

## Table of Contents

Preface . . . . .	V
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### Introduction

<i>Toledot Yeshu</i> as a Tool of Polemic . . . . .	3
History of Modern Research . . . . .	19
Classification . . . . .	28
Title . . . . .	40
Preamble . . . . .	43
Birth Narrative . . . . .	45
Heresies and Crimes of Yeshu . . . . .	57
Stealing the Name . . . . .	64
Yeshu in the Galilee . . . . .	70
Bringing Yeshu to Justice . . . . .	76
The Trials of Yeshu . . . . .	82
Execution . . . . .	92
Burial . . . . .	101
Acts of Eliyahu . . . . .	104
Acts of Nestor and Shim'on . . . . .	111
The Finding of the Holy Cross . . . . .	120

### Texts

#### Group I

Early Oriental A (Cambridge Univ. Lib. T.-S. Misc. 35.87) . . . . .	127
Early Oriental A (New York JTS 2529.2) . . . . .	135
Early Oriental B (New York JTS 8998) . . . . .	137
Early Oriental C (St. Petersburg RNL EVR 2a.105/9) . . . . .	145
Early Yemenite (New York JTS 6312) . . . . .	147
Byzantine (St. Petersburg RNL EVR 1.274) . . . . .	155

## Group II

Ashkenazi A (Strasbourg BnU 3974) . . . . .	167
Ashkenazi B (New York JTS 2221) . . . . .	185
Late Yemenite A (New York JTS 2343) . . . . .	206
Late Oriental (Jerusalem Benayahu 25.4) . . . . .	221
Italian A (Leipzig BH 17 1–18) . . . . .	233
Italian B (Parma 2091 [De Rossi 1271]) . . . . .	273

## Group III

Wagenseil (Cambridge, MA, Harvard Houghton Lib. 57) . . . . .	286
Huldreich (Amsterdam Hs. Ros. 442) . . . . .	305
Slavic A1 (Princeton Firestone Lib. Heb. 28) . . . . .	323

Bibliography . . . . .	373
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Index . . . . .	391
Hebrew Bible . . . . .	391
Rabbinic and Related Literature . . . . .	396
New Testament . . . . .	399
Jewish and Christian Apocrypha . . . . .	401
Selected Classical and Patristic Literature . . . . .	401
Subjects and Other Literary Sources . . . . .	402

## *Toledot Yeshu* as a Tool of Polemic

The history of *Toledot Yeshu* research presents a paradox: Public excitement and interest for this composition had to subside in order for scholarly inquiry to commence. This happened only in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; before that, *Toledot Yeshu* was used as a tool of polemic or studied with the sole purpose of sharpening or, more often, destroying this tool. Not only Johannes Jacob Huldreich and Johannes Christoph Wagenseil but even some of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century scholars – such as Sabine Baring-Gould,<sup>1</sup> George W. Foote and Joseph M. Wheeler<sup>2</sup> – were not completely free of an obsessive desire to disprove the *Toledot*'s claim of being an authentic report of Jesus' life, or to demonstrate just the opposite.

This question, however, was irrelevant for many centuries, when the genuineness or falsehood of *Toledot Yeshu* was presumed, so that one could use it as evidence against one's opponent. Agobard (ca. 769–840 CE), bishop of Lyon, provides the first reference to the *Toledot* as a written composition: “Also in the teachings of their ancestors they read,”<sup>3</sup> starts Agobard, before he goes on to retell a story that closely corresponds to the content of our earliest manuscripts. In this story, Jesus is “an honorable young man” (*juven[is]... honorabil[is]*), a student of John the Baptist, and himself a teacher with many disciples, and “Kepha, that is, Peter” one of them. Despite his recognition, Jesus is accused of “much mendacity” and put in jail by Emperor Tiberius. In order to uphold his reputation, Jesus promises that the emperor's daughter would become pregnant without the agency of a man and would give birth to a son. She, however, gives birth to a stone. Then, Agobard continues,

(Jesus) was suspended on a “fork” like an execrable magus, and there he was hit in the head with a stone. Killed in this way, he was buried next to some aqueduct, and some Jew was entrusted with his custody. At that very night, however, the aqueduct was suddenly flooded. By Pilate's order, (Jesus) was sought for twelve months but never found.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Baring-Gould, *Lost and Hostile Gospels*.

<sup>2</sup> Foote and Wheeler, *Jewish Life of Christ*.

<sup>3</sup> Agobard, *De Judaicis superstitionibus* (“On the Superstitions of Jews,” 826 CE), *PL* 104, pp. 87–88; on this source and other works of Agobard, see Schäfer, “Agobard's and Amulo's *Toledot Yeshu*”; on Agobard, see Cabaniss, “Agobard of Lyons”; Langenwaller, *Agobard of Lyon*.

<sup>4</sup> *Inde etiam, veluti magum detestabilem, furca suspensum; ubi et petra in capite percussus atque hoc modo occisus, juxta quemdam aquaeductum sepultus, et Judaeo cuidam ad*

Many nuclei found in Agobard's version are present in the Aramaic *Toledot Yeshu*: Jesus appears as a student of John the Baptist,<sup>5</sup> a master of five or twelve disciples,<sup>6</sup> and a prisoner of Tiberius. He is accused of using magic,<sup>7</sup> but fails to spell a child into a virgin girl, instead putting a stone into her belly.<sup>8</sup> Eventually, in both Agobard's and the Aramaic versions Jesus is convicted and executed by hanging and stoning,<sup>9</sup> and then buried in some kind of water-pipe, trench or reservoir.<sup>10</sup>

But there are differences, too. Whereas in Agobard Jesus' body is never found, in *Toledot Yeshu* it is found and exposed by Yehudah the gardener.<sup>11</sup> It is impossible to tell whether the eventual disappearance of Jesus' body was indeed introduced by Agobard or whether the version he heard accepted this mysterious ending. The mention of Peter in Agobard's story also differs from the *Toledot*. Here, the name "Peter" is given to one of Jesus' disciples in order to mark "the severity (or: inflexibility) and dullness of (his) mind" (... *propter duritiam et hebitudinem sensus*), yet he is released from jail "by the mercy of Herod, who held his wisdom in high esteem."<sup>12</sup> A wise sage, Peter Kepha, is unknown to the Aramaic versions; however, later recensions of *Toledot Yeshu* do mention Shim'on Kepha, chosen for his wisdom by the Christians as their leader. Unlike Peter, Shim'on is not released from jail, but chose voluntary imprisonment in a tower, all for the sake of misleading the Christians and keeping the Jewish religion separate.<sup>13</sup>

The question of the date of origin and the provenance of Agobard's source is still open and probably will never be answered to everyone's satisfaction. Agobard was familiar with a number of Jewish books, which he quoted in his works written to undermine the growing influence of Jews at the Carolingian

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*custodiam commendatum; noctu vero subita aquaeductum inundatione sublatum, Pilati jussu per duodecim lunas quaesitum, nec usque inventum.*

<sup>5</sup> See Ms. Cambridge Univ. Lib. T.-S. Misc. 35.87, fol. 1r.16–17 (Early Oriental A).

