

# “INICIUM CREATIONIS IESU NAZARENI”

## Toledot Yeshu in the Thematic Version of the Extractions de Talmud\*

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### 1. Introduction

While polemics and dialogue between Judaism and Christianity are as old as the Christian religion itself, one can distinguish different periods, trends and intensities in the relations between the faiths. A significant landmark in this long and complex history is the Christian interest in post-biblical Jewish literature, which must be considered a turning point in anti-Jewish polemics.<sup>1</sup>

During the thirteenth century, when Christians became increasingly aware of the post-biblical Jewish tradition, their primary interest was directed at the Talmud. Nicholas Donin's thirty-five accusations against the Talmud, which he submitted to Pope Gregory IX in 1238/39, triggered a trial against the Talmud that resulted in its condemnation (1240), its burning (1241) and eventually its translation (1245) – before the Talmud received a sentence once again in 1248.<sup>2</sup>

In this final condemnation of the Talmud, the papal legate in France, Odo of Châteauroux, made further references to other Jewish books:

As for the other books that have not yet been delivered to us by the masters of the Jews – although they have been requested many times by us to do so – or have not yet been inspected, we shall know more fully at a suitable time and place and shall do what has to be done.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See A. Funkenstein, “Basic Types of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics in the Later Middle Ages”, *Viator* 2 (1971), pp. 373-382 (extended Hebrew version in *Zion* 33/3-4 [1968], pp. 126-144).

<sup>2</sup> See A. Fidora, “The Latin Talmud and Its Influence on Christian-Jewish Polemic”, *Journal of Transcultural Medieval Studies* 1/2 (2014), pp. 337-342, and Id., “The Latin Talmud and Its Translators: Nicholas Donin vs. Thibaud de Sézanne?”, *Henoch* 37/1 (2015), pp. 17-28. See also Ch. Merchavia, *The Church versus Talmudic and Midrashic Literature (500-1248)* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1970) (Hebrew), and G. Dahan - É. Nicolas (eds.), *Le brûlement du Talmud à Paris 1242-1244* (Paris: Cerf, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Edited in Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIII<sup>th</sup> Century. A Study of Their Relations During the Years 1198-1254, Based on the Papal Letters and the Conciliar*

From this, it is obvious that the Christian instigators of the controversy against the Talmud in mid-13<sup>th</sup>-century Paris knew of other Jewish books that were problematic in their eyes. While some of these books had not yet been handed over to them, others had been, and were awaiting inspection. One of the Jewish texts that was in Christian hands seems to have been the *Toledot Yeshu*, that is, a polemical account of Jesus' life, which has survived in several versions and languages.<sup>4</sup> In the Hebrew report of the trial against the Talmud from the year 1240, one can already spot allusions to this text. As Isidore Loeb has shown, the rabbis' references to Jesus' life during the trial do not draw on the Gospels but rather on the *Toledot Yeshu*, including the claim that Jesus lived at the time of Queen Helene.<sup>5</sup>

An explicit reference to the *Toledot Yeshu* appears only a few years later in the *Extractiones de Talmud*, that is, the Latin translation of almost two thousand passages from the Babylonian Talmud that was prepared in Paris in the year 1245 at the request of Odo de Châteauroux. This is the first text that explicitly mentions the *Toledot Yeshu* as a book, as it predates Ramon Martí's works *Capistrum iudaeorum* (1267) and *Pugio fidei* (1280), which are often quoted as the first notable Christian witnesses to this controversial work.<sup>6</sup> In what follows, we shall analyze in detail this early reference to the *Toledot Yeshu* in the *Extractiones de Talmud*.

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*Decrees of the Period* (Philadelphia [Pa.]: The Dropsie College, 1933), p. 279: "De aliis vero libris nobis non exhibitis a magistris iudaeorum, licet a nobis super hoc pluries fuerint requisiti, vel etiam non inspectis, plenius cognoscemus loco et tempore et faciemus quod fuerit faciendum." English translation from J. Friedman - J. Connell Hoff - R. Chazan, *The Trial of the Talmud: Paris, 1240* (Toronto: PIMS, 2012), p. 101.

