶¹ The other, perhaps weaker parallel, appears already in what Drijvers considers the earliest written account of the legend of the finding of the cross,¹⁶² and Borgehammar meticulously reconstructs, in the *Church History* of Gelasius of Caesarea,¹⁶³ and is later repeated in most other versions, recounting that along with the true cross, Helena also finds the nails of the crucifixion which she set in Constantine's helmet and the bridle of his horse.¹⁶⁴ Notably, Helena of Adiabene is mentioned as having taken the Nazirite vow (twice!) to ensure her son's victory in war, which indeed proves effective (*m. Nazir* 3.6).

Helena of Adiabene and Helena Augusta also obviously share the great generosity that they show for religious institutions to which they endow expensive gifts. This activity emphasizes in both cases the zealotry to their newly acquired religion and the importance of pilgrimage, and in both cases especially the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The mention of both women's concrete marks in the landscape in many pilgrims' accounts underlines the context of pilgrimage as instrumental for the performance and transmission of these traditions.¹⁶⁵ Josephus emphasizes the buildings related to Helena of Adiabene in Jerusalem, her palace, and her sons' tombs, thus privileging her stable and immobile presence. In the Helena accounts of Rabbinic literature aspects of pilgrimage are highlighted by mentioning her votive gifts to the temple, her Nazirite vows and especially her Sukkah, bringing in one of the three annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem according to the Torah, and the Sukkah which in and by itself constitutes a powerful metaphor of the tension between mobility and sedentary life.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ The Greek text *toutōi nika* (Latin: *in hoc signo vinces*) is the exhortation to insert a Christological sign on Constantine's and his soldiers' shields.

¹⁶² The earliest "oral" source is Ambrose's funeral oration in honor of Theodosius the Great, Drijvers, *Helena*, 5.

¹⁶³ Drijvers, *ibid.*, 98–99; Borgehammar, *Holy Cross*, 47–49.

¹⁶⁴ The connection of the nails to Zechariah 14:20a "On that day 'holy to the Lord' will be inscribed on the bells of the horses" which appears in a number of versions, cf. Drijvers, *ibid.*, 105, does not seem consequential for the present discussion. Drijvers, 141 also mentions the apotropaic term *phylaktērion* for the nails in parallel to the relics of the cross.

¹⁶⁵ A case has been made for the particular empowerment of women through these pilgrimages in the context of a creation of a utopian world: Noel Lenski, "Empresses in the Holy Land: The Creation of a Christian Utopia in Late Antique Palestine," in *Travel, Communication and Geography in Late Antiquity: Sacred and Profane* (eds. Linda Ellis and Frank L. Kidner; Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 123 (113–124); see also: Leslie Brubaker, "Memories of Helena: Patterns in Imperial Female Matronage in the Fourth and Fifth Century," in *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium* (ed. Liz James; London: Routledge, 1997), 57 (52–75). Brubaker however has a more critical view and she claims that "Helena has remained confined within the meta-narratives of Constantine and the true cross" (52).

¹⁶⁶ Hasan-Rokem, "Material Mobility vs. Concentric Cosmology." I have in this article addressed a connection between Helena of Adiabene and Helena Augusta that for lack of space will not be discussed here, namely the connection between the festivals of Sukkot and Encaneia. See also: *Egeria's Travels to the Holy Land* (Newly translated with supporting documents and

Whereas Drijvers has underlined the church political aspects of the emergence of the legend on the finding of the cross and Bishop Cyril's agency in it,¹⁶⁷ Stefan Heid has made a case for its role in the liturgical and ritual context of pilgrimage.¹⁶⁸

Whereas Helena of Adiabene's tomb is marked in the topography of Jerusalem,¹⁶⁹ about Helena Augusta's site of last repose there are several conflicting traditions,¹⁷⁰ her mark in the cityscape being the first church of what was to become the complex of churches around the traditional site of the crucifixion, marking another grave, later known as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

It is in the map of Jerusalem that I shall finally identify the birth ground of the composite Helena figure of *TY*. The collocation of Jerusalem and female personification in literature is almost too famous to mention here;¹⁷¹ the Hebrew Bible is replete with examples and rabbinic literature expands on them in all the allegorical and symbolical modes possible.

Since most of the versions of *TY* are impossible to date, my discussion has not and will not pinpoint references to specific events as much as to general cultural trends that disclose the traits of *longue durée* in Braudel's terms. This also fits the

notes by John Wilkinson; Jerusalem: Ariel Publishing House, 1981), 71, 79, 146, 167; *Egeria: Diary of a Pilgrimage* (trans. George E. Gingrass; Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation 38; New York: The Newman Press, 1970), chapters 48–49, pp. 126–27; Charles W. F. Smith, "No Time for Figs," *JBL* 79 (1960): 325 (315–27) claims that the first Encaenia was celebrated on Sukkoth; cf. Joshua Schwartz, "The *Encaenia* of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, The Temple of Solomon and the Jews," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 43 (1987): 265–281.

The possibility that the Talmudic versions and the one midrashic version of Helena of Adiabene are ecotypically developed from the Tannaitic instances in conjunction with the emergence of the figure of Helena Augusta in Christian texts is a separate question and cannot be addressed here.

¹⁶⁷ Drijvers, *Helena*, 81–98, 131–40.

¹⁶⁸ Stefan Heid, "Der Ursprung der Helenallegende im Pilgerbetrieb Jerusalems," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 32 (1989): 41–71. In footnote 85 on p. 55 Heid mentions and instantly dismisses A. von Harnack's theory that Helena of Adiabene might have served as an inspiration for the legend of the finding of the cross by Helena the mother of Constantine, although he concedes that both Helenas have more in common than Helena Augusta's supposed similarity to Protonike, by common agreement a source for one of the strands of the legend of the finding of the cross. Cf. Drijvers, *ibid.*, 147–63, especially 154–56 where he discusses the Helena Augusta-Protonike-Helena of Adiabene connection.

¹⁶⁹ Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem*, 60: "Her funerary monument, which consisted of three pyramids, was so famous that the Greek writer Pausanias in the mid-second century CE mentions it in the same breath as the famous tomb of Mausolus: I know many wonderful graves and will mention two of them, the one at Halicarnassus and one in the land of the Hebrews (Pausanias 8.16. 4–5)" (see also 561, n. 35).

¹⁷⁰ Drijvers, *Helena*, 74–76.

¹⁷¹ Galit Hasan-Rokem, "Not the Mother of All Cities: A Feminist Perspective of Jerusalem," *Palestine Israel Journal* 2 (1995): 53–55.

characterization of the *TY* literature as a continuous non-linear process¹⁷² rather than a historically traceable series of literary or textual “events.”

As we have seen, all the Helenas considered as components of the literary figure of Queen Helena reigning in the *TY* have been endowed with specific connections with cultic sites. In the case of the two mainly relevant Helenas, Adiabene and Augusta, the site in question is undoubtedly Jerusalem and more specifically what moderns have called “the Holy Basin” extending between the sites of the Temple and Golgotha. Like the literary palimpsest of various Helenas accumulated in one dramatis persona of *TY*, the city of Jerusalem is turning into a powerful territorial palimpsest with its amplified Christianization for which Helena Augusta is a major, foundational symbol. The palimpsest cannot be easily decoded as a binary structure such as polemics. The legend of the finding of the cross itself which is crafted around the process of urban Christianization involving Jews in ways which may be interpreted as respect for the knowledge of the Jews,¹⁷³ subsumes considerable anxiety due to the danger of disinheriting the Christians from their newly acquired exclusive rights if Jewish knowledge may become interpreted as Jewish affiliation with the place they know the best. The curious mixture of the need to support the identity of the holy sites – those founded on the New as well as the Old Testament – by Jewish knowledge, as Ora Limor has pointed out, and to categorically repudiate the faintest right of the living Jews to ownership of them, produces the imaginary, cognitive knot, that cannot be characterized tout court as polemics, and is rather identifiable as the palimpsest that has been shown in this article to be the dominant mode of characterization of the Helena figure of *TY*. Indeed, Jerusalem presents “a singular ideological and topographical palimpsest” for imperial Christianity in Andrew Jacobs’ astute phrase, as the site of the birth of Christianity and of the ruin of the Jews,¹⁷⁴ territorially embodied as “Constantine’s Christian city ... the city of Kings David and Solomon.”¹⁷⁵ The palimpsest does not only serve the ideological needs of imperial Christianity, but also of the Jewish imaginary succumbing time and anew to the desperate messianic longing for that which seems to have saved the closest other, the Christians.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² Newman, “The Death of Jesus,” 59.

¹⁷³ Ora Limor, “Christian Sacred Space and the Jew,” in *From Witness to Witchcraft: Jews and Judaism in Medieval Christian Thought* (ed. Jeremy Cohen; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996), 55–77, on the finding of the cross, esp. 58–62.

¹⁷⁴ Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews*, 142.

¹⁷⁵ Jacobs, *ibid.*, 145.

¹⁷⁶ John G. Gager, “Did Jewish Christians See the Rise of Islam?” in *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (eds. Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 361–72 gives an insightful analysis of this cultural milieu. See also: Shlomo Pines, “Notes on Islam and on Arabic Christianity and Judaeo-Christianity,” *JSAI* 4 (1984): 135–52; *idem*, “Studies in Christianity and Judaeo-Christianity Based on Arabic Sources,” *JSAI* 6 (1985): 107–61. Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: at the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press

It is in those borderlands of identity where the longing is sometimes actualized in a partial or total act of embracing Christian salvation that the curious mixture of the *TY* fantasies may have emerged and lived its restless life of agonized and inconsequent narrative plot, theological color and characterization of *dramatis personae*. It is there, among seekers, hesitators and transgressors of boundaries that the detailed knowledge of the others' myths and images such as is displayed in the *TY* if conceptualized as Jewish, flourished.¹⁷⁷ Naturally, for the suggested literary process to have taken place, porosity cannot be attributed only to the Jewish side of the boundary and thus the fluidity characterizing the apocryphal Christian texts that were suggested as an important interface with the *TY* literature, provide a reference to possible textual and social milieus of literary interaction.¹⁷⁸

The conflation of the figures of Helena of Adiabene and Helena Augusta also conflates two periods, for Christians, the revelation of Christ and the Christianization of the empire, for Jews, the destruction of the Temple and likewise the Christianization of the empire. This conflation has the potential to exert enormous pressure on the sense and concept of election among Jews and to produce exactly such contradiction-ridden texts as the *TY* literature, while Jerusalem naturally is one of the highest stakes in the comparative testing of election. The central role of Helena as a palimpsest in *TY* may, therefore, be understood as an

of Harvard University Press, 2010), provides a wider frame of reference for similar thinking relating to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. For the highly relevant formulation "diachronic neighbors," created for modern Israelis and Palestinians, but perhaps also applicable to earlier periods, see: Yfaat Weiss, *A Confiscated Memory: Wadi Salib and Haifa's Lost Heritage*, New York: Columbia University Press 2011, chapter 1.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*; Sarah Stroumsa, "On Jewish Intellectuals Who Converted to Islam in the Early Middle Ages," in *The Jews of Medieval Islam: Community, Society, Identity* (ed. D. Frank; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 179–97; on the intricate and for our discussion highly relevant case of Dāwūd ibn Marwān al-Muqamma, esp. 183–85, describing his conversion from Judaism to Christianity and then his interest in Muslim polemics against Christianity as recorded by the Karaites (another group closely "other" to Jews, that is interestingly represented in the distribution of various *TY* versions) al-Qirqisāni. See especially Stroumsa's poignant formulation regarding al-Muqamma, who, "taking the giant strides to Christianity and then back to Judaism, transported the acquired literary baggage with him and introduced it into the Jewish world," *idem.*, "Soul-searching at the Dawn of Jewish Philosophy: A Hitherto Lost Fragment of al-Muqamma's Twenty Chapters," *Ginzei Qedem* 3 (2007): 141 (137–61). Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra has indicated the inter-cultural character of *TY* in "An Ancient List of Festivals in *Toledot Yeshu*: Polemics as Indication for Interaction," *HTR* 102 (2009): 481–96, emphasizing the polemical aspect more than the narrative dialogue aspect that is the emphasis in the present article.