<sup>6</sup> See the manuscripts of the Oriental A and B and the *Tam u-Mu'ad* versions (Slavic B2, only in the database).

<sup>7</sup> See, e. g., Mss. Cambridge Univ. Lib. T.-S. Misc. 35.87, fol. 1r.25–30 (Early Oriental A), and New York JTS 8998, fol. 1r.20–21 (early Oriental B).

<sup>8</sup> See, e. g., Ms. Cambridge Univ. Lib. T.-S. Misc. 35.87, fol. 1v, and other manuscripts of Group I; see also Meerson, "Yeshu the Physician."

<sup>9</sup> See the "Execution" section.

<sup>10</sup> On this episode, see Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 30; Newman, "The Death of Jesus," 74; and Meerson, "Meaningful Nonsense," 191–95.

<sup>11</sup> See the "Burial" section.

<sup>12</sup> Usually, in the versions mentioning John the Baptist, John is executed along with Yeshu. However, in Ms. New York JTS 8998 (Early Oriental B), Yohanan the Dyer (John the Baptist) betrays Yeshu and perhaps is spared in the lost section of the manuscript. In the later versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, Yohanan the Dyer is probably assimilated with Yohanan the scholar and husband of Miriam.

<sup>13</sup> See Gager, "Simon Peter"; and the "First separation" section in the present edition.

court.<sup>14</sup> Along with *Toledot Yeshu*, he refers to the book of *Divine Dimensions* (*Shi'ur Qomah*), the *Book of Creation* (*Sefer Yetsirah*), the *Great Treatise on the Order of Creation* (*Seder Rabbah di-Bereshit*) and the *Alphabet of Rabbi Aqiva* (*Otiyyot de-R. Aqiva*), all composed in seventh- or eighth-century Babylonia.<sup>15</sup> Apparently, *Toledot Yeshu* belongs to this body of literature, and it is very likely that the same wave of literary production and reception that brought to light and carried these works to Europe included one of the earliest versions of *Toledot Yeshu*. If this is correct, this early version may well have also been composed in Babylonia not much earlier than its citation by Agobard.

However, *Toledot Yeshu* traditions are older. Some events from the narrative are mentioned by authors of late antiquity already in the second century CE. Justin Martyr (ca. 150 CE) testifies to the existence of an anti-Christian “heresy.” In his *Dialogue with Trypho* the author maintains that the Jews sent out from Jerusalem chosen men through all the land to “tell that the godless heresy of the Christians had sprung up, and to recount such things against (the Christians) which only those who do not know (them) say ...”<sup>16</sup> Those chosen men “displayed great zeal in publishing throughout all the land bitter and dark and unjust things,”<sup>17</sup> namely that Jesus was a magician (μάγος)<sup>18</sup> and “a Galilean deceiver” (Γαλιλαίος πλάνος)<sup>19</sup> whose body was stolen from the grave by his disciples at night. Similar testimonies can be found in

i) the *Epistola ad Titum* by Jerome (ca. 400 CE): “I heard that certain Jews ... in Rome ... make an inquiry into the genealogy of Christ”;<sup>20</sup>

<sup>14</sup> See Schäfer, “Agobard’s and Amulo’s *Toledot Yeshu*,” 29–30, and the bibliography *ibid.*, footnote 12, especially Zuckerman, “The Political Uses of Theology,” and Bonfil, “Cultural and Religious Traditions in Ninth-Century French Jewry.”

<sup>15</sup> See Schäfer, “Agobard’s and Amulo’s *Toledot Yeshu*,” 38–39.

<sup>16</sup> Scholars disagree in their understanding of this passage. Whereas Frend (*Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, 146) maintains that the passage confirms the existence of official letters sent by Jewish authorities already since the first century CE in order to discredit Christianity, Katz (“Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity,” 44–48) argues that Justin only refers to “casual, if negative, gossip” spread inside the Diaspora by travelers from Palestine. For the absence of any evidence of official communication between Jews and Gentiles condemning Christianity in Justin’s time, we are prone to agree with Katz. Cf., however, Harnack (*Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, 237–40) and Krauss (“Die Jüdischen Apostel”) who support the idea of “Jewish apostles” in the first centuries CE.

<sup>17</sup> Justin, *Dialogus cum Tryphone*, 17: ἄνδρας ἐκλεκτοὺς ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἐκλεξάμενοι τότε ἐξεπέμψατε εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν, λέγοντας αἵρεσιν ἄθεον Χριστιανῶν πεφηνέναι, καταλέγοντας τε ταῦτα ἅπερ καθ’ ἡμῶν οἱ ἀγνοοῦντες ἡμᾶς πάντες λέγουσιν. See also chapters 10, 69, 108, and *Apologia* 1:26.

<sup>18</sup> Justin, *Dialogus cum Tryphone*, 69.

<sup>19</sup> Justin, *Dialogus cum Tryphone*, 108.

<sup>20</sup> Jerome, *Epistola* 3:9: *audivi quondam de Hebraeis ... Romae ... de Christi genealogiis facere quaestionem.*

ii) Commodian's *Carmen apologeticum* (ca. 250 CE): "But those are unfortunate, who admire empty stories | and defame him as a magician ...";<sup>21</sup>

iii) John Chrysostom (ca. 400 CE), asking the Jews: "Why did you crucify Christ?" and receiving the answer: "Because he led (people) astray and was a sorcerer";<sup>22</sup>

iv) Eusebius, quoting Justin in his *Historia ecclesiastica* (ca. 330 CE).<sup>23</sup>

All these sources refer to informal debates between Jews and Christians. The first official disputation is described in the eighth-century *Vita Silvestri* that also contains references to ideas and situations known from *Toledot Yeshu*. In the *Vita*, twelve rabbis are sent from Jerusalem to Rome to dispute the Christian doctrine with bishop Sylvester. During the debate they repeatedly question the virgin birth of Jesus and eventually use the Ineffable Name to prove their case. The bishop, however, prevails over them with the help of the name of Jesus.<sup>24</sup>

It is clear, then, that Jews did say something against Jesus. However, did Justin's "heresy" form a narrative? Was it publicized in a written form? Was it actually spread through the lands by the "chosen men from Jerusalem?" To these questions, there are no definite answers. The anti-Christian traditions, witnessed in the above mentioned sources, could have been used by *Toledot Yeshu*; yet nothing there points to *Toledot Yeshu* specifically.

Unlike the *Dialogue with Trypho*, works by Celsus, Origen, Tertullian, and another verse by Commodian do contain idiosyncratic material that may well have germinated in some kind of a proto-*Toledot Yeshu*. In his Ἀληθὴς λόγος ("Word

<sup>21</sup> Commodian, *Carmen apologeticum*, 387–88: *Illi autem miseri, qui fabulas vanas adorant / Et magum infamant ...*

<sup>22</sup> John Chrysostom, *Ad Ps.*, 8:3.

<sup>23</sup> Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 4:18.7.

<sup>24</sup> The earliest kernel of this story is found in a work by the fifth-century Syriac author Jacob of Serugh. This allows Krauss to link *Toledot Yeshu* (via *Vita Silvestri*) with an unknown Syriac gospel, which presumably was satirized by the *Toledot*. See Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 3–4, 243–44; Krauss and Horbury, *The Jewish-Christian Controversy*, 42, 44–45.