<sup>4</sup> On the *Toledot Yeshu* and its versions, see the classical studies by S. Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: Calvary, 1902), R. Di Segni, *Il Vangelo del Ghetto* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1985) and the comprehensive edition by M. Meerson - P. Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus*, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014). For the Judeo-Arabic tradition of the *Toledot Yeshu*, see A. Cuffel, "Jesus, the Misguided Magician. The (Re-)emergence of the *Toledot Yeshu* in Medieval Iberia and its Retelling in Ibn Sahula's *Fables from the Distant Past*", *Henoch* 37/1 (2015), pp. 4-16.

<sup>5</sup> I. Loeb, *La controverse religieuse entre les chrétiens et les juifs au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Extrait de la Revue de l'histoire des religions, 1888), p. 23, n. 3. For an English translation of the Hebrew account, see Friedman - Connell Hoff - Chazan, *The Trial of the Talmud: Paris, 1240*, p. 139. In the so-called Helene group (Di Segni) of the *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts, Jesus is brought before the Queen and tries to convince her that he is the Son of God. See also below n. 21.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of Ramon Martí's Latin translation of parts of the Helene version of the *Toledot Yeshu* in his *Pugio fidei*, see A. Cuffel, "Between Epic Entertainment and Polemical Exegesis. Jesus as Antihero in *Toledot Yeshu*", in R. Szpiech (ed.), *Medieval Exegesis and Religious Difference. Commentary, Conflict, and Community in the Premodern Mediterranean* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), pp. 156-170, n. p. 158. Her argument that Ramon Martí was probably drawing on an oral tradition rather than on a written text is not compelling, as in both the *Pugio* and the *Capistrum* he refers to the work as a "libellum", that is, a short book. For the passage in the *Capistrum*, not mentioned by Cuffel, cf. Raimundus Martini, *Capistrum iudaeorum*, ed. and trans. A. Robles Sierra, 2 vols. (Würzburg/Altenberge: Echter/Telos, 1990), vol. 1, p. 282. For earlier implicit references to the *Toledot Yeshu*, see P. Schäfer, "Agobard's and Amulo's *Toledot Yeshu*", in P. Schäfer - M. Meerson - Y. Deutsch

## 2. The Mention of Toledot Yeshu in the Thematic Version of the *Extractiones*

Linguistic and philological analysis has confirmed that the *Extractiones de Talmud* offer an almost impeccable Latin translation of the Babylonian Talmud, with only minor ideological inflections from the Latin translator. Rather than in the way of translating the Talmudic texts themselves, the ideological bias of this Christian Talmud anthology consists in offering only fragments from larger Talmudic argumentative units (*sugyot*), which comment on the Hebrew text of the Mishnah.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the very act of selecting material from a much larger work – the Babylonian Talmud – is intrinsically ideological, as it cannot preserve the original textual cohesion and may emphasize passages that would otherwise play a less significant role in the general economy of the text.

This bias is particularly conspicuous in the second of the two extant redactions of the *Extractiones the Talmud*, which was most likely produced by the same person or group of scholars. While the first redaction, which we refer to as the sequential version, presents the translated extracts from the Talmud in exactly the same order as they occur in the Talmud,<sup>8</sup> the second redaction represents a thematic rearrangement of the sequential version according to subjects of controversy.<sup>9</sup> The prologue to the thematic version aptly describes the *modus procedendi* as follows:

You must know that, while I first wrote down the single passages according to the order in which they were excerpted from the [Talmudic] book [i.e., for the sequential version], subsequently I classified them according to subject matter [i.e., for the thematic version], so that one may easily find what one is looking for, arranging them under a few titles and rubrics, so as to avoid confusion.<sup>10</sup>

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(eds.), *Toledot Yeshu ("The Life Story of Jesus") Revisited. A Princeton Conference* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), pp. 27-48.