¹⁷⁸ István Czachesz, "Who is Deviant? Entering the Story-World of the *Acts of Peter*," in *The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: Magic, Miracles and Gnosticism* (ed. Jan N. Bremmer; Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 95: "Christianity interprets itself in these writings as a *vivid subculture*" (my emphasis). See also Christine M. Thomas, *The Acts of Peter, Gospel Literature and the Ancient Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 16, suggesting folkloristic models of communication as an adequate method for studying the *Acts of Peter* and its likes.

encoding of the palimpsest Jerusalem. Unlike unambiguous narratives of sole ownership of the city, the Helena palimpsest communicates an awareness of the multiple affiliations of the city palimpsest, Jerusalem. It thus serves, both in the Christian narrative of Helena Augusta as referred to above, with its intricate use of Jewish knowledge, and likewise in *TY* with its polymorphic Helena, to subvert unanimous statements of ownership. As a mode of communication, it articulates loss and longing, but also narrative as a mode of appropriation and as a powerful mechanism of coping with tumultuous realities.

The tale episode of the finding of the true cross is the concrete sign, or rather a narrative performance tying together the two periods, by materially reiterating the mythical moment. But it, also, reminds the Christians that the promise of a Second Coming (*parousia*) has somehow gone awry and constitutes a possible parallel source of frustration among Christians – albeit perhaps with less concrete repercussions – that the loss of Jerusalem may have been for Jews.¹⁷⁹ It, thus, may serve as a point of departure for satirical elaborations on all possible sides, including Christians diverting from the dominant beliefs, however tamed by the earthly might of the Christian kingdom “of heaven” on earth. This, finally, raises a possible interpretation of the flight in the air that all scholars considered a major theme of *TY* as well as the *Acts of Peter*, and especially as a motif correlating both these texts, as a grotesque bending of the image of kingdom of heaven. If heaven does not come down, let us fly up to it.¹⁸⁰

Thus the dichotomy between Christians and Jews that has largely dominated many earlier readings of *TY* must also be deconstructed to a more diversified picture encompassing Christians and their heretics of whom some Jews were to begin with part and was only later pushed out to a less communicable category. And these various heresies, among them Gnosticism, housed the various versions of the narratives about the life of Jesus and his disciples, some of them popular and “popular,” including grotesque and perhaps even satirical motifs. Like in the study of the *TY* literature the answers to the questions when? where? and why? have not yet been satisfactorily answered with regard to the apocryphal Acts that have been comparatively discussed above. Indicative of the parallel status of these two literary corpora is the general silence and lack of an acknowledged and printed version of the *TY* until modernity and the sometimes precarious status of some of the popular Acts that were even burnt.¹⁸¹ Were I a historian, I would probably be tempted to ask whether the reality of loss from a

¹⁷⁹ The constant reminiscence of the promised event and its removal to eschatological terms is discussed in detail in Oded Irshai, “Cyril of Jerusalem: The Apparition of the Cross,” in *Contra Iudaeos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics between Christians and Jews* (eds. Ora Limor and Guy G. Stroumsa; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 85–104, esp. 97 ff.

¹⁸⁰ The flying contest perhaps also echoes the foundational scene of Jesus’ Ascension at the beginning of chapter 1 in the NT *Acts of the Apostles*.

¹⁸¹ Schneemelcher 2:156; Oded Irshai, “Cyril of Jerusalem,” 101, footnote 51, quotes Cyril’s preaching against the use of apocryphal works such as the *Acts of Peter*.

Jewish perspective is grounded in the fourth-fifth century rapid Christianization of Jerusalem; the sixth century documented common expectation for the end of times;¹⁸² the seventh-eighth century Islamization of the city;¹⁸³ or rather the new wave of Christianization during the twelfth and the thirteenth century and the rise of the Jewish narratives of pilgrimage in the eleventh-fourteenth centuries and onwards. As a folklorist and a literary scholar analyzing the semiotics of culture, I want to highlight the striking parallel between the non-linear process of the emergence of the *TY* literature and the oscillation of the status of Jerusalem as attainable and lost for Jews through as many generations as those texts have been distributed. Christians too – and Muslims – have gained Jerusalem and lost Jerusalem and therein lies the deep meaning of the palimpsest as an inter-culturally coded symbol. Helena in *TY* with her troubled oscillation between accepting the version of the Jewish sages accusing Jesus of sorcery and misleading on one hand and the Christological version of his divinity, sacrifice and resurrection on the other hand, as well as the overriding theme of conversion in all the three Helenas' lives, is a powerful, if somewhat satirical personification of Jerusalem oscillating between belief systems and political identities, one in the long tradition of female figures symbolizing Jerusalem. I hope that, by pointing at Helena of *TY* and Jerusalem as parallel and interlinked palimpsests, I have introduced a new understanding of the towering female figure of the text that lies at the center of our common discourse in the present volume.

¹⁸² Oded Irshai, "Confronting a Christian Empire: Jewish Culture in the World of Byzantium," in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History* (ed. David Biale; New York: Schocken Books), 198 and especially 211, n. 17 (181–221).

¹⁸³ Samuel Krauss, "Har ha-zeytim be-toledot Yeshu," *Melilah* 1 (1944): 166–77 on the centrality of the Mt of Olives for certain *TY* versions focuses especially on this period.

The Second Life of the Life of Jesus: Christian Reception of *Toledot Yeshu**

Yaacov Deutsch

In a letter to Johannes Buxtorf the son, written around 1650, Johannes Müller, a Christian Hebraist from Hamburg, wrote that he was able to obtain a very secret Jewish manuscript that attacks the Christian religion and especially the New Testament. The text he was referring to was *Toledot Yeshu*.¹ Other examples from the medieval and early modern sources indicate that Christians believed that *Toledot Yeshu* was a secret composition that the Jews tried to hide from their Christian neighbors.² This covert status of the work is confirmed by Jewish sources as well. Thus, less than a century after Müller's letter to Buxtorf the son, the copyist of a manuscript from 1740 wrote:

This booklet contains an orally transmitted tradition, from one person to another; it may be written, but not printed, due to our harsh exile. Beware of reading it before the youth, children or lightheaded people and even more so before the uncircumcised who understand German. Therefore, the wise will know how to remain silent and will receive his reward because these are inopportune times ... it is an immense responsibility to publicize this text and it can not be revealed to all, because we never know what the next day will bring ... I have copied the text from three manuscripts from out of the country, and they all had similar intention. I have written the text in a deceptive language since God

* My work on *Toledot Yeshu* started as an MA thesis written at the Hebrew University, in Jerusalem under the supervision of Benjamin Kedar and submitted in 1997. I would like to thank him for his direction over the years.

¹ Johannes Christoph Wolf, *Bibliotheca Hebraea* (4 vols.; Hamburg, 1715–1733) 2: 1448–49. On this composition which includes an abundance of information on Christian familiarity with the text see Shimeon Brisman, *A History and Guide to Judaic Bibliography* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1977), 13–15.

² See for example Brenz's description where he writes that the Jews read the book under cover of secrecy, Samuel Friedrich Brenz, *Jüdischer abgestreiffter Schlangen-Balg, das ist, Gründliche Entdeckung und Verwerfung aller Lästungen und Lügen derer sich das giftige Jüdische Schlangen-Geziefer und Otternergezucht, wider den frömmsten und unschuldigen Juden Christum Jesum* (Nürnberg, 1614), 2. Other Christians report the difficulties to obtain a copy of the text, and thus also hint to its rarity. Buxtorf for example writes that he got his copy from a friend who got it from an Hungarian gold dealer who bought it from a Jew, see Johannes Buxtorf, *Bibliotheca Rabbinica* (Franequer, 1696), 148–49 and see also Wolf, *Bibliotheca Hebraea*, 3: 1222 who argues that the friend who gave it to Buxtorf was Heinrich a Diest. In itself this testimony sheds light on the one of the ways that enabled Christians to get hold of a copy of *Toledot Yeshu*.

chose us from all other nations and gave us a language ... and some mockery of idolatry is permitted.³

Nonetheless, notwithstanding its secrecy, with around 170 manuscripts *Toledot Yeshu* is one of the most widespread Hebrew manuscripts, although almost all the manuscripts and fragments are of late origin. Thus, besides the fragments from the Geniza, there are fewer than 10 manuscripts, not all of them are complete, that are dated to the fifteenth or sixteenth century.⁴ All other manuscripts are of later date. In addition, *Toledot Yeshu* is mentioned only rarely in Jewish sources from the Middle Ages and in most cases these references reveal very little about the text and its textual tradition.⁵ Therefore, based on Jewish sources, any study of the textual tradition of *Toledot Yeshu*, especially in its early stages, is difficult and will lead to very partial results.

On the other hand, there is an abundance of information about *Toledot Yeshu* in Christian works, most of them polemical, especially from the high Middle Ages and the Early Modern period.⁶ Usually, the focus of Christian anti-Jewish writings was not *Toledot Yeshu*. Rather, these polemical texts were aimed at refuting Jewish understandings of the Bible and, since the high Middle Ages, the refutation of post Biblical literature such as the Talmud, the Midrash and Biblical exegesis. Nevertheless, in some cases, Christian scholars discussed Jewish polemical literature among them *Nitsahon Vetus* (*Sefer Nitsahon Yashan*) and *Nitsahon* of Yom Tov Lipman Mülhausen (*Sefer Nitsahon*).⁷ These works and several others drew some attention from Christian polemicists, but my research has shown that no other polemical work received as much attention as the *Toledot Yeshu* literature.

Seeing that *Toledot Yeshu* is a Jewish text that tells a Christian tale, it is of interest and also somewhat ironical that, to learn about this Jewish text, one must

³ The text is taken from a manuscript of *Toledot Yeshu* dated around 1740 which was auctioned by the Society of Judaica Collectors, on January 5th, 2005 and appeared in the manuscript's description, see *Exhibition and Auction in Jérusalem, Judaica*, 5 January, 2005, 88 (#122). A similar quotation is being brought by Krauss from one of the Slavic manuscripts he is describing, see Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1902; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1977), 10–11. Similar warning appears also in Ms. London Montefiore 450, f. 6r–v (#8775 in The Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jerusalem).

⁴ The most complete list of manuscript up to date was published in Riccardo Di Segni, *Il vangelo del ghetto* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1985), but there are many manuscripts that can be added to his list.

⁵ For these references see below, 284.

⁶ For a comprehensive although not exhaustive treatment of Christian references to *Toledot Yeshu*, see Yaacov Deutsch, '*Toledot Yeshu*' in *Christian Eyes: Reception and Response to 'Toledot Yeshu' in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period* (MA thesis; The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997 [in Hebrew]).

⁷ For Christian reaction to Mülhausen's *Nitsahon* see Judah Kaufman, *R. Yom Tov Lipmann Mülhausen, Author of Nitsahon, the Scholar and the Kabbalist*, (New York: Litwin, 1927 [in Hebrew]).

listen to what Christians have to say about it. From this perspective, *Toledot Yeshu* is a unique example of a Jewish text, insofar as the information about it in Christian sources is richer than the information in Jewish sources, certainly before modern times.⁸ These Christian references can be used both for understanding Christian reactions to *Toledot Yeshu*, a topic I have studied in the past, and for studying the textual tradition of the text a subject that will be the focus of this article.⁹ I will concentrate on the references to *Toledot Yeshu* up to the fifteenth century and demonstrate how they shed light upon the history of the text. Moreover, I will suggest that, based on the information about the text in Christian and to some extent Jewish sources, we should reconsider some of our assumptions about the date of the composition and that perhaps *Toledot Yeshu* as a text that includes a description of Jesus' life from birth to death is of a relatively late origin.