The *Vita Silvestri* is preserved in Latin, Syriac, Greek, and Armenian, and also goes by the names *Actus Silvestri*, *Gesta beati Silvestri*, and *Liber Silvestri*. The most detailed, Latin version is given by Mombricitus (*Sanctuarium, sive Vitae collectae ex codibus MSS*, 2:279 ff.; 2:508–31). For the Syriac version, see Land, *Anecdota syriaca*, 2:46–76; for the Greek versions by Byzantine authors, see Mingé *PG*, 134:1097–1118, 143:1–380, 158:1–958; and for the Armenian version, see the references in Pogossian, *The Letter of Love and Concord*, 57. The prologue in Mombricitus' version informs us that the *Vita Silvestri* is part of *Acts* of bishops and martyrs composed by Eusebius but not included in his *Church History*. The authenticity of traditions reported by this story is still debated; in addition to Krauss and Horbury, see Coleman, *Constantine the Great and Christianity*, 161 f.; Heller, "Über das Alter der jüdischen Judas-Sage und des Toldot Jeschu," 206; Ehrhardt, "Constantine, Rome and the Rabbis," 301; Canella, *Gli Actus Silvestri*, 1–46; Birkett, *The Saints' Lives of Jocelin of Furness*, 69. For a list of editions of the *Vita Silvestri*, see Juster, *Les juifs dans l'empire romain*, 1:66, no. 1; for a list of late antique and early medieval works addressing Jewish-Christian disputations, see McGiffert, *Dialogue Between a Christian and a Jew*, 12–27; Krauss and Horbury, *The Jewish-Christian Controversy*, 27–43.



of Truth”; ca. 177 CE), Celsus introduces a Jew who reveals to him the secrets of Jesus’ origin: that he was “born in a certain Jewish village, of a poor woman of the country, who gained her subsistence by spinning”;<sup>25</sup> that his mother, “when she was pregnant, was turned out of doors by the carpenter to whom she had been betrothed, as having been guilty of adultery”; that “she bore a child to a certain soldier named Panthera”;<sup>26</sup> that he went to Egypt, learnt magic, and returned to his own country to proclaim himself a god. Apart from scattered references to Jesus parentage in the Talmud,<sup>27</sup> the above story of Miriam’s adultery with Panthera/Pandera can only be found in *Toledot Yeshu*: in the earliest recensions, as a brief reference quite conforming to the account in Celsus,<sup>28</sup> but in the later versions, as a sophisticated drama that preserved nothing from the Ἀληθής λόγος except for the name Panthera.

A distant echo of Yeshu’s execution and burial resonates in Tertullian’s *De spectaculis* (ca. 200 CE) and in the *Carmen apologeticum* by Commodian. In the context addressing the true enjoyment and spectacle appropriate for Christians (as opposed to attending the circus and theatre), Tertullian praises the “fast-approaching advent” of Jesus,

That is he ... that carpenter’s or prostitute’s son, that Sabbath-breaker, that Samaritan and demon-possessed! This is he, whom you bought from Judas! This is he, who was struck with reed and fist, who was defiled with spittle, who was given gall and vinegar to drink! This is he, whom his disciples secretly stole away that it might be said he had risen, unless it was the gardener who removed him, lest his lettuces be damaged by the crowd of sightseers!<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1:28: ἐκ κόμης αὐτὸν γεγονέναι ἰουδαϊκῆς καὶ ἀπὸ γυναικὸς ἐγγωρίου καὶ πενιχρᾶς καὶ χερνήτιδος. It is impossible to ascertain whether or not Celsus’ Jew was a fictive character. Arguments in favor of him being a real person are unconvincing. See for these arguments Troiani, “Il Giudeo di Celso”; Baumgarten, “Jews, Pagans and Christians on the Empty Grave of Jesus”; Blumell, “A Jew in Celsus’s *True Doctrine*?” Even more unsuccessful is the appeal to common sense by Bammel (“Der Jude des Celsus,” 282). See now Niehoff’s attempt to locate a Jewish written source behind the account of Celsus (“A Jewish Critique of Christianity,” 154–58). Her arguments, including an alleged difficulty to reproduce a long and detailed account from an oral source, are also problematic.

<sup>26</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1:32: ὡς ἐξωσθεῖσα ἀπὸ τοῦ μνηστευσαμένου αὐτὴν τέκτονος, ἐλεγχθεῖσα ἐπὶ μοιχείᾳ καὶ κούσῃ ἀπὸ τινος στρατιώτου Πανθήρα τοῦνομα.

<sup>27</sup> *M. Shabb.* 12:4; *t. Shabb.* 11:15; *y. Shabb.* 12:4/3, fol. 13d; *b. Shabb.* 104b = *b. Sanh.* 67a. See Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 15–24.

<sup>28</sup> See Ms. New York JTS 8998, fol. 1r.13–16 (Early Oriental B). It was also known to Maimonides; see below, pp. 47–48.

<sup>29</sup> Tertullian, *De spectaculis*, 30: *Ille ... fabri aut quaestuariae filius, sabbati destructor, Samarites et daemonium habens; hic est quem a Iuda redemistis, hic est ille harundine et colaphis diverberatus, sputamentis dedecoratus, felle et aceto potatus; hic est, quem clam discentes subriperunt, ut surrexisse dicatur, vel hortulanus detraxit, ne lactucae suae frequentia com-eantium adlaederentur.* The translation is quoted from Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 112. On this passage, see also Horbury, “Tertullian on the Jews,” reprinted in idem, *Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy*, 176–79.

The gardener and his lettuces reminds us of Yeshu's execution on a cabbage-stalk and of the following episode, in which Yehudah the gardener steals his body in fear that Yeshu's disciples may steal it first and then claim that their master has ascended to heaven.<sup>30</sup> This is a far call, however, because there are closer affinities in Christian sources, which retell the story alluded to in Tertullian. Already in John 20:15 Mary Magdalene mistakes the resurrected Jesus for the gardener who might have carried his body away. In the *Acta Pilati* (also known as the *Gospel of Nicodemus*), Jesus is scourged and hanged in the same garden where he was arrested.<sup>31</sup> The Jews then try to bribe the guardians who witnessed the resurrection of Jesus, asking them to lie and say that his disciples stole him.<sup>32</sup> In the *Book of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ by Bartholomew*, the body of Jesus is indeed stolen; yet by one of his followers, the gardener Philogenes, who manages to outrun the Jews, to take Jesus' body away and place it in a tomb in his own garden.<sup>33</sup> It can be concluded, therefore, that Tertullian did not necessarily need *Toledot Yeshu* in any form, oral or written, to quote from it; there could have been other easily available, less distant and more consistent traditions.<sup>34</sup>

The relevant passage in Commodian's poem is short, but it establishes a more specific connection with *Toledot Yeshu* than any of the above-mentioned sources. In the *Toledot*, Yeshu is buried in a water trench, pipe, or reservoir; in the poem, "(the Jews) further defame him: 'We have put him in a well.'"<sup>35</sup> There is indeed no other known work of literature in addition to the *Carmen apologeticum* and *Toledot Yeshu* that reports Jesus' burial in water.