<sup>7</sup> On the nature of the Latin translation and its subtle ideological orientation, see: F. Dal Bo, "A Priest's 'Uncircumcised Heart.' Some Theological-Political Remarks on a Rashi's Gloss in tractate *Sanhedrin* and its Latin Translation in *Extractiones de Talmud*", in U. Cecini - E. Vernet i Pons (eds.), *Studies on the Latin Talmud* (Bellaterra: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2017), pp. 129-144; Id., "Talmudic Angelology and the Tosafists. On Metatron in the Latin Translation of Tractates *Sanhedrin* and *Avodah Zarah*", *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 25/1 (2018), pp. 42-61; Id., "Jesus' Punishment in Hell in the Latin Translation of the Babylonian Talmud. A Passage from Tractate *Gittin* in the *Extractiones de Talmud*", in the present volume, and Id., "Jesus' Trial in the Latin Talmud in Tractate *Sanhedrin* and its Translation in the *Extractiones de Talmud*", *Henoch*, forthcoming.

<sup>8</sup> See the edition of the sequential version: U. Cecini - Ó. de la Cruz Palma (eds., with E. Vernet i Pons and F. Dal Bo), *Extractiones de Talmud. Per ordinem sequentialem* (CCCM 291; Turnhout: Brepols, 2018). An edition of the second redaction is in preparation.

<sup>9</sup> For a more detailed description of the two versions and a list of manuscripts, see A. Fidora, "Textual Rearrangement and Thwarted Intentions: The Two Versions of the Latin Talmud", *Journal of Transcultural Medieval Studies* 2/1 (2015), pp. 63-78.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted from the prologue to the thematic version of the *Extractiones de Talmud* which

In this second, thematically rearranged – and thus clearly more polemical – version of the *Extractiones*, we find the first explicit reference to the *Toledot Yeshu*. It is mentioned at the end of the third of the thirteen chapters that the Talmudic texts are arranged into:

De auctoritate Talmud

De sapientibus et magistris

De blasphemiiis contra Christum et beatam virginem

De blasphemiiis contra Deum

De malis quae dicunt de goym, id est christianis

De erroribus

De sortilegiis

De somniis

De futuro saeculo

De Messia

De stultitiis

De turpitudinibus et immunditiis

De fabulis

The passage from the end of the third chapter of the thematic version of the *Extractiones* exhibits a particularly controversial nature. Not only does it conclude the thematic collection of Talmudic passages “On the blasphemies against Christ and the Holy Virgin”, but it also frames the translation project within a larger theological perspective. It shows how the Talmud and other texts allegedly manifest intrinsic animosity against Christianity. Consequently, this passage – presumably written by the Latin translator or, at least, by the same author as the prologue to the *Extractiones* – describes how Jewish writings pose a cultural threat to be dealt with. In short, the Jews would spread animosity against Christianity with a number of lies and blasphemies.<sup>11</sup>

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is only transmitted in the manuscript Schaffhausen, Stadtbibliothek, MS Min. 71 (13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century), here fol. 60r: “Sciendum igitur quod cum primo scripsissem singula secundum ordinem quo ex libris fuerant excerpta, tunc, ut legentibus facilius occurrant optata, per singulas illa distinxī materias et subiectis redegei titulis et rubricis paucis inde, ut confusionem vitarem.”

<sup>11</sup> Quoted from the thematic version of the *Extractiones de Talmud* in the manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 16558 (13<sup>th</sup> century), fol. 14va-b. There are no significant variants with regard to the text of Schaffhausen. On the importance of this manuscript which offers the full dossier of the Parisian controversy against the Talmud of the 1240s, see Ó. de la Cruz, “El estadio textual de las *Extractiones de Talmud* en el BnF ms. lat 16558”, in Cecini - Vernet i Pons (eds.), *Studies on the Latin Talmud*, pp. 23-44.