Already in the writings of the Church Fathers we can find testimonies about Jewish traditions against Jesus that resemble some of the ideas that will later appear in *Toledot Yeshu*.¹⁰ In his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin Martyr (110–165) writes that the Jews disseminate vicious opinions about Jesus although he does not refer specifically to their content.¹¹ According to Celsus (last quarter of the second century), whose claim is being brought by Origen, Mary was married to a carpenter named Joseph, had adulterous relationships with a Roman soldier named Pantera and was impregnated by him and gave birth to Jesus.¹² These traditions do not include elements that are unique to *Toledot Yeshu*, but show that, already at a very early stage, Jews propagated rancorous opinions about Jesus and the holy family.

At the turn of the second century, the church father Tertullian (ca. 160–ca. 225) referred to claims that describe Jesus as the son of a carpenter or a whore. He also mentioned a claim according to which Jesus' disciples stole his body since they wanted to claim that he was resurrected. In addition, he noted a parallel version according to which his body was stolen by a gardener who did not

⁸ Like *Toledot Yeshu* there are some other Jewish polemical texts that were printed for the first time by Christians, among them *Nitsahon Vetus*; Isaac Troki's *Faith Strengthened* (*hyzuq 'emuna*), both printed by Johannes Wagenseil in his *Tela Ignea Satanae* (Altdorf, 1681) and Mülhausen's *Nitsahon* printed by Theodor Hackspan in Altdorf in 1644, but the information about these works in Christian sources is relatively limited and cannot be compared to the information about *Toledot Yeshu*.

⁹ On Christian reactions to *Toledot Yeshu*, see Deutsch, '*Toledot Yeshu*' in *Christian Eyes*, esp. 81 ff.

¹⁰ For a discussion of some of these elements, see Ludwig Couard, "Jüdische Sagen über das Leben Jesu," *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift* 12 (1901): 164–76; Hillel I. Newman, "The Death of Jesus in the *Toledot Yeshu* Literature," *JTS* 50 (1999): 59–79.

¹¹ Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo*, PG 6:511–14.

¹² Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1:28, 32, PG 11:713–14, 719–22 and see Richard von der Alm, *Die Urtheile heidnischer und jüdischer Schriftsteller der vier ersten christlichen Jahrhunderte über Jesus und die ersten Christen* (Leipzig: Otto Wigand, 1864), esp. 50–54.

want his lettuce field to be destroyed by the many visitors. It is likely that these traditions are related to later versions of *Toledot Yeshu* that mention similar details: that his body was moved by a gardener who was afraid that it would be stolen by his disciples who would argue that he resurrected, or maybe to the claim that Jesus was hung on a cabbage tree, although after reading Michael Meerson's article in this volume, this link needs to be reconsidered.

Tertullian's description reflects traditions that later will become part of the *Toledot Yeshu* corpus, but in my opinion it is unlikely that when he was writing *Toledot Yeshu* was already a complete composition. The only true similarity between Tertullian's description and *Toledot Yeshu* is the reference to the gardener who stole the body of Jesus. Therefore, I believe that, like the texts of Justin Martyr and Celsus, Tertullian's text reflects some early traditions about Jesus that later were transformed and incorporated into the *Toledot Yeshu* corpus.¹³ Other references in early Christian literature reveal additional elements that are also part of the *Toledot Yeshu* corpus, but, as with the case of Tertullian, it is more likely that these references are earlier traditions about Jesus that only later on were incorporated into the *Toledot Yeshu* literature.¹⁴

There are several other examples that show that the *Toledot Yeshu* literature is built upon earlier stories and motifs and that ideas and concepts that today are part of the *Toledot Yeshu* corpus were mentioned as separate entities in earlier Christian sources.¹⁵ Therefore, based on the Christian sources, I would argue that it is hard to prove that prior to the ninth century *Toledot Yeshu* was a text that included most of the motifs that appear in the texts known to us from the middle ages and onward, i. e. his birth; the way in which he achieved the ability to perform miracles; the miracles he performed; the attempts of the rabbis to catch him; his struggle with Judas; his death; his burial and resurrection; the discovery of his body.

Early Jewish texts include some parallel motifs to the *Toledot Yeshu* literature and reveal some of the possible sources for the *Toledot Yeshu* texts. For example, the Talmudic passage which argues that Berf Stada wrote on his skin and thus learned magic, is probably among the sources for the story about Jesus entering the holy of holies, writing the holy name of God on a parchment, cutting his skin and then placing the parchment in his thigh, an element that is not known

¹³ For a discussion of these details, see William Horbury, "Tertullian on the Jews in the Light of *de spec.* xxx. 13," *JTS* 23 (1972): 455–59, reprinted in idem, *Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), 176–79 and especially Newman who suggests that this and also the story about hanging Jesus on a cabbage stalk are part of a Jewish attempt to link between Christianity and the cult of Adonis, see Newman, "The Death of Jesus."

¹⁴ For example the claim that Jesus was a sorcerer and magician is also part of the *Toledot Yeshu* Corpus and is mentioned by several Church Fathers.

¹⁵ Newman, "The Death of Jesus"; William Horbury, "The Trial of Jesus in Jewish Tradition," in *The Trial of Jesus: Cambridge Studies in Honour of C. F. D. Moule* (ed. Ernst Bammel; Naperville: Allenson, 1970), 103–21.

to us from the Geniza fragments of *Toledot Yeshu*, but only from the later version known to us from the thirteenth century.¹⁶

Although one can argue that this and other stories in the Talmud and Midrash are based on the *Toledot Yeshu* literature, I think that since all these sources refer only to one or two details and never give a detailed account of Jesus' life, it is more plausible that these stories were the sources for the *Toledot Yeshu* literature, rather than being evidence of an existing composition known to us today as *Toledot Yeshu*, at that time.

As Peter Schäfer shows in his article in this volume, in the writings of Agobard and Amulo one can find several references that show that they were familiar with several traditions that are part of the *Toledot Yeshu* literature. Therefore it is likely that by the ninth century *Toledot Yeshu* was already a distinct and defined corpus, even if the story did not have all its components. It is important to mention that all the details that Agobard and Amulo mention, relate to the end of Jesus' life, and not to his birth and youth.

The testimonies of Agobard and Amulo, the earlier testimonies that I mentioned before and all other earlier sources that resemble to the *Toledot Yeshu* literature, which can not be discussed here, have parallels in the Pilate group of manuscripts, represented mainly in the Geniza texts, and in some cases only in this family of manuscripts, and thus buttress the claim that this group represents the earliest version of the text. Moreover, as I will show later, from the evidence about *Toledot Yeshu* in Christian and Jewish sources it seems that the two other families of manuscripts were not known prior to the twelfth, or, perhaps, even the thirteenth century.

After the reference to *Toledot Yeshu* by Agobard and Amulo in the ninth century, there is a long period of silence in the Christian sources, and only in the thirteenth century do we hear about *Toledot Yeshu* again. Two sources from the middle of the thirteenth century, a collection of Hebrew passages especially from the Talmud and the text published by the "Anonymous of Passau" disclose details that seem to be based on a version of *Toledot Yeshu*. In a section titled: "De blasphemii contra xristum et beatam virginem" in the collection of Hebrew passages from Paris, the editor refers to a text that opens with the words "incipium creacionis Ihesu Nazareni."¹⁷ It is likely that he refers to a *Toledot Yeshu* text, especially since one of the manuscripts of the story opens with the same words

¹⁶ The story appears in *b. Shabbat*, 104b. On this passage see Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 15–18. For Jesus stealing the Holy name of God, see Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 40–41, 68–69, 118.

¹⁷ In 1239 Nicholas Donin a converted Jew wrote to Pope Gregory IX and attacked the Talmud because it contains passages against Christianity and Christians. The passages that he mentioned with passages from other Jewish sources are preserved in manuscript #16588 in the National Library in Paris. The information about the manuscript is based on Chen Merchavia, *The Church versus Talmudic and Midrashic Literature [500–1248]* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1970), 227–315, esp. 305, n. 28. Lea was the first to claim that in addition to the Talmud, *Toledot*

although in Hebrew: *tehylat briyyato shel yeshu*.¹⁸ In this case, we have only one line from the story, and it is probably the first quotation from the text by a Christian author.

In the writings of the Anonymous of Passau, a text that was written around 1260 in southeast Germany, the author has a chapter about Jewish blasphemies against Jesus (*Vera signa Christi blasphemant Iudei*) that opens with the following words: "Fingunt Iudei, quod Salomon summum nomen dei, quod dicitur 'zamma fores,' sculpsit in lapidem."¹⁹

In this chapter, the author confronts the Jewish claim that Jesus performed his miracles using the divine name of God. This claim appears in most of the versions of *Toledot Yeshe* and is unique to the *Toledot Yeshe* corpus and therefore it is more than likely that it is based on one of the versions of the text.

It is only around 1280 that a Christian scholar brings a lengthy quotation of the text. In his work *Pugio Fidei adversus Mauros et Judaeos* ("the dagger of faith against Moors and Jews").²⁰ Raimundus Martinus not only refers to *Toledot Yeshe*, but, also, brings its text; this text is, then, set next to the fragments from the Geniza, as the earliest textual evidence on the text and, at this point, the longest.

Martinus's book includes hundreds of passages from various Jewish sources and is aimed at revealing Jewish hostility toward Christianity. In a section devoted to Jesus' miracles, Martinus writes that the Jews composed a fictitious book that deals with Jesus' miracles.²¹ The quotation that Martinus brings includes about eighty lines. It does not start with the description of Jesus' birth rather with his arrival in Jerusalem, the way he learned the holy name of God (*shem ha-meforash*) and used it to perform miracles. The passage ends with the description of the hanging of Jesus and lacks the additional parts that describe the fate of his body after he was hanged.

One possible explanation for the fact that Martinus brings only partial version of the text is that he had access only to a partial version of the text. Alternatively,

Yeshe was also attacked in Paris, see Henry C. Lea, *The Inquisition of the Middle Ages* (3 vols.; New York: Harper, 1887), 1:516, n. 1.

¹⁸ Strasbourg, Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire Ms. 3974 (Héb. 48), f. 170a (#2868 in The Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jerusalem). For this text and its importance in studying the textual tradition of *Toledot Yeshe* see William Horbury's article in this volume.

¹⁹ Alexander Patschovsky, ed., *Der Passauer Anonymus, Ein Sammelwerk über Ketzer, Juden, Antichrist aus der Mitte des 13. Jahrhunderts* (MGH Schriften 22; Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1968), 186.

²⁰ Leipzig, 1687. Martinus's work was first printed in 1651 in Paris, but the 1687 edition is the one used by most scholars and is also more accessible, therefore when referring to Martinus's work I use this edition. For a discussion of this work and of Martinus and his attitude to the Jews see Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 129–69; *idem*, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 342–56; Robert Chazan, *Daggers of Faith* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989), 115–36.

²¹ Martinus, *Pugio Fidei*, 362–64

he may have chosen to bring only part of the text because his description is focused on Jesus' miracles. Another explanation could be based on Di Segni's suggestion that the story about Jesus' birth was added to *Toledot Yeshu* only in the fourteenth century.²² However, this suggestion seems wrong, since already the reference to the text in the collection from Paris that I mentioned before, refers to the beginning of the story.²³ The text that Martinus brings belongs to the group of manuscripts known as the Helen group. Most of the manuscripts known to us today belong to this group, however Martinus's text is the first certain evidence for the existence of this family of manuscripts.