Yet only one source predating Agobard may claim a direct and immediate connection with the *Toledot*, meaning that distinct episodes in one composition may indeed have been copied from identical episodes in the other. This source is the Talmud. The trial of the five disciples of Jesus (Matthai, Naqi, Beni, Netser, and Todah),<sup>36</sup> his atrocious behavior in an Alexandrian hostel,<sup>37</sup> and Miriam's confession to Rabbi Aqiva regarding Yeshu's parentage.<sup>38</sup> all these stories are

<sup>30</sup> See the "Execution" and "Burial" sections.

<sup>31</sup> *Gospel of Nicodemus*, 9:5; see the edition by Tischendorf, *Evangelia apocrypha. Acta Pilati*.

<sup>32</sup> *Gospel of Nicodemus*, 13.

<sup>33</sup> Ms. London Brit. Mus. Or. 6804; the Coptic text is edited and translated in Budge, *Coptic Apocrypha*, 1–216 (for the burial episode, see *ibid.*, 188–89); see also the summary in James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 182–86.

<sup>34</sup> Both the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and the *Gospel of Bartholomew* postdate Tertullian. We presume, however, that these gospels derive from earlier Christian traditions, although it cannot be ruled out that they respond to anti-Christian arguments and reverse them. If the latter is true, a direct connection between Tertullian and *Toledot Yeshu* is possible.

<sup>35</sup> Commodian, *Carmen apologeticum*, 440: *magis infamant: In puteum misimus illum*.

<sup>36</sup> *b. Sanh.* 43a; see Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 75–81.

<sup>37</sup> *b. Sanh.* 107b = *b. Sotah* 47a; see Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 34–40.

<sup>38</sup> *Kallah* 18b (this source, however, does not give the name of the "bastard's mother").



almost identical in the Talmud and *Toledot Yeshu*.<sup>39</sup> Each of the two sources may reasonably claim primogeniture: the Talmud, because it was commonly known and authoritative, and because there is no actual evidence for *Toledot Yeshu* as a composition that predates the latest date of the Talmud's composition. On the other hand, these short stories from the life of Jesus seem to ask for a broader context or a more solid and coherent presentation than the one offered in the Talmud. Therefore, some scholars conclude that these stories were unified into a narrative, such as *Toledot Yeshu*, before they were quoted in the Talmud.

Speculations aside, Agobard remains the first milestone providing the terminus ad quem for the *Toledot*'s composition. His successor in the bishop's chair, Amulo, mentions the reputation of Jesus as a "destroyer from Egypt" (*dissipator Aegyptius*),<sup>40</sup> his shameful birth from some Pandera and an adulteress, and retells the story of his execution and burial in precisely the same detail as they appear in *Toledot Yeshu*:

They blaspheme that we believe in him who the Law of God says is suspended from a tree and is accursed by God. Therefore, on the same day that he was suspended, they ordered him buried, lest he remain on the gallows through the 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 cabbages, lest their land be contaminated ... 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 cast aside.<sup>41</sup>

Amulo accurately refers to the protest of Yehoshua<sup>c</sup> ben Perahiah against "breaking the eternal rules of Scripture because of that criminal"<sup>42</sup> and to the demonstration of Yeshu's body by Yehudah the gardener,<sup>43</sup> both episodes being well-known from all recensions of the *Toledot*. Approximately the same story was

<sup>39</sup> See our discussion in the following sections: "Birth Narrative," "Heresies," and "Trials."

<sup>40</sup> Amulo, *Liber contra Judaeos ad Carolum regem* ("Book Against the Jews Addressed to King Charles"), ch. 39 (PL 116:168a).

<sup>41</sup> Amulo, *ibid.*, chs. 25, 40 (PL 116:158a, 168b–169b): *Blasphemant enim quod in eum credamus, quem lex Dei in ligno suspensum, et a Deo maledictum dicat: et propterea eadem die quo suspensus est, eum jusserit sepeliri; ne si per noctem remaneret in patibulo, terra eorum per eum pollueretur ... [E]t conclamante, ac jubente magistro eorum Josue, celeriter de ligno depositum; et in quodam horto caulibus plena, in sepulcro projectum, ne terra eorum contaminaretur ... Et dicunt eum a majoribus sui, quando depositus est de ligna, et obrutus in sepulcro, ut omnes scirent mortuum, nec resuscitatum, iterum de sepulcro extractum, et retorta per totam ciuitatem tractum.* On this source too, see Schäfer, "Agobard's and Amulo's *Toledot Yeshu*," 44 ff.

<sup>42</sup> E. g., Ms. Leipzig BH 17, fol. 11r. 2–4 (Italian A): "And at night, the elders said, 'Take him down from the cabbage and bury him, in order to fulfill that which is said, *Do not leave his corpse on the tree*, etc.'" (Deut. 21:23).

<sup>43</sup> E. g., Ms. New York JTS 2221, fol. 42r. 7–9 (Ashkenazi B): "They took Yeshu and tied him up with ropes and pulled him and dragged him through the outskirts of Jerusalem until they brought him before them, the queen and Pilate."

recounted by Amulo's contemporary Hrabanus Maurus in his treatise *Contra Iudaeos* ("Against the Jews").<sup>44</sup> After that, for the following four hundred years, one can hardly point to any significant textual witness of *Toledot Yeshu*, apart from the very first mention of its title, *Tolada de Yeshu*, by Ephraim of Bonn in his commentary on the liturgical poem *Elohim al-dami-lakh* (12<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>45</sup>

The 13<sup>th</sup> century brought to light the next milestone in the history of the *Toledot*'s reception, and again thanks to a Christian polemicist. In 1264, the Dominican monk Raymond Martin was appointed to examine Hebrew books which Jews, by the king's order, had to submit to the Dominicans so that the friars could censor the passages deemed offensive. Raymond's own book, the *Pugio fidei*,<sup>46</sup> presented the results of his investigation. Among these results, there was a Latin translation of *Toledot Yeshu*, corresponding to our type Ashkenazi A. While the *Pugio fidei* remained in manuscript form until 1651, the Franciscan monk Alfonso de Espina reproduced Raymond's translation in his  *Fortalitium fidei*<sup>47</sup> and printed it in 1470. Fifty years later, another monk, Porchetus Salvaticus from Genoa, published his *Victoria*, in which he also copied Raymond's *Toledot*.<sup>48</sup> The following is our translation of Raymond's text:<sup>49</sup>

In the time, they tell, when the queen Elani, that is, Helene, reigned over all the land of Israel, Jesus of Nazareth came to Jerusalem and, in the Temple of the Lord, found a stone on which the Holy Ark was once resting. And on this (stone), *Schemhamephoras*, that is, the Ineffable Name, was written and exposed. Indeed, anyone who attained to the letters of that Name and learned them could do whatever he wished. Therefore, since the sages were concerned that men of Israel might master that Name and destroy the whole world with its power, they made two copper dogs and put them on the top of two columns opposite the gate of the Temple. Thus, whenever someone entered and gained knowledge of the letters of the aforementioned Name and then (tried to) exit, those copper dogs would bark at him so horribly that he was terrified, and the Name with the letters, which he had learned, were erased from his memory. In this way, Jesus of Nazareth came, entered the

<sup>44</sup> Quoted by Wagenseil, *Tela ignea Satanae* ("Flaming Arrows of Satan"), 1:52–53.