Si quis catholicus aures habet ad audiendum multo plura nefanda, quaerat et legat librum qui incipit: “Inicium creationis Iesu Nazareni”, quem blasphemum et perfidum iudaei ad destructionem Evangelii et totius fidei christianae fabulose et mendaciter confixerunt. Ibi reperiet miras et inexcogitatas blasphemias quas pudor est dicere, horror audire, abominatio cogitare contra illum qui splendor est gloriae et figura substantiae Dei, et intermeratam Virginem matrem eius, et specialiter contra gloriosos apostolos Petrum et Paulum, generaliter autem contra omnes in Christum credentes. Sane praedictum libellum presenti interseruissim opusculo; sed forsitan aliquibus esse posset offendiculum infirmis. Scriptum est autem in libro *Iessuhot*, in capitulo *Arbamithot*, et in libro *Mohed* similiter, in capitulo *Hacore*, quod omnis blasphemia vetita est, praeter blasphemiam servitii peregrini, hoc est Ecclesiae. Ideo praedictas et alias audacius evomunt blasphemias, in hoc arbitantes se obsequium praestare Deo. Et ex hoc habent in usu quod beatam Virginem *themea*, id est pollutam, et *kezesa*, id est meretricem, appellant. Sacramentum altaris *zeva tame* vocant, id est sacrificium pollutum; et sanctos *kezesym*, id est fornicatores; sanctasque *kezesoc*, id est meretrices, appellant. Ecclesiam autem *beth mossab* seu *beth hakice*, quod est domus sedis in latrina, vocant. Aquam benedictam *maym temeym*, id est aquas pollutas; benedictionem *kelala*, id est maledictionem; praedicationem nostram *nybuah*, quod est latratus, nominant. Omnibus etiam festis nostris imponunt nomina blasphemiae.

(1) If a Catholic has ears to listen to many more vile things, he shall look for a book, and read it, which begins with [the expression] “The Beginning of the Creation of Jesus the Nazarene”, [a book] that the blasphemous and infidel Jews have completed in order to destroy the Gospel and the entire Christian faith with fables and lies. Therein, one can find awesome and unthinkable blasphemies one would be ashamed to tell, horrified to listen to and disgusted to think of directed against him who is the splendor of the glory and the image of God’s essence, against his mother, the unspoiled Virgin [Mary], and especially against the glorious Apostles Peter and Paul, but generally against all those who believe in Christ. Of course, I could have included the aforementioned booklet in the present work, but perhaps it could be a stumbling block to the weak.

(2) Indeed, in the book *Iessuhot*, in the chapter *Arbamithot*, and similarly in the book *Mohed*, in the chapter *Hacore*, it is written that blasphemy is forbidden to everyone, except blasphemy [against] foreign worship, which is the Church.

(3) Therefore, they vomit out with even more audacity these and other blasphemies, assuming that they are offering worship to God. From this, they are accustomed to calling the Blessed Virgin *themea*, which is spoiled, and *kezesa*, which is prostitute. They call the sacrament of the altar *zeva tame*, which is spoiled sacrament, and they call the male saints *kezesym*, which is fornicators, and the female saints *kezesoc*, which is prostitutes. Indeed, they call the Church *beth mossab* or *beth hakice*, which is house of the toilet seat. They call the holy water *maym temeym*, which is spoiled

waters, benediction *kelala*, which is curse, and our preaching *nybuah*, which is bark. To all our holy days, they impose the name of blasphemy.

In our translation, we have segmented this complex passage into three minor units for clarity's sake: (1) the mention of the *Toledot Yeshu*; (2) a reference to passages from the Babylonian Talmud, which seemingly justify anti-Christian blasphemies; and (3) specific examples of common Jewish blasphemies against the Christian religion. Each of these minor units provides a number of interesting details on the context in which the *Extractiones de Talmud* were redacted, and allows for greater understanding of the general attitude of the Latin translator towards the Talmud.

### 3. The Title of the Toledot Yeshu in the Extractiones

The first striking piece of information is that the author of this passage from the thematic version of the *Extractiones* believes that the Talmud is not as blasphemous as another Jewish text, which is a book that starts with the words *initium creationis Iesu Nazareni*. It is clear that the Christian author was referring to a text that he knew first-hand, for he tells the reader that he could have easily included the booklet (*libellum*) in the thematic version of the *Extractiones*, but that he refrained from doing so because it would have been a "stumbling block to the weak" (1 Cor 8:9). Despite the fact that there is no further reference to the text in the *Extractiones*, its initial words clearly prove that he was referring to the *Toledot Yeshu*, in a copy that was similar to those disseminated in the northern French and German worlds, as represented by the famous manuscript Strasbourg, Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire, MS 3974. The first line of the *Toledot Yeshu* text in this manuscript reads *tehillat beri'ato shel Yeshu*, i.e. "the beginning of the creation of Jesus".<sup>12</sup>