The number of Christian references to *Toledot Yeshu* grows rapidly in the fourteenth and fifteenth century and, in some cases, this is due to familiarity with Martinus's text. Porchetus Salvaticus, a Carthusian Monk from Genoa who died around 1315 copied parts of Martinus's text including the section with the *Toledot Yeshu* text in his polemical work *Victoria adversus impios Hebraeos* written in 1303.²⁴ Although he copied Martinus's text verbatim, his text is important because it was printed already in 1520, about 130 years before Martinus's book was first printed and thus in some cases, most significantly in the case of Martin Luther, he was the source from which people learned about *Toledot Yeshu*. Nonetheless, this is not the first time *Toledot Yeshu* was printed. In his polemical work *Fortalitium fidei* (Fortress of Faith) which was first printed around 1470, the Franciscan monk, Alfonso de Espina copied the text of Raimundus Martinus verbatim, and this is, therefore, the first time that the text of *Toledot Yeshu* was printed.²⁵ De Espina's book was printed six times during the fifteenth century in France, Germany and Spain and thus played an important role in spreading the knowledge about *Toledot Yeshu* among Christians.²⁶

In addition to Salvaticus and de Espina, there are other scholars in the fourteenth and fifteenth century, like Nicholas of Lyra, who used Martinus's text as

²² Di Segni, *Il vangelo del ghetto*, 32

²³ See above, 287–88.

²⁴ Porchetus Salvaticus, *Victoria Porcheti adversus impios Hebraeos, in qua tum ex Sacris Literis, tum dictis Talmud, ac caballistarum et aliorum omnium auctorum, quos Hebraei recipiunt, monstratur Veritas Catholicae Fidei* (Paris, 1520).

²⁵ Alfonso de Espina, *Fortalitium fidei contra Iudaeos Saracenos aliosque Christianae fidei inimicos*, (Nürnberg, 1494), 81. On de Espina and his work see Alisa Meyuhus Ginio, "'The Fortress of Faith' – at the end of the West: Alonso de Espina and his *Fortalitium fidei*," in *Contra Iudaeos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics between Christians and Jews* (eds. Ora Limor and Guy G. Stroumsa; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 215–37; Heinz Schreckenberg, *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos-Texte und ihr literarisches und historisches Umfeld (13.-20. Jh.)* (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1994), 536–39 and the literature cited there.

²⁶ This work was first printed in Strasbourg in 1471 or a year earlier and later on in Basel (1475); Burgos (1479), Nürnberg (1485); Lyon (1487) and again in Nürnberg (1494). Usually the number of copies of incunabula ranged between 200 and 1000 and therefore it is likely that altogether a few thousands copies of the book were printed already before 1500, see Elisabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 11.

a source for information about *Toledot Yeshu*.²⁷ Furthermore, other testimonies from this period show that Christians had access to additional versions of the text. This is evident for example from an inquisitorial scrutiny from 1341 that include some details that do not appear in earlier versions of the text.²⁸ According to this report Jesus was playing with a hoop near the temple and the hoop rolled into the temple and when Jesus went in to bring it back he saw the holy name of God, wrote it down on parchment and hid it under his skin and when he left the temple he used it to perform miracles. Other versions of *Toledot Yeshu* refer to a similar detail, but they mention that Jesus was playing with a ball and thus this testimony reveals the richness of the textual tradition of *Toledot Yeshu*.²⁹

Following Martinus's translation, the Viennese cleric and historian Thomas Ebendorfer (1388–1464) prepared another Latin translation of *Toledot Yeshu*.³⁰ According to Ebendorfer, he was assisted by a loyal Jew and he did it because he wanted the Christians to be able to see the depth of Jewish hatred to Christianity.³¹ The text that Ebendorfer brings is very similar to the Strasbourg text published by Krauss but there are some minor differences that are valuable for the textual study of *Toledot Yeshu*.³² For example, according to Ebendorfer's text, Judas prevails over Jesus in the aerial struggle by sodomizing him, while,

²⁷ Nicholas of Lyra referred to *Toledot Yeshu* in his *Quaestio de Adventu Christi* written in 1309. As Jeremy Cohen showed, Nicholas used Martinus's work extensively and a comparison of his writing on *Toledot Yeshu* to Martinus's text shows that also here Martinus was the source of Nicholas, see Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 188–91, esp. n. 47 and also, *ibid.*, 265–66. This text of Nicholas of Lyra was very popular during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and survived in more than hundred manuscripts and thus probably served as an important source for learning about *Toledot Yeshu*, see Deana Copeland Klepper, *Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian Reading of Jewish text in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 111.

²⁸ This record was published in: Josep Perarnau i Espelt, "El procés inquisitorial barceloní contra els jueus Janto Almuli, la seva muller Jamila i Jucef de Quatorze (1341–1342)," *RCT* 4 (1979): 309–53. Di Segni was the first to suggest the affinity between this inquisitorial record and *Toledot Yeshu*, see, Riccardo Di Segni, "Due nuovi fonti sulle Toledoth Jeshu," *La rassegna mensile di Israel* 55 (1990): 127–32. For a detailed discussion of this testimony see Paola Tartakoff's article in this volume.

²⁹ The difference in the details, such as in the above example could shed light on the specific historical, geographical and social circumstances of a specific text and thus can enrich our understanding both on the textual tradition of *Toledot Yeshu*, the history of the Jews and of Christian Jewish relations.

³⁰ Ebendorfer's translation was printed recently, see Brigitta Callsen, Fritz Peter Knapp, Manuela Niesner and Martin Przybiski (eds.) *Das jüdische Leben Jesu, "Toldot Jeschu": Die älteste lateinische Übersetzung in den "Falsitates Judeorum" von Thomas Ebendorfer* (Vienna: Oldenburg, 2003) and *ibid.*, 18–19 for details about Ebendorfer.

³¹ "coadjuvante quodam Hebreo fidelissimo fere de verbo ad verbum in latinam lingwam rustico stilo converti un cunctis Christianicolis pateat evidenter Iudaice pravitatis odium," see, *ibid.*, 38.

³² As William Horbury shows in his article in this volume, there are also affinities between the Strasbourg text and early references to *Toledot Yeshu* such as those made by Raimundus Martinus and Alfonso Valladolid.

in Krauss' text, he does so by urinating on him.³³ Another example is related to the hanging of Jesus. According to the Strasbourg text, Jesus is being hanged on 'iqqar shel keruv while in the Ebendorfer's text, was hanged on *godel shel keruv*. Thus, Ebendorfer's text can shed light on some textual developments of the *Toledot Yeshu*, but, more than that, it shows that a full text almost identical with the Strasbourg text was known already in the first half of the fifteenth century.

Knowledge of another version of the *Toledot Yeshu* is apparent in the writings of Petrus Nigri, known also as Petrus Schwartz. In his book *Stern Messiah*, published in 1475, he mentions *Toledot Yeshu* and reports that, when the Jews tried to stop Jesus, they sent Judas. Judas flew in the air after Jesus and struggled with him.³⁴ According to Nigri, when Judas saw that he could not prevail, he sodomized Jesus.³⁵ Some versions of *Toledot Yeshu* contain a similar story but, in most of them, the method used by Judas is more subtle (relatively) – in some versions, he prevails in the physical struggle and, thus, manages to throw him to the ground, while in other versions he urinates on Judas, or, in some cases, ejaculates on him and thus defeats him.³⁶ It is likely that this particular detail was changed by people who read and transmitted the text of *Toledot Yeshu*, probably with accordance to how secure they felt. Nigri's text together with the text of Ebendorfer are both a testimony for this version about Jesus being sodomized by Judas and they both show that, already in the fifteenth century, some Jews felt secure enough to insert it into the text of *Toledot Yeshu*.

It is important to mention that the examples I have just brought reflect only a fraction of the testimonies found in Christian sources about *Toledot Yeshu*, but, as I demonstrate, these testimonies are crucial for understanding the textual history of *Toledot Yeshu*.

The Jewish sources, on other hand, especially up to the seventeenth or even the eighteenth century, only rarely refer to *Toledot Yeshu*. This is not coincidental and is likely the result of Jewish fear of Christian authorities. Thus, as I mentioned above some of the manuscripts that have reached our hands warn the reader to conceal the text of *Toledot Yeshu*.³⁷ Nonetheless, there are some me-

³³ And see also the following discussion regarding Nigri's text.

³⁴ Petrus Nigri, *Tractatus contra perfidos Judaeos de conditionibus veri Messiae* (Esslingen, 1475). On Nigri see Bernhard Walde, *Christliche Hebräisten Deutschlands am Ausgang des Mittelalters* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1916), 70–152; Thomas Willi, "Christliche Hebräisten der Renaissance und Reformation," *Judaica* 30 (1974): 78–85, 100–3; Pinchas E. Lapide, *Hebrew in the Church, The Foundations of Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1984), 16–18; Schreckenberg, *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos-Texte*, 544–46.

³⁵ For a version that mentions that Judas sodomized Jesus see Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 74.

³⁶ For a version that mentions the use of his physical power see Martinus, *Pugio Fidei*, 364; for a version that mentions urination, see Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 43; for a version that mentions ejaculation see Samuel Krauss, "Une nouvelle recension hébraïque du TOLDOT YĔŠŪ," *REJ* 103 (1938): 81.

³⁷ See above, 283–284.

dieval Jewish sources that are important for the textual history of *Toledot Yeshu* and, in what follows, I will briefly discuss them.

Several scholars argued that, already in the Tosefta and Talmud, it is possible to find traditions that come from *Toledot Yeshu*, but, in my opinion, these instances do not reflect the existence of *Toledot Yeshu* as an independent text, but reflect traditions that later became part of the *Toledot Yeshu* corpus. Thus, for example, the reference in the Tosefta (*Shabbat* 11:15), and its parallel version in the Talmud (*b. Shabbat* 104b) to Ben Stada who brought witchcraft from Egypt by cutting his flesh, is, in my opinion, the source for the elaborated description of the way Jesus learned the holy name of God that appears in some version of the *Toledot Yeshu*, and not an abridged version of the story that appears in *Toledot Yeshu*.³⁸

Nonetheless, the paucity of references to *Toledot Yeshu* in Jewish sources is not necessarily a sign that it was not known to Jews in the middle ages and the early modern period, but a result of its folkloric nature, and, also, a of the fact that its transmission was mainly through oral venues.

Toward the end of the eleventh century, in the literature that came from Rashi's school, we find a reference to the story about Peter who composed Piyutim, among them the piyut *Nishmat kol hay*.³⁹ This story appears at the end of some of the *Toledot Yeshu* versions,⁴⁰ however it is likely clear that it also stood as a separate story and, therefore, this reference is not sufficient to determine that already Rashi or his disciples were familiar with *Toledot Yeshu*.⁴¹ To the best of my knowledge, the first reference in Jewish sources that is clearly based on the text of *Toledot Yeshu* appears in Ephraim of Bonn commentary on the piyut *Elohyim al leha domy*, which was written in the second half of the twelfth century. Ephraim writes that Jesus was a bastard and brings a text named *Tolada de-yeshu* as the source for this claim.⁴² Another reference from the beginning of

³⁸ According to these versions Jesus entered the holy of holies copied the holy name of God on a parchment, cut his thigh and placed the parchment there. After he left the holy of holies he took the parchment out and thus was able to use the holy name to perform miracles.

³⁹ Shimon Halevi Hurwitz, *Mahzor Vitry* (Berlin: Itzkowski, 1889), 282, and see David Oppenheim, "Ueber den Verfasser des Nischmath und das Alter der Piutim," *MGWJ* 10 (1861): 212–24; Leopold Zunz, *Literaturgeschichte der Synagogalen Poesie* (Berlin: L. Gerschel, 1865), 5–6.

⁴⁰ Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 49–50, 86–88.

⁴¹ *Bet ha-Midrash. Sammlung kleiner Midraschim und gemischter Abhandlungen aus der ältern jüdischen Literatur* (ed. Adolph Jellinek; 6 vols., third ed.; Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1967), 5:60–62; 6: 9–14, 155–6 and see Julius H. Greenstone, "Jewish Legends about Simon-Peter," *Historia Judaica* 12 (1950): 89–104; Simon Légasse, "La légende juive des apôtres et les rapports judéo-chrétiens dans le haut Moyen Age," *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique* 75 (1974), esp. 107–17; Wout van Bekkum, "The Rock on which the Church is Founded: Simon Peter in Jewish Folklore," in *Saints and Role Models in Judaism and Christianity* (eds. Marcel Poorthuis and Joshua Schwartz; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 289–310.