<sup>45</sup> Ms. Parma 665 (#13920 in The Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jerusalem), fol. 155. See Urbach, *Sefer Arugat ha-Bosem*, 4:47–48.

<sup>46</sup> *Pugio fidei adversus Mauros et Iudaeos* ("Dagger of Faith against Moors and Jews"). Scholars usually quote the second edition of this book, Leipzig, 1687. For a discussion, see Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 129–69; idem, *Living Letters of the Law*, 342–56; and Robert Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, 115–36.

<sup>47</sup> *Fortalitium fidei contra Iudaeos Saracenos aliosque Christianae fidei inimicos* ("Fortress of Faith against Jews, Saracens, and other Enemies of the Christian Faith"), 81. On De Espina and his work, see Meyuhaz Ginio, "The Fortress of Faith," and Schreckenberg, *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos-Texte. Fortalitium fidei* is partially edited and translated in McMichael, *Was Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah?*, 327 ff.

<sup>48</sup> *Victoria Porcheti adversus impios Hebreos* ("Porchetus' Victory against the Impious Jews"), 580–82. The relevant passage is published in Callsen, *Das jüdische Leben Jesu*, 98–106. On Porchetus and his book, see La Porta, "A Fourteenth-Century Armenian Polemic against Judaism and its Latin Source."

<sup>49</sup> Translated from *Pugio fidei*, 2:8.6. The Latin text of this excerpt can also be found in Feliu, "Un antievangelio Jueu de l'edat mitjana: el Séfer Toledot Iesu," 247 ff.

Temple and learned those letters and wrote them down on parchment. After that, he cut open the flesh of his shin and put the said tablet in that incision while feeling no pain because he pronounced the Name. Then, he returned the skin to its place as it was before. When he exited from the Temple, the above mentioned copper dogs barked at him, and immediately the Name was forgotten.

Thus, he came home and opened his shin with a knife, and he took out the tablet where the letters of *Shemhamephoras* were written and learned them again. When it was done, he gathered three hundred and ten youngsters of Israel and told them, “You see, the sages say that I’m a bastard only because they themselves want authority over Israel; you, however, know that all prophets prophesied about the Messiah; and I am the one, truly! Of me told the prophet Isaiah, ch. 7, הנה העלמה הרה וילדת בן וקראת שמו עמנואל, *behold, haalma*, that is a girl or a virgin, *shall conceive and bear a son and you shall call his name Emmanuel* (Isa. 7:14). David, my ancestor, prophesied about me and said, Ps. 2, יהוה אמר אלי בני אתה, *the Lord has spoken to me, You are my son. Today I have begotten you* (Ps. 2:7). Thus, my mother begot me without intercourse with a man, but by the agency of God. Therefore, they are bastards not I, for it is said, Hos. 2, ואת בניה לא ארחם כי בני זנונים, *I will have no pity on her children because they are children of whoredom*” (Hos. 2:6). And those youngsters responded, “If you are the Messiah, give us a sign.” “What sign,” he said, “are you asking from me?” They answered, “Make a crippled one stand just like we do.” He said, “Lead him to me.” Soon, they brought before him a crippled man who never stood on his feet. He pronounced the *Shemhamephoras* over him, and in that very moment he rose up and stood on his feet. Then, they all bowed to him and said, “Doubtlessly, he is the Messiah!” After that, they brought a leper to him; he said the Name and put his hand upon him, and he was instantly cured. Therefore, many criminals of our people believed him.

When the sages saw that the people of Israel believed him, they caught him and brought him before Queen Helene, in whose hands the land of Israel was. “Our Lady,” they said, “the hands of this man are full of witchcraft, and he leads the world astray.” Jesus, however, responded, “Lady, for a long time, prophets have prophesized about me; one of them said, *And a shoot shall spring forth from the stem of Jesse* (Isa. 2:1). I am the one, of whom David has truthfully spoken, *Happy is the man that has not walked in the counsel of the wicked* (Ps. 1:1).” She said, “Is it true that your laws contain what he is saying?” They answered her, “There is (such a thing) in our laws, but it does not refer to him. About him, however, it is written, *And that prophet shall be put to death because he has spoken perversion against the Lord* (Deut. 13:5). For about the Messiah is truthfully said, *In his days Judah shall be saved*” (Jer. 23:6). That enemy answered and said to the queen, “I am the one because I (can) resurrect the dead.” Then, the queen sent emissaries that she had with them, and that wicked one, using the *Shemhamephoras*, succeeded to resurrect the dead. At that very moment, the queen said, astounded, “This is truly a great sign!” And then, she put the sages to shame, and they went out of her sight, confused. And a great sorrow befell them and all of Israel.

Meanwhile, Jesus came to the Upper Galilee, and the sages came to the queen and said to her, “Our Lady, that man is a sorcerer who leads creatures astray.” She then sent soldiers to arrest him, but the people of the Galilee did not permit (it) and wanted to fight with them. He said, “Do not fight for me because the power of my heavenly Father and the signs which He gave me shall protect me.” After that, the people of the Galilee made birds of clay in their presence; he pronounced the *Shemhamephoras* over them and those birds instantly flew away. Then, they prostrated themselves face down, worshipping him.

And indeed, at that very moment, he ordered a huge millstone to be delivered and cast into the sea. When it was done, that wicked one pronounced the *Shemhameforas* and made the millstone stand above the surface of the water. He then sat upon it and told the soldiers, "Go to your Lady and report what you have seen." Then he stood up in front of them and started walking on the water.

Those soldiers went away and said what they had seen to Queen Helene who, deeply astounded, called the sages and told them, "You say this man is a sorcerer; yet you know that the signs, which he made, prove him to be the true son of God." They answered her, "Our Lady, make him come, and we shall expose his lies." After that, the elders of Israel went out and arranged that someone called Judah Scarioth should enter the Temple's *Sanctum Sanctorum* and learn the letters of the *Shemhameforas* in the same manner as Jesus had learned them: He made incisions on his shin and the other things which (Jesus) had made.

Then, that Nazarene came with his company, and the queen invited the sages; and that (Jesus) standing in the presence of the queen said, "About me, David prophesied, *For dogs have encompassed me; a company of evil-doers have enclosed me* (Ps. 22:17). However, about me it is also said, *Be not afraid of them; for I am with you to deliver you*" (Jer. 1:8). And the sages vehemently contradicted him. He (then) said to the queen, "I will ascent to heaven because David said so about me, *Be You exalted, O God, above the heavens* (Ps. 108:6). And he lifted his hands like wings and, by the *Shemhameforas*, flew up between heaven and earth. When the sages of Israel saw this, they ordered Judah Scarioth to pronounce the *Shemhameforas* and to ascend after him. He ascended and started wrestling with him, and they both fell down, and that wicked one broke his forearm, and this event the Christians lament each year before their Pascha.