The Hebrew formula *tehillat beri'ato shel Yeshu* immediately brings to mind the similar Hebrew expression *tehillat beri'ato shel ha-'olam* ("the beginning of the creation of the world"), which was used to introduce some cosmological arguments in rabbinic texts (Gen Rab 1:6).<sup>13</sup> Yet it is unlikely that this lexical congruence can explain all the theological implications of *tehillat beri'ato shel Yeshu*. Given the extremely polemical nature of the *Toledot Yeshu*, the Hebrew formula might have a rationale deeper than a simple similarity with a rabbinic sentence (*tehillat beri'ato shel ha-'olam*). It

<sup>12</sup> Edited by Meerson - Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus*, vol. I, p. 167 (English) and vol. II, p. 82 (Hebrew). In some manuscripts, one finds the addition "the Nazarene" (*ha-Notzri*), see *ibidem*, vol. II, p. 82. Compare also the medieval French translation, edited by Daniel Barbu in this volume, which yields the following *incipit*: "Commencement de la naissance de Jésus le Nocery".

<sup>13</sup> See W. Horbury, "The Strasbourg Text of the *Toledot*", in P. Schäfer - M. Meerson - Y. Deutsch (eds.), *Toledot Yeshu ("The Life Story of Jesus") Revisited. A Princeton Conference* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), pp. 49-59, on p. 53. Horbury also establishes a possible relation between *tehillat beri'ato shel Yeshu* and the Nicene Creed.

is reasonable to assume that the Hebrew formula *tehillat beri'ato shel Yeshu* serves as a theological parody of the Gospels. This becomes evident when comparing this Hebrew formula (*tehillat beri'ato shel Yeshu*) to the first line of the Hebrew Bible (*be-re'shit bara' Elohim*). If one divides the first verse of Scripture as follows, one can see that the Hebrew formula in the *Toledot Yeshu* responds to a specific theological agenda:

Gen 1:1	<i>be-re'shit</i>	<i>bara'</i>	<i>Elohim</i>
Toledot Yeshu	<i>tehilat</i>	<i>berya'io shel</i>	<i>Yeshu</i>
Gen 1:1	In the beginning	created	God
Toledot Yeshu	The beginning of <sup>14</sup>	the creation of	Jesus

This shows that the Hebrew formula *tehillat beri'ato shel Yeshu* subtly inverts the phraseology from the first verse of Scripture. An examination of these different elements reveals distinctive semantic changes. Firstly, the famous prepositional adverb *be-re'shit* (“in the beginning”) is transformed into the term *tehillah*, which describes the ordinary event of “beginning something”. Secondly, the act of creation is changed from the active voice *bara'* (“he created”) to the passive voice *beri'ato* (“the creation of”) and thirdly, the name *Elohim* (“God”) is replaced by *Yeshu* (“Jesus”). The purpose of this complex paraphrase seems to be to undermine any Christian pretention about Jesus’ divinity and simultaneously claim three things: (1) Jesus is clearly not God; (2) he is created but he is not a creator; and (3) he is the result of an ordinary event, the mere “beginning of something”, rather than a metaphysical, absolute event. In other words, the introductory Hebrew formula *tehillat beri'ato shel Yeshu* manifests an anti-Christological nature: since its inception, the *Toledot Yeshu* emphasizes that Jesus was not “generated” as the son of God but rather as the illegitimate son of an unwilling adulteress.

The Latin *initium creationis Iesu Nazareni*, reported in the *Extractiones*, clearly renders the works’ anti-Christological opening sentence, but without any reference to its common title, *Toledot Yeshu*. Recently, Michael Meerson and Peter Schäfer have suggested that this title could derive from the contraction of the longer Hebrew sentence *tehillat beri'ato shel Yeshu*, despite the evident lexical difference between the two terms: *beri'ah* and *toledot*.<sup>15</sup> More specifically, they argue that this linguistic contraction is the effect of

<sup>14</sup> The semantic difference between the prepositional adverb *be-re'shit* (“in the beginning”) and the term *tehillah* (“beginning”) is barely perceptible in English but it is particularly evident in a number of other languages.