⁴² Ms. Parma 665 (#13920 in The Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jerusalem),

the thirteenth century is found in Ephraim ben Shimshon's commentary on the Bible (a different Ephraim).⁴³ He mentions that Jesus was not found in his grave, and writes that this is written in *Toledot Yeshu* and this is probably the first reference to the name *Toledot Yeshu* in a Jewish or Christian source.

Several polemical works from the twelfth and thirteenth century mention that Jesus was hanged on a cabbage stalk.⁴⁴ This particular detail is unique to the *Toledot Yeshu* corpus and, therefore, it likely that these references reflect familiarity with a version of *Toledot Yeshu*. Similarly, *Nitsahon Vetus* mentions the aerial battle between Jesus and Rabbi Yehuda the Jewish emissary, again a detail unique to the *Toledot Yeshu* corpus.⁴⁵ Only toward the end of the fourteenth century, in Shem Tov ibn Shaprut's polemical work *'Even Bohan* there is a significant reference to the text of *Toledot Yeshu* and even then it is by quoting a Christian source that of Alfonso Valladolid.⁴⁶ According to Alfonso (as he quoted by Ibn Shaprut), the dissemination of knowledge about Jesus' miracles among the Jews is a proof of his Messianism. In order to prove that the Jews were aware of Jesus' miracles he mentions two versions of *Toledot Yeshu* in Hebrew and in Aramaic. The details about the Hebrew version that he brings show that the text he is referring to are similar to the one brought by Martinus. He brings only a few lines from the Aramaic version and they have parallels in some of the Geniza fragments

However, the claim that the reference to Jesus as son of menstruated woman in the Jewish chronics of the First Crusade is based on *Toledot Yeshu* is prob-

f. 155. This reference was first mentioned by Urbach, see Ephraim Elimelech Urbach, *Sefer Arugat ha-Bosem* (4 vols.; Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1963), 4:47–48.

⁴³ Manfred Lehmann, "Allusions to Jesus and Muhammad in the Commentaries of Hasidei Ashkenaz," *Sinai* 87 (1980): 39 (in Hebrew).

⁴⁴ See Judah Rosenthal, "Teshuvot ha-Minim" in idem, *Studies and Texts in Jewish History, Literature and Religion* (2 vols.; Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1967 [in Hebrew]), 1: 371. It seems that this text was composed already in the twelfth century and see also David Berger, ed., *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages: A Critical Edition of Nitsahon Vetus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 202 (#202) (English section).

⁴⁵ Berger, *ibid.*, 203–4 (# 205).

⁴⁶ Valladolid's reference survived only in Ibn Shaprut's text. This reference to *Toledot Yeshu* was brought by Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 146–47 from a manuscript in the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau that now is lost. This paragraph appears in several other manuscripts without major differences, see JTS 2234, fol. 195 (#28487 in The Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jerusalem) Vatican 523 (#8658 in The Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jerusalem), this manuscript has no page numbers and the pages are mixed up, on this manuscript see William Horbury, "The Revision of Shem Tov Ibn Shaprut's Eben Bohan," *Sefarad* 43 (1983), 221–37. On Ibn Shaprut and his work see Norman E. Primer, Dov Schwartz, *The Life and Thought of Shem Tov Ibn Shaprut* (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1992 [in Hebrew]), 1–50; Schreckenberg, *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos-Texte*, 407–9; on Alfonso Valladolid see, Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America), 1:327–54; Arthur Lukyn Williams, *Adversus Judaeos: A Bird's-Eye View of Christian Apologiae until the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), 259–60; Schreckenberg, *ibid.*, 377–78.

lematic, since the early versions of *Toledot Yeshu* known to us do not include this claim.⁴⁷ Therefore, it is plausible that the reference in later versions of *Toledot Yeshu* to this mockery name is based on curses such as those that appear in the chronicles of the crusade and not vice versa.⁴⁸ What is common to all the allusions to *Toledot Yeshu* in the Jewish sources is that they always mention it peripherally and never in order to bring the entire story. Thus, for some Jewish authors, it becomes a reference source which is used to base their arguments such as in the case of Ephraim of Bonn. On the other hand, some authors that referred to details, likely taken from *Toledot Yeshu*, did not mention at all that *Toledot Yeshu* was their source.

All the references to *Toledot Yeshu* from the thirteenth century, and thereafter, disclose details that are found in the Helen group of manuscripts and do not appear in the Pilate group to which the Geniza fragments belong. The only exception is the abovementioned reference in the Ibn Shaprut's *Even Bohan*, in which he brings a few lines from the Aramaic version, and they have parallels in some of the Geniza fragments.⁴⁹

The textual evidence for *Toledot Yeshu* from Jewish sources, at least up to the beginning of the seventeenth century, is thus limited, even when including the extant Jewish manuscripts up to that point in time. Moreover, Jewish sources give only a partial picture of the dissemination of *Toledot Yeshu* and its influence on medieval and early modern society. Nonetheless, the fact that there are so many references in Christian sources to the text and that there are at least two cases in which Christians translated the text into Latin before 1500, are, in my opinion, a proof that the text was widespread already in the high Middle Ages. After *Toledot Yeshu* was first printed in 1470 by de Espina and then by Porchetus Salvaticus in 1520, the number of Christians who mentioned the text continued to grow, and it is almost impossible to trace all the references to the text.⁵⁰ Christian texts serve as the main source for references about *Toledot Yeshu* before the 17th century, and after de Espina and Salvaticus, who were the first to print part of the *Toledot Yeshu* text, Christian scholars were also the first to print a full version of the text with a Latin translation and some comments. Here, I refer to Johannes Wagenseil who included *Toledot Yeshu* in his collection of anti-Christian texts entitled *Tela Ignea Satanae* from 1681, and to Johannes Huldreich, who published another version of *Toledot Yeshu* in 1705.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Anna Sapir Abulafia, "Invectives against Christianity in the Hebrew Chronicles of the First Crusade" in *Crusade and Settlement* (ed. Peter W. Edbury; Cardiff: University College Cardiff Press, 1985), 68–70.

⁴⁸ The use of the term Ben Hanida as a mockery name appears already in Tractate *Kallah* 16 and *Kallah Rabbati* 2,2 and could be the source for this curse in *Toledot Yeshu*.

⁴⁹ See, above, 293.

⁵⁰ For more examples see Deutsch, 'Toledot Yeshu' in *Christian Eyes*.

⁵¹ Johannes Christophorus Wagenseil, *Tela ignea Satanae, hoc est: Arcani et horribiles Judaeorum adversus Christum Deum et Christianam religionem libri anekdotot: Sunt vero: R.*

As such, the evidence from Christian and Jewish sources reveals that, up to the twelfth century, the only version of *Toledot Yeshu* that was known was the one found in the Geniza. On the other hand, from the thirteenth century and onward, almost all the references to *Toledot Yeshu* belong to the second group of manuscripts known as the Helen group. Based on this finding, I would argue that it is quite possible that up to the twelfth, and perhaps even the beginning of the thirteenth century, the only extant version of *Toledot Yeshu* was the one found in the Geniza. This version was known in Europe, as Amulo's and Agobard's references to it reveal. The Helen group was created sometime during the twelfth or the thirteenth century, and, from then on, became the dominant version of *Toledot Yeshu*. The third group of manuscripts, known as the Herod group, which is represented in the text published by Johannes Huldricus in 1705, has some parallels in sources from the fifteenth and onward, and probably originated around that time.

Moreover, I would like to argue that the evidence about *Toledot Yeshu* in Jewish and Christian sources show that there is no proof that, prior to the twelfth century, *Toledot Yeshu* was already a comprehensive story that described Jesus' life from birth to death. Altogether, we need to remember that all the evidence from the church fathers, from the Talmud and Midrash, and even from Agobard and Amulo refer only to particular details that, today, are part of the *Toledot Yeshu* literature, but, prior to the twelfth century, there is no reference to *Toledot Yeshu* as an all inclusive text that discusses Jesus' life from birth to death and also the events after his death. This suggestion does not mean that parts of the story are not older, but that the crystallization of the various units into a complete story, and especially that of the Helen version, appeared relatively late, perhaps not prior to the twelfth century.

I will end where I began, by pointing to the importance of Christian sources for determining and following the Jewish text of *Toledot Yeshu*, a fate that is perhaps fitting for a Jewish text that attempts to follow and retell the Christian story.

Lipmanni Carmen Memoriale. Liber Nizzachon Vetus Autoris Incogniti. Acta Disputationes R. Jechielis cum quodam Nicolao. Acta Disputationis R. Mosis Nachmanidis cum Fratre Paulo Christiani, et Fratre Raymundo Martini. R. Isaaci Liber Chissuk Emuna. Libellus Toldos Jeschu Johann Christophorus Wagenseilius ex Europae Africaeque latebris erutos, in lucem protrusit ... (Aldorf, 1681); Johannes Jacobus Huldricus, *Historia Jeschuae Nazareni* (Leiden, 1705).

The *Toledot Yeshu* and Jewish-Christian Conflict in the Medieval Crown of Aragon

Paola Tartakoff

On the night of Thursday, January 4, 1341, in the Aragonese village of La Almunia de Doña Godina, in the kitchen of a Jewish home, three Jewish men and three Jewish women allegedly gathered around an old acquaintance named Alatzar. Alatzar had converted from Judaism to Christianity some three weeks earlier, during a trip to Catalonia, taking the name Pere. By the light of a crackling fire, these Jews berated Alatzar/Pere for his apostasy, warned him that “the Christian Law” was false, and urged him to return to Judaism.¹

One of the three Jewish men in attendance was Jucef de Quatorze, a prominent member of the neighboring community of Calatayud. Over the course of the evening, he is said to have declared that “Jesus ... was not God but an accursed bastard whose mother conceived him through adultery.”² Following these words, Jucef reportedly produced the ensuing account of Jesus’ conception and career. “On a great festivity of the Jews,” Jucef began, “Mary’s husband, Joseph, left the house while it was still night to hear morning prayers at the Temple. He shut the door behind him and left the key in a hole next to the gate, leaving Mary indoors. As soon as Joseph was out of sight, a Jew who had been spying on him and had seen where he had put the key snatched the key, entered the house, lay with Mary, and impregnated her with a son.” Jucef continued:

A few years later, when the boy was four or five, he was playing with other boys one day with a hoop before the doors of the Temple. At the entrance of the Temple, there were two lions who were put there so that, if someone wanted to enter the Temple, they would be too afraid of the lions to read the *Shem ha-Meforash*, which is so powerful that the first (person) to read it would perform great miracles. As the boys were playing, the hoop of Mary’s son fell before the steps of the Temple, and when the boy went after his hoop, he raised his eyes and saw the *Shem ha-Meforash* written on the lintel of the Temple in golden letters. He memorized the name and, with dust and spit, wrote it on his hand, lest he forget it on account of fear of the lions. Afterward, he wrote the name on a thin piece of parchment, folded it, and sewed it under the skin of his right shin.

¹ Pere’s story is preserved in the Archive of the Cathedral of Barcelona (hereafter, ACB), Codex (hereafter, C) 126. Pere was originally from the town of Calatayud. His father’s name was Isaach Camariel (ACB, C126, fol. 2r). Descriptions of Pere’s alleged encounter with the six Jews are found on folios 40r–43r, 44r–45r, and 47v–51r.

² ACB, C126, fol. 50r.