In this moment, (the people of) Israel caught him and covered him over with a cloth and beat him through and through with pomegranate branches, telling Queen Helene, "If he is the son of God, let him tell who is beating him." And he could not tell. Therefore, the queen said to the sages, "He is in your hands, do with him whatever is suitable in your eyes."

Then, they took him and led him away in order to hang him. However, all wood and trees on which he was hanged immediately broke down, obviously because he had bound all the wood under an oath not to accept him. (Seeing that), they went and brought a stalk of some cabbage that belongs not 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.

About the same time as Raymond Martin wrote his *Pugio fidei*, more textual witnesses of the *Toledot* surfaced. The Christian convert Alfonso of Valladolid (Abner of Burgos; 14<sup>th</sup> century) included in his anti-Jewish tractate excerpts from two versions of *Toledot Yeshu*. These excerpts were then reproduced by a Jewish polemicist, Shem Tov ben Isaac ibn Shaprut, in his *Even Bohan* ("Touchstone"; 1380 or 1385).<sup>50</sup> One excerpt corresponds to the version trans-

<sup>50</sup> Consisting of 14 books of the original revision (1385) plus three additional chapters written around 1400, two of which contain *Toledot Yeshu* passages as part of Shem Tov's responses to Alfonso of Valladolid. For a bibliography on the *Even Bohan*, see Krauss and Horbury, *The Jewish-Christian Controversy*, 1:241–42. On the manuscripts of *Even Bohan*, see Horbury, "The Revision of Shem Tob ibn Shaprut's *Eben Bohan*."



lated by Raymond Martin and transmitted by the Hebrew manuscripts of our Group II.<sup>51</sup>

Behold, you will find many books in their possession, telling about these – about the secrets and miracles of Yeshu – such as the book that they composed as *Story of Yeshu ha-Notsri* who lived in the time of Queen Helene, and also the book that they composed in the language of the Palestinian Talmud<sup>52</sup> as *Incident with Yeshu son of Pandera*, saying that he lived in the time of Teberinus Caesar. It says in the first book that he cut open the flesh of his thigh without feeling pain and put a writing with the Ineffable Name inside (the wound). He then returned the skin above it and (the wound) was healed. After that he removed the writing from under (his) skin and he did signs and wonders. He said to the boys of Israel, “If you want to know a sign from me, bring me a lame person and I will cure him.” Immediately they brought him a lame person who never stood on his feet, and (Yeshu) pronounced over him the letters and laid his hand on him, and he was healed. (Yeshu) also said, “I am the son of God, I will raise the dead.” Immediately Queen Helene sent to him, loyal messengers she sent, and they saw that he raised the dead. They came and told her (this), and she was amazed and said to the sages, “This is a big sign!” She then rebuked the Jews who disagreed with (Yeshu), and they left her embarrassed and ashamed. (The book also says) that the people of the Galilee made birds of clay, (Yeshu) pronounced over them the Name, and they flew in the air. At that moment, (the people) fell on their faces and prostrated themselves before him. He said to them, “Bring me a large millstone.” They brought it to him, he threw it into the sea and sat on it. He raised and floated it on the sea surface like an egg-shell, and he sat on it. The wind carried him, he sat on the sea surface, and all the people were amazed. He also said to the queen, “I will ascend to my Father in heaven.” He spread his hands and ascended in the air between heaven and earth, and the queen was frightened and all the people were deeply astonished. (The book also says) that (Yeshu) knew that in the end he would be crucified, and he adjured all the trees in the world so that they should not accept him to be hanged on them. When they hanged him on a tree, it broke under him, and so every tree broke under him and did not accept him.

The other excerpt conforms to the version of Agobard and the Aramaic manuscripts of our Group I, particularly Ms. Cambridge Univ. Lib. T.-S. Misc. 35.87 (Early Oriental A). In fact, this excerpt is the only testimony to the acquaintance with the Aramaic *Toledot* in late-medieval Europe:

In the second book they said: There came Pilatus the governor, and Rabbi Yehoshua<sup>c</sup> son of Perahiah, and Marinus the Great Elder of the Jews, and Rabbi Yehudah the gardener, and Rabbi Yohanan ben Mat<sup>c</sup>ana, and Yeshu ben Pandera to Tiberias before Tiberinus Caesar. He said to them, “What are the things that you do?” (Yeshu) said to them, “I am the son of God. I wound and I heal. And (if) someone is dead, I whisper to him and he will live. And (if) there is a woman who never gave birth, I make her pregnant without (the agency of) a man.” (Tiberinus) said to them, “In this I will test you. I have a daughter who did not see a man yet. Make her pregnant!” They said to him, “Bring her to us.” He commanded the servant, he brought her, they whispered to her, and she begot.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Both excerpts are quoted and translated in Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 146–47.

<sup>52</sup> That is, in Aramaic.

<sup>53</sup> At this point the *Even Bohan* skips the part of the story telling how the embryo was turned into a stone; see the “Trials” section.



When they heralded (the judgment) of Yeshu and when the time to put him on the gallows had come and he saw the gallows at the fourth hour of the day,<sup>54</sup> he said words of sorcery and flew, and he sat on Mount Carmel. Rabbi Yehudah the gardener said to Rabbi Yehoshua<sup>c</sup> son of Perahiah, “I will go after him and bring him (down).” He said to him, “Go!” (Rabbi Yehudah) recollected and said the name of God, that is, the Ineffable Name, and left and flew after him. As he wanted to take him, Yeshu said words of sorcery, entered the cave of Elijah and closed the entrance. Rabbi Yehudah the gardener came and said to the cave, “Open! I am the messenger of God.” It opened. Yeshu made himself like a bird, a rooster. Rabbi Yehudah seized him with a linen garment and came before Rabbi Yehoshua<sup>c</sup> and (his) fellows.

About 1420, Thomas Ebendorfer, a professor of Theology in Vienna and a member of Basel’s city council, published a book, the *Falsitates Judeorum* (“Lies of the Jews”).<sup>55</sup> It survived in two manuscripts, one of which contains an anti-Christian poem by a certain Abraham and the only unabridged Latin translation of *Toledot Yeshu* including those details which, in fact, all but the twentieth-century translators choose to skip.<sup>56</sup> A Christian convert helped Thomas translating a Hebrew manuscript into German. Thomas then translated the German text into Latin, retaining in his edition many Hebrew and German words, always with an explanation of their meaning; for example, “iste Jesus *rascha*, id est malefactor, *pozswicht*” (that is, *Bösewicht*).<sup>57</sup> Like Raymond Martin, Thomas Ebendorfer translated a manuscript of our recension Ashkenazi A, but, unlike Raymond Martin, a manuscript that fully corresponds to the Strasbourg manuscript BnF 3974, including the birth narrative and the final episodes addressing the separation of the Jews and the Christians. All these episodes are missing in Raymond’s translation, and hence were likely included in the main narrative between Raymond Martin and Thomas Ebendorfer, that is, sometime between 1264 and 1420.