Thereafter, by the power of this name, the boy performed wonders and many miracles. For example, he rode on a ray of the sun and hung from it, he made live sparrows out of clay, and he cured all the infirm. He grew up refined, clever, and pleasant, and, by means of the miracles that he performed, he turned people's hearts to him and made himself adored as the son of God. In this way, he deceived the world until, finally, the doctors of the law and the high priests condemned him to death as a fraud.³

This narrative, which is preserved in an inquisitorial dossier in the Archive of the Cathedral of Barcelona (Codex 126), is a version of the *Toledot Yeshu* (*The Life of Jesus*), a Jewish parody of the Gospels that circulated among Jews since at least as early as the third century.⁴

In light of Jucef de Quatorze's alleged narration of the *Toledot Yeshu*, this paper suggests several functions that the *Toledot Yeshu* may have served in the context of Jewish-Christian tensions in the medieval Crown of Aragon – a confederation of realms in northeastern Iberia that included Catalonia, Aragon, and Valencia, territories north of the Pyrenees, and Mediterranean islands such as Majorca.⁵ Indeed, when considered in its textual and historical framework, this attestation of the *Toledot Yeshu* underscores the power and versatility of the narrative as a form of Jewish polemic, illuminating the setting in which Jews typically may have given voice to the parody, the role the folktale may have played in Jewish efforts to re-Judaize apostates, its potential presence in open confrontations between Jews and Christians, and the ways apostates may have used their knowledge of the *Toledot Yeshu* to malign Jews. In the pages that follow, then, we shall examine the *Toledot Yeshu* in action, serving as ammunition in an age-old fray.

Pere's Case

As it is of direct relevance to our subject, let me begin by explaining how Jucef de Quatorze's alleged narration of the *Toledot Yeshu* found its way into inquisitorial records. On the night of January 4, in the course of pressuring Pere to renounce Christianity, Pere's Jewish advisors allegedly made a forbidding announcement. They declared that, although Pere would need to re-embrace Judaism if he wanted to save his soul, he would never be able to resume life as a

³ ACB, C126, fols. 50r–51r.

⁴ Riccardo Di Segni briefly discusses this attestation of the *Toledot Yeshu* in "Due nuovi fonti sulle Toledoth Jeshu," *La rassegna mensile di Israel* 55 (1990): 127–32. Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1902; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1977) remains the most comprehensive work on the *Toledot Yeshu*. For a summary of the early history of the *Toledot Yeshu*, see Miriam Goldstein, "Judeo-Arabic Versions of *Toledot Yeshu*," *Ginzei Qedem* 6 (2010): 10–11.

⁵ For a succinct introduction to the political and economic history of the Crown of Aragon, see Thomas N. Bisson, *The Medieval Crown of Aragon: A Short History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

Jew. Instead, he would have to burn to death at the stake as a Jewish martyr. To this end, the Jews reportedly continued, he was to go before the justice of Calatayud and enrage him with a shocking display of disdain for Christianity. First, Pere was to blaspheme against the Christian faith, declaring that Jesus was “an accursed bastard” and Mary “the greatest of whores.”⁶ Next, he was to express repugnance for Christian rituals, demanding that the fingers with which he had made the sign of the cross be amputated, the skin of his forehead that had come into contact with chrism be ripped off, and the skin of his knees on which he had knelt before the crucifix be flayed.⁷ And finally, he was explicitly to repudiate Christianity and thereby incur the death penalty.⁸

Pere actually may have followed this advice for, on Friday, January 5, he was indeed tied to the stake in Calatayud. In fact, his body was already beginning to burn when the inquisitor fra Sancho de Torralba, who had been alerted to the proceedings, rushed to the scene, had Pere unbound, and brought him to the fittingly-named Dominican convent of Sant Pere Màrtir.⁹ There, before a hastily assembled inquisitorial tribunal, Pere had another change of heart. Although he had renounced Christianity and sought to die as a Jewish martyr only hours earlier, Pere now declared that he was “a true and good Christian.”¹⁰ Moreover, he denounced Jucef de Quatorze and two other Jews – the wealthy Janto Almuli and his wife, Jamila – for allegedly having “re-Judaized” him.¹¹ In addition, two Jewish eyewitnesses – a cobbler named Salomon Navarro and his wife, Miriam – corroborated Pere’s claims in detail.¹²

The inquisitorial trials that ensued were a momentous affair.¹³ They passed through the hands of inquisitors in Calatayud, Valencia, and Barcelona, came

⁶ ACB, C126, fols. 42v, 45r, and 48v.

⁷ ACB, C126, fols. 8v, 11r, 12r, 14r, 45r, 48v, 50r, and 71v.

⁸ ACB, C126, fols. 42r, 45r, 48v, and 51r.

⁹ ACB, C126, fols. 39r and 43r.

¹⁰ ACB, C126, fol. 39v.

¹¹ Pere and the Jewish witnesses in Pere’s case used the verb *judayçare* (to Judaize) in relation to Pere’s story (see, for example, ACB, C126, fols. 46v–47r and 48v). On the history and usage of the term, see Shaye Cohen, “Between Judaism and Christianity: The Semicircumcision of Christians according to Bernard Gui, his Sources and R. Eliezer of Metz,” *HTR* 94 (2001): 295–300.

¹² ACB, C126, fols. 44r–49r.

¹³ It is important to note that these proceedings took place over a century prior to the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition in 1478. Indeed, the records of the trials of Janto and Jamila Almuli and Jucef de Quatorze include some of the earliest known transcripts of inquisitorial proceedings involving either Jews or converts. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi pioneered the study of relations between Jews and medieval (as opposed to Spanish) inquisitors in his article, “The Inquisition and the Jews of France in the Time of Bernard Gui,” *HTR* 63 (1970): 317–76. Josep Perarnau i Espelt has published an introductory analysis of these trials that includes transcriptions of selected passages in “El procés inquisitorial barceloní contra els jueus Janto Almuli, la seva muller Jamila i Jucef de Quatorze (1341–1342),” *RCT* 4 (1979): 309–53. Kristine T. Utterback provides an overview of the trials in “*Conversi* Revert: Voluntary and Forced Return to Judaism in the Early Fourteenth Century,” *CH* 64 (1995): 16–28. The author’s forthcoming

to the attention of King Peter the Ceremonious, and concluded under the supervision of fra Bernat de Puigercós, whose jurisdiction extended over all the dominions of the Crown of Aragon.¹⁴ At their conclusion, Pere was sentenced to prison for life,¹⁵ and on Sunday, August 11, 1342, at the cemetery of Santa María del Mar, in the presence of notables and a great throng of townspeople, Janto and Jamila Almuli were sentenced to prison, and Jucef de Quatorze was turned over to the secular arm to burn at the stake.¹⁶ In due time, the trial transcripts were carefully re-copied and filed away for consultation by future inquisitors,¹⁷ and Jucef de Quatorze's alleged narration of the *Toledot Yeshu* thus survived, embedded in one of Pere's confessions.

The *Toledot Yeshu* as a Form of Internal Jewish anti-Christian Polemic

Pere's case unfolded fifty years prior to the massacres and forced conversions of 1391, during a period when relations between Jews and Christians were relatively stable.¹⁸ During the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, there may have been up to 20,000 Jews in Aragon, 25,000 in Catalonia, and 10,000 in Valencia. In cities with particularly prosperous Jewish communities, such as Barcelona and Girona, the population may even have been more than 10 percent Jewish.¹⁹ Highly acculturated, the Jews of the Crown included courtiers, merchants, moneylenders, doctors, and artisans,²⁰ and they cultivated extensive personal and professional ties with Christians.²¹

book, *Between Christian and Jew: Conversion and Inquisition in the Medieval Crown of Aragon* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), offers a detailed analysis of Pere's case.

¹⁴ ACB, C126, fol. 88r.

¹⁵ ACB, C126, fol. 90r.

¹⁶ ACB, C126, fols. 88r–93v. Jucef de Quatorze received the death penalty because he was considered a repeat offender. He had allegedly previously foresworn bringing Christians over to Judaism.

¹⁷ On medieval inquisitors' use of earlier trial records, see James B. Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society: Power, Discipline, and Resistance in Languedoc* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), esp. 26.

¹⁸ On the massacres and forced conversions of 1391, see Jaume Riera i Sans, "Los tumultos contra las juderías de la Corona de Aragón en 1391," *Cuadernos de historia: Anejos de la revista Hispania* 8 (1977): 213–25 and Philippe Wolff, "The 1391 Pogrom in Spain: Social Crisis or Not?" *Past and Present* 50 (1971): 4–18.

¹⁹ David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 26–27.

²⁰ On the history of Jews in the Crown of Aragon from 1213 to 1327, see Yom Tov Assis, *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry: Community and Society in the Crown of Aragon, 1213–1327* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1997).

²¹ See Josep Baucells i Reig, *Vivir en la Edad Media: Barcelona y su entorno en los siglos XIII y XIV, 1200–1344* (Barcelona: Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas, Institución Milá y Fontanals, 2005), 2:1717 and Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 38–40.

The peace, however, was tense, and the rivalry that had characterized Jewish-Christian relations since the birth of Christianity endured. In spite of their position of dominance, for example, Christians remained fearful that the “sons of the crucifiers” might still be conspiring for evil purposes.²² Thus, every year during Holy Week, Christian boys stoned the walls of Jewish quarters,²³ and rumors about Jews engaging in ritual murder and host desecration in alleged reenactment of the crucifixion circulated, as did accusations about Jews poisoning wells in an effort to destroy Christendom.²⁴ Into the early decades of the fourteenth century, Mendicant friars preached compulsory conversionary sermons during which Christian hangers-on harassed and humiliated Jewish audiences.²⁵ And, in spite of their mandate to focus on Christian heretics, medieval inquisitors repeatedly prosecuted individual Jews and entire Jewish communities on the grounds that these Jews sought to harm Christians and undermine Christianity.²⁶

Jews were not passive in the face of these injuries, and one of the ways they responded was by denigrating Christians and Christianity in private. Thus, they recited passages disparaging of Christians and Christianity in prayers such as the *Birkot ha-Shahar*, the *Amida*, and the *Aleinu*.²⁷ They composed learned polemics that stressed the irrationality of Christian doctrine and portrayed Christian society as intellectually and morally inferior.²⁸ And they ridiculed Christianity

²² See Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the Thirteenth Century*, Vol. 1., 1198–1254, (2nd ed. New York: Hermon Press, 1966), 104–9 (#14).

²³ See Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 200–230.

²⁴ On accusations of ritual murder in the Crown of Aragon, see Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (trans. Louis Schoffman; Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1992), 2:6–7 and Elena Lourie, “A Plot which Failed? The Case of the Corpse Found in the Jewish Call of Barcelona (1301),” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 1 (1986): 187–220. On charges of host desecration, see Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 109–15 and Joaquim Miret i Sans, “El procés de les hosties contra’ls jueus d’Osca en 1377,” *Anuari de l’Institut d’estudis catalans* 4 (1911): 79–80. On charges of well poisoning, see Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 108–10.

²⁵ See Jaume Riera i Sans, “Les llicències reials per predicar als jueus i als sarraïns (Segles XIII–XIV),” *Calls* 2 (1987): 113–43 and Robin Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews in the Medieval Crown of Aragon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 133–39 and 155–61.

²⁶ On inquisitorial activity in the medieval Crown of Aragon in general, see Eufemià Fort i Cogul, *Catalunya i la Inquisició* (Barcelona: Editorial Aedos, 1973) and Johannes Vincke, *Zur Vorgeschichte der Spanischen Inquisition: Die Inquisition in Aragon, Katalonien, Mallorca und Valencia während des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts* (Bonn: Peter Hanstein Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1941).

²⁷ On the situation in southern France, see Yerushalmi, “The Inquisition and the Jews,” 354–63. On the cursing of Christians in Ashkenaz, see Israel J. Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 115–34.