The Passauer Anonymus (13<sup>th</sup> century) and Nicolaus de Lyra (14<sup>th</sup> century) briefly mention *Toledot Yeshu* in their works. Both sources retell the story of Yeshu’s miracles: In Nicolaus’ work, Yeshu uses the Ineffable Name,<sup>58</sup> while according to the Passauer Anonymus, this Name is written by Solomon on a stone in the Temple, where Yeshu eventually sees it.<sup>59</sup> Nicolaus also mentions

<sup>54</sup> Meaning four hours after dawn.

<sup>55</sup> Published in Callsen, *Das jüdische Leben Jesu*, 35–96.

<sup>56</sup> This refers, first of all, to the infamous air fight. Even Foote and Wheeler, who had published their translation and commentary in order to make a case against Christianity, chose to write: “But Judas seeing that his strength was not equal to that of Jeshu, moistened him with the sweat of his body” (*The Jewish Life of Christ*, 26).

<sup>57</sup> Callsen, *Das jüdische Leben Jesu*, 44 (*Falsitates*, fol. 30v. 2.1.3).

<sup>58</sup> On Nicolaus de Lyra, see Klepper, “The Dating of Nicholas of Lyra’s Quaestio de Adventu Christi”; eadem, *The Insight of Unbelievers*. The passage is quoted and translated in Callsen, *Das jüdische Leben Jesu*, 17–18.

<sup>59</sup> See Patschovsky, *Der Passauer Anonymus*, 186; quoted and translated in Callsen, *Das jüdische Leben Jesu*, 17.

the title of the composition that he quotes: *De Iesu Nazareni generatione* (“On the Generations of Jesus of Nazareth”), literally *Toledot Yeshu*.

How exactly Yeshu discovers the Ineffable Name is described in inquisitional records of 1341, the testimony of a certain Peter (Lazar), a Christian neophyte, who was then convinced by one Jucef de Quatorze to renounce Christianity and to accept martyrdom by saying in public that Jesus was “an accursed bastard” and Mary “the greatest of whores.” Peter was indeed sentenced to death but rescued at the last moment by the inquisitor Sancho de Torralba. Given a second chance, Peter embraced Christianity again and reported that a certain Josef and Janto Almuli with his wife, Jamila, convinced him to denounce Christianity, buttressing their argument with *Toledot Yeshu*. In this story, Yeshu does not steal the Name but sees it by chance, as he is playing with a hoop and drops it before the Temple’s portal. He “(goes) after his hoop, raise(s) his eyes and (sees) the Ineffable Name written on the lintel of the Temple in golden letters.” Yeshu then performs miracles including riding “on a ray of the sun and hang(ing) from it.”<sup>60</sup> By 1415, *Toledot Yeshu* became notorious enough to be officially banned by a bull of Pope Benedict XIII.<sup>61</sup>

Although German translations of the *Toledot* had begun circulating at the latest since Thomas Ebendorfer subsidized their translation, the first German translation of Porchetus’ *Toledot Yeshu* (which Porchetus had copied from the *Pugio fidei*) was published by Martin Luther in 1543 under the title *Vom Shem Hamforash und vom Geschlecht Christi*.<sup>62</sup> During the following two centuries, the awareness of *Toledot Yeshu* reached its zenith. It was discussed by scholars and sought by travelers. George Sandys, the British traveler, ethnologist, and colonist, who traveled across the Mediterranean and in 1615 published the description of his journey, recounts a story told to him by a “Palestinian Jew”:<sup>63</sup>

Their other books are in the Spanish tongue and Hebrew characters. They (the Jews) confess our savior to have been the most learned of their nation, and have this fable dispersed

<sup>60</sup> On this source, see Di Segni, “Due nuovi fonti sulle Toledoth Jeschu”; and Tartakoff, “The Toledot Yeshu.” There is another source explicitly saying that *Toledot Yeshu* “was (found) in the large Jewish communities of Spain and that it was read there among (Jews) in order to bring back those who dare to make themselves Christians”: *Vita Christi* of Francesc Eiximenis; Vic, Spain, Museum Episcopal, Ms. 172, fol. 34r; see Tartakoff, “The Toledot Yeshu,” 303; and Viera, “The Evolution of Francesc Eiximenis’ Attitudes toward Judaism,” 152. See also Ioly-Zorattini, *Processi del S. Uffizio*, 95–100.

<sup>61</sup> A bull against anti-Christian literature including the pamphlet *Mar mar Yeshu*: Di Segni, *Il vangelo del ghetto*, 23. On another papal bull that likely refers to the prohibition of *Toledot Yeshu*, see Radin, “A Papal Brief of Pius IV.”

<sup>62</sup> “On the Ineffable Name and the Generation of Christ.” The relevant passage is published in Callsen, *Das jüdische Leben Jesu*, 99–107; see the translation in Falk, *The Jew in Christian Theology*, 163–224.

<sup>63</sup> Sandys, *A Relation of a Journey Begun An. Dom. 1610*, 147. For an analysis of this source, particularly its statement that Jesus welcomed his death, see Bammel, “Der Tod Jesu in einer ‘Toledot Jeschu’-Überlieferung.”

amongst them, concerning him: How that yet a boy, attending upon a great Cacam at such time as the heavens accustomed to open, and whatsoever he prayed for was granted; the Cacam oppressed with sleep, charged the boy when the time was come to awaken him. But he provoked with a frantic desire of peculiar glory (such is their devilish invention) made for himself this ambitious request; that like a God he might be adored amongst men. Which the Cacam over-hearing added thereunto (since what was craved should not be revoked) that it might not be till after his death. Whereupon he lived contemptibly; but dead, he was, is and shall be honoured unto all posterity. They say with all that he got into the Sanctum Sanctorum: and taking thence the powerful names of God, did sew them in his thigh. By virtue whereof he went invisible, rid on the Sun beams, raised the dead to life and effected like wonders. That being often amongst them they could never lay hands on him; until he voluntarily tendered himself to their fury: not willing to defer his future glory any longer. That being dead they buried him privately in a dung-hill, lest his body should have been found and worshipped by his followers: when a woman of great nobility, seduced by his doctrine, so prevailed with the Roman governor that he threatened to put them forthwith unto the sword unless they produced the body. Which they digging up, found uncorrupted, and retaining that same amiable flavour which he had when he lived: only the hair was fallen from the crown, imitated, as they say, by the Roman friars. Such and more horrible blasphemies invent they; which I fear to utter.

Sandys' version contains motifs known from the extant manuscripts, but shuffles in a free-hand manner with some rare and idiosyncratic elements, such as Yeschu becoming invisible (which is unique) and riding the sun beams, which can also be found only in the above mentioned inquisitional records. The episode with the "Cacam" (Yehoshua<sup>c</sup> ben Perahiah) and his student is well known from the Slavic recensions and the Talmud.<sup>64</sup> Yeschu's burial in a dung-hill echoes his sewer burial in the Huldreich version, and his loss of hair recurs in almost all manuscripts, either in the scene where Yehudah dragged Yeschu through the streets of Tiberias,<sup>65</sup> or in the scene where Yeschu's head is washed with the water Bolet to mark him as illegitimate and excommunicated.<sup>66</sup> "A woman of great nobility" is, obviously, Queen Helene, who usually plays a dominant role in the process against Yeschu, but in Mss. New York JTS 2221 and Amsterdam Hs. Ros. 414 (Ashkenazi B) also acts with Pilate.<sup>67</sup>

In 1681, Johannes Christoph Wagenseil, a professor of Oriental languages at Altdorf, published two volumes of his *Tela ignea Satanae*:<sup>68</sup> one volume

<sup>64</sup> See, e. g., Ms. Princeton Firestone Lib. Heb. 28, fol. 5r.31–37 (Slavic A1).