²⁸ Examples from Iberia include the twelfth-century *Milhamot ha-Shem* (*The Wars of the Lord*) of Jacob ben Reuben, the *Kelimat ha-Goyim* (*Shame of the Gentiles*) of the Catalan scholar, Profiat Duran (c. 1350–c. 1415), the *Bittul Ikkarei ha-Nozrim* (*The Refutation of the Christian Principles*) of the Catalan philosopher and *halakhist* Hasdai Crescas (c. 1340–1410),

in coarse folktales, such as the *Toledot Yeshu*. Indeed, other attestations of the *Toledot Yeshu* have come to light from the medieval Crown of Aragon, beyond the one preserved in the records of Pere's case. The elaborate *'Even Bochan* (*Touchstone*) that Shem Tov ben Isaac ibn Shaprut composed in 1380 or 1385 in Tarragona echoes elements of the *Toledot Yeshu*,²⁹ and the shorter *Qeshet u-Maghen* (*Bow and Shield*) that Shimon ben Tzemach Duran of Majorca composed in 1423 in Algiers contains a description of Mary's adultery.³⁰ In addition, the Catalan Dominican, Ramón Martí, included a Latin translation of a version of the *Toledot Yeshu* in his compendium of anti-Jewish polemic, the *Pugio fidei* (*Dagger of faith*, 1278).³¹ And, toward the end of the fourteenth century, the Catalan Franciscan, Francesc Eiximenis, who was familiar with the *Pugio fidei*, strongly condemned the *Toledot Yeshu* in his *Vita Christi* (*Life of Christ*, 1397–1399), which circulated widely among the Christian laity.³² As a form of internal anti-Christian polemic, the *Toledot Yeshu* buttressed Jews psychologically against the allures of Christian culture at the same time as it armed Jews against the arguments of Christian preachers.

Although we cannot know to what extent the charges against the Almulis and Jucef de Quatorze were true and whether Jucef de Quatorze actually used the *Toledot Yeshu* to re-Judaize Pere,³³ these accusations inevitably contained elements that were drawn from lived experience and, as such, they promise further to illuminate the world of internal Jewish polemics in the medieval Crown of Aragon. For example, regardless of whether or not Jucef de Quatorze actually recited the *Toledot Yeshu* on the night of January 4, 1341, Pere's words may accurately describe the intimate context in which Jews typically told the tale.

the *Even Bochan* (*Touchstone*, 1380 or 1385) of Shem tov ben Isaac ibn Shaprut, and the *Qeshet u-Maghen* (*Bow and Shield*) of Shimon ben Tzemach Duran (1361–1444).

²⁹ See George Howard, "A Primitive Hebrew Gospel of Matthew and the *Tol'doth Yeshu*," *NTS* 34 (1988): 60–70 and Di Segni, "Due Nuovi Fonti," 129. For bibliography on the *Even Bochan*, see Samuel Krauss, *The Jewish-Christian Controversy from the Earliest Times to 1789* (ed. William Horbury; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 1:241–42.

³⁰ See Di Segni, *ibid.*, 129. For bibliography on the *Qeshet u-Maghen*, see Krauss, *Jewish-Christian Controversy*, 1:212–13.

³¹ *Pugio fidei adversus mauros et judaeos* (Leipzig, 1687), 362–64.

³² David J. Viera, "The Evolution of Francesc Eiximenis' Attitudes toward Judaism," in *Friars and Jews in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (eds. Steven J. McMichael et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 152.

³³ Pere's story has come down to us through multiple filters, including the words of inquisitors who had vested ideological, financial, and professional interests in discovering guilt, the translations and interpretations of inquisitorial scribes, the utterances of frightened Jewish defendants who endured prison and torture and simply may have said what they thought inquisitors wanted to hear, the assertions of two impoverished Jewish witnesses who may have born a grudge against the wealthy Almulis and Jucef de Quatorze, and the confessions of Pere who, as we shall see, as a Jewish apostate, may have wished to malign the Almulis and Jucef de Quatorze. For an overview of the controversy concerning the reliability of inquisitorial sources, see Renée Levine Melammed, *A Question of Identity: Iberian Conversos in Historical Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 28–29.

Indeed, it is noteworthy that, according to Pere, Jucef not only narrated the *Toledot Yeshu* at night, in the kitchen, by the fire, and among friends, but also in the presence of three women – Jamila Almuli, Miriam Navarro, and Vellida, the Almulis' daughter-in-law. These women reportedly participated “as much as the men” in urging Pere to renounce Christianity.³⁴ In fact, according to Miriam, Vellida specifically commanded Pere: “do as you are told!”³⁵ And, after Pere agreed to return to Judaism, Jamila is said to have poured everyone – presumably including Pere – a glass of wine to celebrate.³⁶

An inquisitorial dossier from the second half of the fifteenth century similarly portrays the *Toledot Yeshu* as the stuff of fireside lore. One century after Pere's case, in a neighboring Aragonese village, a *conversa* named Salvadora Salvat allegedly sat by the fire and told her children that “while Joseph was out of the house, an iron-monger entered and lay with Mary, and that's where Jesus came from.” Moreover, Salvadora explained that she had heard this story from her father, and she believed it.³⁷ As Salvadora's and Pere's confessions suggest, the *Toledot Yeshu* likely circulated orally among ordinary Jews, and it had a place in the Jewish home, a domain shared by men, women, and children.

The *Toledot Yeshu* as a Jewish Tool for Recruiting Repentance

In more ways than one, however, Pere's confession before the tribunal of fra Sancho de Torralba indicates that the *Toledot Yeshu*'s intended audience was not always strictly internal. To begin, if we are to believe Pere's story, then, on at least one occasion in the medieval Crown of Aragon, Jews used the *Toledot Yeshu* in an effort to convince an apostate to return to Judaism.

It is noteworthy that, in his *Vita Christi*, Francesc Eiximenis affirmed this use of the narrative, remarking: “I have heard that this book of the devil (i. e., the *Toledot Yeshu*) is (found) in the large *aljamas* (i. e., Jewish communities) of Spain and that it is read there among (Jews) in order to bring back (to Judaism) those (Jews) who dare to make themselves Christians.”³⁸ Eiximenis may have been familiar with Pere's trial,³⁹ in which case his comment may indicate merely

³⁴ ACB, C126, fol. 48v.

³⁵ ACB, C126, fol. 48r.

³⁶ ACB, C126, fols. 49r and 51r.

³⁷ See Eleazar Gutwirth, “Gender, History, and the Judeo-Christian Polemic,” in *Contra Iudaeos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics between Christians and Jews* (eds. Ora Limor and Guy G. Stroumsa; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 272.

³⁸ Vic, Spain, Museu Episcopal de Vic, MS 172, fol. 34r.

³⁹ Some Christians were familiar with Pere's case one century later. In 1503, at the height of the Spanish Inquisition's campaign against crypto-Judaism, the Dominican inquisitor general, Diego de Deza (successor to Tomás de Torquemada), requested a copy of the final sentence in the case (ACB, C126, fols. 93v–94r). In conformity with inquisitorial protocol, this sentence

that Pere's story led Christians to believe that Jews employed the *Toledot Yeshu* in re-Judaization efforts. If Eiximenis heard about the practice from elsewhere, however, then there must have been additional accusations to the effect that Jews used the *Toledot Yeshu* to bring apostates back to Judaism. Unfortunately, it is not possible to track Eiximenis' source.

Records of a mid-sixteenth century trial conducted by the Venetian Inquisition, however, document an episode that resembles the one described by Pere, thereby suggesting that Jews beyond the Crown of Aragon also may have used the *Toledot Yeshu* in re-Judaization efforts. According to the confession of a convert named Francesco Colonna, following his baptism, Jews sought to make him renounce Christianity by saying "many horrible things against Christ and the Virgin Mary," including ... "that (Christ) was a bastard and a fraud, that he had entered the Holy of Holies and taken the Name of God and sewn it in his side, and that it was on account of this that (Christ) performed miracles ..."⁴⁰

It is well known that some Jews in the medieval Crown of Aragon did attempt to re-Judaize apostates,⁴¹ nearly two hundred of whom emerge from the pages of royal and episcopal registers between 1243 and 1391.⁴² Some of these Jews were motivated by love of estranged friends and relatives.⁴³ And they all acted in accordance with the teaching of the great Ashkenazi *halakhist* Rashi (1040–1105), according to whom apostates were still legally Jews and it was incumbent upon them to return to Judaism,⁴⁴ as well as in keeping with the exhortations of the Jewish political and spiritual leader of Barcelona, Rabbi Isaac ben Abraham Ishbili (1250–1330, known as "Ritva"), who declared in a *responsum* that it was a great *mitzvah* "to save a Jewish soul from the desecration of idol-worship and

opened with a summary of the entire proceedings, and it is likely that Deza hoped to mine the document for information useful to his own work.

⁴⁰ See *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia contro Ebrei e Giudaizzanti (1548–1560)* (ed. Pier Cesare Ioly-Zorattini; Florence: Leo S. Olschki editore, 1980), 1:95–100.

⁴¹ See Edward Fram, "Perception and Reception of Repentant Apostates in Medieval Ashkenaz and Premodern Poland," *AJS Review* 21 (1996): 299–339; Joseph Shatzmiller, "Converts and Judaizers in the Early Fourteenth Century," *HTR* 74 (1981): 63–77; and Maurice Kriegel, "Prémarranisme et inquisition dans la Provence des xiii^e et xiv^e siècles," *Provence Historique* 29 (1978): 313–23.

⁴² See Paola Tartakoff, "Jewish Women and Apostasy in the Medieval Crown of Aragon, c.1300 – 1391," *Jewish History* 24 (2010): 8–9

⁴³ See, for example, Joseph Shatzmiller, *Recherches sur la communauté juive de Manosque au Moyen Âge, 1241–1329* (with a preface by Georges Duby; Paris: Mouton, 1973), 58–60; *Die Juden im Christlichen Spanien: Erster Teil Urkunden und Regesten* (ed. Yitzhak Baer; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1929/1936), 1:201–3 (#164); Jean Régéné, "Rapports entre l'Inquisition et les Juifs d'après le mémorial de l'inquisiteur d'Aragon (fin du xiv^e siècle)," *REJ* 53 (1906): 229; and Bernard Gui, *Practica inquisitionis heretice pravitatis* (ed. Célestin Douais; Paris: Picard, 1886), 288.

⁴⁴ See Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance* (Oxford: Behrman House Inc., 1961), 69–73 and "Although he has Sinned, he Remains a Jew," *Tarbiz* 27 (1958): 203–17 (in Hebrew).

to bring it back in repentance.”⁴⁵ These Jews reached out to apostates in spite of the dangers posed by vigilant inquisitors, resentful fellow Jews, and inscrutable apostates themselves.⁴⁶ Once apostates agreed to renounce Christianity, they were officially readmitted into the Jewish community following public acts of penance or a popular rite of re-Judaization that centered on ritual immersion.⁴⁷

Insofar as re-Judaization efforts involved retrieving souls from the bosom of the Church and reclaiming them for Israel, they constituted bold expressions of Jewish defiance toward Christians and Christianity. And although the techniques Jews used to evince repentance are difficult to verify, it is clear that the *Toledot Yeshu* bore the potential to serve as a powerful tool in this enterprise. Like any kind of anti-Christian blasphemy, the *Toledot Yeshu* would have embarrassed apostates by mocking the tenets to which they had subscribed. It is noteworthy, however, that the version of the *Toledot Yeshu* that Jucef de Quatorze allegedly used during his encounter with Pere was relatively gentle in its critique of Christianity. Indeed, although the narrative plainly stated that Christianity was based on lies and deception, it portrayed the faith as more pathetic than evil. Unlike some later attestations of the *Toledot Yeshu*, it did not describe Mary as menstruating (and therefore ritually impure) at the time of Jesus’ conception, it depicted Jesus in generally complimentary terms, and it portrayed Jesus’ discovery of the ineffable name of God as accidental.⁴⁸ Moreover, this version of the *Toledot Yeshu*, unlike others, barely mentioned Jesus’ trial and death. It is possible that Jucef de Quatorze or other Jews tailored the *Toledot Yeshu* to suit particular occasions. In situations involving vacillating apostates, they may have deemed it wise to ridicule Christianity in a relatively moderate way and to focus on undermining foundational Christian claims – for instance, about the virginity of Mary and the divinity of Christ – rather than dwelling on historical or biographical details about Jesus. The goal, after all, was not primarily to humiliate apostates but to cajole them into returning home. In addition, to the extent that Jews were commonly raised on the *Toledot Yeshu*, the narrative could have exerted pressure on apostates by reminding them of the rejection of Christian principles as it had figured in their earliest memories, triggering feelings of nostalgia and guilt.

⁴⁵ *Sheelot u-Teshuvot* (ed. Yosef Kafah; Jerusalem, 1959), 187–90 (#159). On Francesc Eiximenis’ response to the Jewish accusation that Christianity was idolatrous, see Viera, “The Evolution of Francesc Eiximenis’s Attitudes,” 151–52.

⁴⁶ On the inquisitorial prosecution of Jews charged with re-Judaizing apostates, see Jean Régéné, comp., *History of the Jews in Aragon: Regesta and Documents (1213–1327)* (ed. Yom Tov Assis; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1978), 218–19 (#1206), 548 (#2966), 599 (#3259), and 624–25 (#3419). On Jews denouncing other Jews for re-Judaizing apostates, see Shatzmiller, *Recherches sur la communauté juive de Manosque*, 55 and 59.

⁴⁷ See Shatzmiller, “Converts and Judaizers” and Yerushalmi, “The Inquisition and the Jews,” 363–74.

⁴⁸ See Di Segni, “Due nuovi fonti,” 129–30.

The *Toledot Yeshu* in Open Confrontations with Christians

The records of the trials of Janto and Jamila Almuli and Jucef de Quatorze suggest that, on occasion, the intended audience for the *Toledot Yeshu* may have been even broader than Jews and apostates. Indeed, the testimonies of Pere and the Navarros all intimate that Pere's Jewish advisors encouraged Pere to broadcast the *Toledot Yeshu* to the justice of Calatayud in order to ensure that he would condemn Pere to the stake and thereby enable him to burn to death as a Jewish martyr. Thus, in the medieval Crown of Aragon, the *Toledot Yeshu* may have had a place in open confrontations with Christians.

Pere claimed that Janto Almuli told him to tell the justice of Calatayud that "Christians believe(d) a false thing because they believe(d) that God came (to earth) through a woman whom Christians call Holy Mary, and that they believed a dead thing, and that he whom Christians called Jesus, and ... whom they believed to be God, was not God but, rather, a fraud."⁴⁹ Similarly, according to Solomon Navarro, Pere was to declare that "Christ whom Christians worship is not God nor was he (ever) God or he would not have died. Rather, he was an accursed fraud and the son of the greatest whore."⁵⁰ Finally, according to Miriam, Pere was told to say that "Jesus whom (Christians) adore is not God. Rather, he is and was an accursed fraud, and his mother Mary, whom Christians worship, was a great whore and a cheap woman."⁵¹

These words not only encapsulate the essence of Jucef de Quatorze's version of the *Toledot Yeshu*, but they also closely follow the opening line of his narrative: "Jesus ... was not God but an accursed bastard whose mother conceived him through adultery."⁵² Indeed, it is possible that they were actually shorthand for the *Toledot Yeshu*, whether on the part of the Jews as they allegedly spoke to Pere, of Pere and the Navarros as they stood before the tribunal of fra Sancho de Torralba, or of inquisitorial scribes as they put pen to paper. Moreover, given the inflammatory contents of the *Toledot Yeshu*, it is possible that the narrative was referred to using shorthand more often than we shall ever know. Several documents from the medieval Crown of Aragon allude to Jews insulting Christ and Mary in ways that involved elements of the *Toledot Yeshu*. In 1305, for example, a Jew from the region of Huesca was denounced for declaring that Jesus had been conceived through adultery and for uttering other blasphemies "that cannot be recounted or heard without tears."⁵³ Was this a reference to the *Toledot Yeshu*? Surely, from a Christian perspective, the less the *Toledot Yeshu* was heard, the

⁴⁹ ACB, C126, fol. 42v.

⁵⁰ ACB, C126, fol. 45r.

⁵¹ ACB, C126, fol. 48v.

⁵² ACB, C126, fol. 50r.

⁵³ Baer, *Die Juden im Christlichen Spanien*, 184–88 (#157).

better. Francesc Eiximenis, for one, wanted “the kings of Spain” to burn and prohibit this “book of the devil” so that it would never again “be seen or named.”⁵⁴

The possibility that Jews may have commanded a repentant apostate to unveil the *Toledot Yeshu* in broad daylight in order to draw Christians into participating in their plan suggests that Jews knew that the *Toledot Yeshu* could leave no Christian unmoved.⁵⁵ Indeed, according to Miriam Navarro, the Jews told Pere: “when you will have said these (words, i.e., about Christ being a fraud and Mary a whore), the justice will immediately (agree to burn you at the stake).”⁵⁶ And Salomon Navarro claimed that the Jews told Pere that, after saying these things, “the justice would proceed against him without any delay.”⁵⁷ In point of fact, Christian authorities in the medieval Crown displayed little tolerance for “heretical words” that, as the bishop of Girona, Jaume de Trilla, put it in 1373, might “infect the Lord’s sheep.”⁵⁸ Moreover, clerics were particularly alarmed by blasphemous words that were uttered within earshot of suggestible Christians. Thus, fra Bernat de Puigcercós opened his draft of the final sentence for the Almulis and Jucef de Quatorze by noting that these “Jews not only led certain Christians, who were previously Jews, to return to the Jewish perfidy *in secret*, but that they also led them *publicly* to profess said perfidy, *publicly* to deny the faith of Christ, and *publicly* and with abominable words to blaspheme (against) Christ and his mother and the Law of Christ” (emphasis mine).⁵⁹ It follows that, if the charges against the Almulis and Jucef de Quatorze were true, these Jews would have gauged well how to manipulate the justice of Calatayud, although clearly at great personal cost.

The *Toledot Yeshu* as a Weapon in the Hands of Jewish Apostates

The possibility that Pere entirely fabricated his charges against the Almulis and Jucef de Quatorze is problematic, not least of all because it fails to account for Pere’s near death at the stake. It cannot be discounted, however, and it, in turn, suggests yet another potential role for the *Toledot Yeshu* in the context of Jewish-Christian tensions in medieval Iberia. Precisely because the *Toledot Yeshu* was such an abomination to Christians, apostates who sought to harm their former co-religionists could, to great effect, accuse Jews of reciting the narrative.

⁵⁴ Museu Episcopal de Vic, MS 172, fol. 34r.

⁵⁵ On Christian reactions to the *Toledot Yeshu*, see Yaacov Deutsch, ‘*Toledot Yeshu*’ in Christian Eyes: Reception and Response to ‘*Toledot Yeshu*’ in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period (MA thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997 [in Hebrew]).

⁵⁶ ACB, C126, fol. 48v.

⁵⁷ ACB, C126, fol. 45r.

⁵⁸ Jaume Puig i Oliver, “Documents Relatius a la Inquisició del ‘Registrum Litterarum’ de l’Arxiu Diocesà de Girona (s. XIV),” *Arxiu de Textos Catalans Antics* 17 (1998): 447–48 (#59).

⁵⁹ ACB, C126, fol. 83v.

Many of the Jewish apostates who lived in the medieval Crown of Aragon prior to 1391 were angry at particular Jews, if not at the Jewish community as a whole. Indeed, intra-Jewish strife (relating, for example, to excommunications, ideological disagreements, instances of physical violence, and the personal consequences of particular laws) often led to apostasy in the first place, and apostates were frequently eager to take revenge against their Jewish antagonists. Time and again, apostates therefore denounced Jews to bishops and inquisitors for alleged crimes against Christians and Christianity (presumably hoping, in the process, also to rise in Christians' esteem). For example, in 1324, an apostate named Ramón warned the Jewish scribe of Calatayud, Judah Hochon, that if he did not pay him 10 Jaca *lliures*, he would report him to the local inquisition, presumably for some crime against the Catholic faith. When Judah refused to pay Ramón, Ramón denounced him, and Judah was arrested and imprisoned by the prior of the Dominican convent of Calatayud.⁶⁰ Similarly, a register of denunciations that were made to the tribunal of the inquisitor general of the Crown of Aragon during the 1370s tells of an apostate named Jaume Bisnes who denounced a Jew by the name of Lupus Abnacay for host desecration.⁶¹ And in 1389, an apostate denounced a Jew from Montblanc named Vidal Brunell to the inquisitor fra Guillem de Tous for possessing an allegedly blasphemous book by Maimonides (probably the *Sefer Shoftim* of the *Mishneh Torah*), unleashing a grueling inquisitorial investigation.⁶²

If Pere fabricated his charges against the Almulis and Jucef de Quatorze, then his case constitutes one more example of an apostate seeking to harm his former co-religionists by denouncing Jews to Christian authorities for offenses against Christians and the Catholic faith. Moreover, the *Toledot Yeshu* would have played a central role in Pere's scheme, for, an entire year after Pere first told the tribunal of fra Sancho de Torralba about his alleged encounter with the Almulis and Jucef de Quatorze on the night of January 4, 1341, Jucef's reported words still stung as much as his imputed actions. Indeed, in his final sentence, fra Bernat de Puigercos excoriated Jucef de Quatorze, not only for having led an apostate to renounce Christianity and burn at the stake, but also for "having said unspeakably cruel words against the Christian faith, the holy son of God, Jesus Christ, and his holy mother, the Blessed Virgin, Our Lady, Mary."⁶³ A source of strength for Jews, shame for apostates, and outrage for Christians, the *Toledot Yeshu*, then, could be dynamite in the hands of a vengeful apostate.

⁶⁰ *Acta Aragonensia: Quellen zur deutschen, italienischen, französischen, Spanischen, zur Kirchen- und Kulturgeschichte aus der diplomatischen Korrespondenz Jaymes II (1291–1327)* (ed. Heinrich Finke; Berlin: W. Rothschild, 1908–1922), 2:861–62 (#542).

⁶¹ See Miret, "El procés de les hosties," 59–80 and Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, 86–87 and 109–15.

⁶² See Jaume Riera i Sans, "Un procés inquisitorial contra els jueus de Montblanc per un llibre de Maimònides," *Aplec de Treballs* 8 (1987): 59–73.

⁶³ ACB, C126, fol. 90v.

The relatively mild nature of the version of the *Toledot Yeshu* that Pere put in the mouth of Jucef Quatorze suggests, however, that Pere's primary aim actually was not to destroy Jucef. If it had been, Pere presumably would have given the tribunal of fra Sancho de Torralba a far more vitriolic rendition of the tale. This observation, in turn, strengthens the possibility that Jews actually did recount the *Toledot Yeshu* in an effort to re-Judaize Pere and that Pere's claims were, at least to some extent, true.

Further research regarding the history of the textual transmission of the *Toledot Yeshu* promises to shed additional light on the narrative that Jucef de Quatorze is said to have told on the night of January 4, 1341. In itself, however, this attestation of the *Toledot Yeshu* significantly deepens our understanding of the functions that the parody may have played in medieval Iberia. Insofar as it was a centerpiece of an epic inquisitorial trial against Jews and converts in the mid-fourteenth-century Crown of Aragon, it is clear that the *Toledot Yeshu* played an important role in Jewish-Christian conflict beyond the learned polemics of Ramón Martí, Shem Tov ben Isaac ibn Shaprut, and Shimon ben Tzemach Duran. More specifically, however, this attestation also grants a glimpse of the humble and clandestine circumstances under which ordinary Jews commonly told the tale, it suggests that Jews drew upon the *Toledot Yeshu* in their efforts to re-Judaize apostates, it raises the possibility that the narrative was brandished in open confrontations with Christians, and it shows how a wily apostate could have used his knowledge of the *Toledot Yeshu* to harm Jews.

If the text thus illuminates relatively obscure aspects of Jewish-Christian tensions in medieval Iberia, however, this broader context may, conversely, deepen our understanding of the text. As we discussed above, it seems probable that Jews molded the contents of the *Toledot Yeshu* to suit particular goals and audiences. It follows that the remarkably protean nature of the *Toledot Yeshu* may have been a product, not only of the particular sources that were at the disposal of Jews in specific times and places, but also of a creative process that was shaped by the ever-evolving exigencies of Jewish existence.

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