<sup>65</sup> E. g., Ms. Cambridge Univ. Lib. T.-S. Misc. 35.87, fol. 2r.22–24 (Early Oriental A): "And Rabbi Yehudah the gardener went and took him away from his grave and tied a rope to his legs and dragged him through all the market[s of Tiberias]."

<sup>66</sup> Only in the Huldreich version: Ms. Amsterdam Hs. Ros. 442, fol. 1v.12–13: "... they took Jesus, let his name and memory be erased, and shaved the hair round his head and washed it with the water Bolet."

<sup>67</sup> See Ms. New York JTS 2221, fol. 41v.1–3 (Ashkenazi B): "Then the sages of Israel and the violent ones went to Queen Helene and to Pilate, the judge from the city of Rome, who came to Jerusalem to collect the tax from Israel."

<sup>68</sup> Vol. 1: "Liber Toldos Jeschu," and vol. 2: "Confutatio Libri Toldos Jeschu."

containing the Hebrew transcription of a manuscript he purchased from a “German Jew,”<sup>69</sup> a Latin translation of that manuscript, and a brief commentary; and another volume with a detailed refutation of the *Toledot*’s blasphemy. Soon, another edition ensued: In 1705, Johannes Jacob Huldreich published a version that is notorious for its idiosyncratic elements. His edition also contains a Latin translation and a commentary.<sup>70</sup> Needless to say, no other event in the manuscript tradition of *Toledot Yeshu* promoted its copying to the extent achieved by Huldreich and Wagenseil. If not for Johannes Huldreich, we probably would never know about the “Huldreich version,” since all extant manuscripts were copied from his edition. But it was the Wagenseil version that became the best known in Europe, judging by the number of its manuscript copies, quotations, re-editions, and translations. Almost as popular as Wagenseil’s *Toledot* was the Italian version reported by Daniel Ernst Jablonski,<sup>71</sup> who studied, but never published it. Jablonski’s letter describing his manuscript is mentioned in the *Bibliotheca Hebraea* by Johannes Christoph Wolf, which also includes citations from de Espina’s *Toledot*<sup>72</sup> and a brief discussion of Huldreich’s version.<sup>73</sup> Many Orientalists and collectors, such as Johannes Buxtorf,<sup>74</sup> Johannes Müller,<sup>75</sup> Giovanni Di Rossi,<sup>76</sup> Johannes à Lent,<sup>77</sup> and Georgius Edzardi<sup>78</sup> owned *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts and described them, now displaying philological and historical interest in addition to the interest of a theologian.

Surprisingly, with the Age of Enlightenment the attitudes towards *Toledot Yeshu* grew more polarized than ever. Whereas Judah Briel and Joshua Segre authorized the inclusion of *Toledot Yeshu* in their own work<sup>79</sup> (an association usually avoided by educated Jewish polemicists), Voltaire was only too glad

<sup>69</sup> Delitzsch, *Catalogus librorum*, 287, no. xxi. See Ms. Leipzig BH 27.

<sup>70</sup> *Sefer Toledot Yeshua ha-Notsri/Historia Jeschuae Nazareni*.

<sup>71</sup> Ms. Leipzig BH 17, fols. 1–18 (Italian A), is the copy owned by Jablonski.

<sup>72</sup> Wolf, *Bibliotheca Hebraea* 2:1443–49; 3:1222; 4:484, 1065.

<sup>73</sup> In Wolf’s opinion (*Bibliotheca Hebraea* 2:740), Huldreich’s edition stemmed from the same recension of *Toledot Yeshu* as the one from which a Bavarian convert, Samuel Brenz in his *Jüdisches abgestreifter Schlangenbalg* (1614), drew his version of *Ma’aseh Tola*. Brenz’s quotation was reprinted in Wülfer, *Theriaca judaica ad examen revocata* (1681), ch. 1. See also Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 33.

<sup>74</sup> Buxtorf, *De abbreviaturis hebraicis*, 148–49, including a short excerpt from *Toledot Yeshu*.

<sup>75</sup> Wolf, *Bibliotheca Hebraea*, 2:1448–49.

<sup>76</sup> See “Parma” in the list of manuscripts.

<sup>77</sup> *De moderna theologia judaica*, 125.

<sup>78</sup> *Tractatus talmudici avoda sara*, 313.

<sup>79</sup> *Asham Talui* (a critique of the Gospels written by Briel and enhanced by Segre), ca. 1730. Marx (“Bibliographische Miscellen,” 92–93) and Horbury (*A Critical Examination of the Toledoth Jesu*, 153) suggest that Segre authorized the inclusion of *Toledot Yeshu* in *Asham Talui* because one of the manuscripts combining *Asham Talui* and *Toledot Yeshu* (Italian B) contains Segre’s remarks in both of these books. On Segre and his works, see Malkiel, “The Jewish-Christian Debate,” and the bibliography in Krauss and Horbury, *The Jewish-Christian Controversy*, 241.

to substantiate his anti-religious sentiment with *Toledot Yeshu*,<sup>80</sup> and Moses Mendelssohn, in one of his letters to Lavater, squeamishly dismissed it as “a miscarriage from the times of legends.”<sup>81</sup>

In 1824, the lengthiest version of *Toledot Yeshu*, known as *Tam u-Mu‘ad* was first printed by a Jewish publisher in Breslau.<sup>82</sup> It was reprinted multiple times, edited and abbreviated.<sup>83</sup> Fierce polemic and many centuries of untamed creativity have shaped *Toledot Yeshu* into its present state – a folk narrative with multiple variations and countless cultural strata.

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<sup>80</sup> Arguing that *Toledot Yeshu* is older than the Gospels and consequently a more trustworthy account of Jesus’ life: Voltaire, *Mélanges*, 1212; see also Barbu, “Voltaire and the *Toledot Yeshu*,” 623.

<sup>81</sup> “Moses Mendelssohn an Lavater: 15 Jan. 1771,” in *Schriften zum Judentum*, 362. Graetz (*Geschichte der Juden*, 3:314) expressed a similar sentiment: “*Toldot Jeschu* is a lousy concoction (*ein elendes Machwerk*) of fragmentary sayings from the Talmud about Jesus.”

<sup>82</sup> According to Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, 6:x.

<sup>83</sup> For example, in 1870/1; then in 1883 (Lichtenstein’s edition), in 1889 (Bader’s edition: *Helgat mehoqeq*), in 1907 (Mahler’s edition: *Sippure mehoqeq*), in 1914 (Kauffmann, Frankfurt am Main); see Schlichting, *Ein jüdisches Leben Jesu*, 7, 17–19.