<sup>15</sup> See Meerson - Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus*, vol. 1, pp. 40-42.



a transcultural transmission – from Hebrew to Latin and then from Latin to Hebrew. In other terms, the eventually established Hebrew title *Toledot Yeshu* would reflect a possible Hebrew re-translation of a segment from the Latin translation of the Hebrew sentence *tehillat beri'ato shel Yeshu*. In 1420, Thomas Ebendorfer translated the Hebrew sentence *tehillat beri'ato shel Yeshu ha-Notzri* as *initium generationis Iesu Nazareni* ("the beginning of the generation of Jesus the Nazarene").<sup>16</sup> In so doing, Ebendorfer clearly echoed the Latin version of the Gospel of Matthew (*liber generationis Iesu Christi*) (Vulg. Matt 1:1). Consequently, a fragment from this title – namely the three Latin words *generatio(nis) Iesu Nazareni* – might have provided the lexical basis for its re-translation into Hebrew as *Toledot Yeshu*, which eventually became the canonical title of this text. The author of the present passage from the thematic version of the *Extractiones* – who had read a copy of the *Toledot Yeshu* and could have attached it to the present documentation – did not associate the expression *tehillat beri'ato shel Yeshu* with the Gospel of Matthew. Differently from Ebendorfer, he translated the underlying Hebrew expression into very literal terms as *initium creationis Iesu Nazareni*.

The most notable difference between the translation in the *Extractiones* and Ebendorfer's is the use of two distinct Latin nouns – *creatio* and *generatio*, respectively. Apparently, this lexical choice does not pose any linguistic issue, as the Hebrew term *beri'ah* ("creation, making, generation") designates both the making of the universe and the making of a human embryo; therefore, it could be translated as either *creatio* or *generatio*. Yet the two Latin terms are semantically different, since they designate a divine act and a human act. The literal rendering of the Hebrew sentence in the *Extractiones* has two important consequences on the possible *Wirkungsgeschichte* of this text. On the one hand, the literal rendering *initium creationis Iesu Nazareni* does not establish the sarcastic reference to the Latin version of the Gospel of Matthew (*liber generationis Iesu Christi*). On the other hand, the literal rendering *initium creationis Iesu Nazareni* prevents the Latin translation from offering a linguistic basis for its possible re-translation into Hebrew as *Toledot Yeshu*. A hypothetical re-translation of the Latin segment *creatio(nis) Iesu* would probably result in *beri'ato shel Yeshu* rather than two other possible Hebrew variants: *toledot Yeshu* ("the generation of Jesus"), which would be closer to Biblical phraseology, and *yalduto shel Yeshu* ("the childhood of Jesus"), which would be closer to rabbinic phraseology. These lexical remarks could suggest that the coining of the Hebrew title *Toledot Yeshu* postdates the *Extractiones*, as Meerson and Schäfer maintain.

<sup>16</sup> On Thomas Ebendorfer's fifteenth-century translation, see B. Callsen - F.P. Knapp - M. Niesner - M. Przybilski, *Das jüdische Leben Jesu 'Toledot Jeschu': die älteste lateinische Übersetzung in den 'Falsitates Judeorum' von Thomas Ebendorfer* (Wien: Oldenburg, 2003); and also R.M. Karras, "The Aerial Battle in the *Toledot Yeshu* and Sodomy in the Late Middle Ages", *Medieval Encounters* 19 (2003), pp. 493-533. Ebendorfer's translation drew on a text that must have been very similar to ours, as it includes the story of the conception of Jesus, which is absent from Ramon Martí's Latin rendering of the *Toledot Yeshu*.



Yet we should mention that 150 years earlier, in the Hebrew account of the second Paris disputation in the year 1269, we already come across a possible reference to our book as *Toledot Yeshu*. The reference points back to the first Talmud disputation of the 1240s, as it claims that during this controversy the Christian side gathered all kinds of “anecdotes and stories on Jesus”.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly enough, the protocol does not speak of *Toledot Yeshu* tout court but it expands the expression into a hendiadys: *kol ha-haggadot we-toledot Yeshu*. This rhetorical expansion depends on the semantics of the Hebrew term *toledot*, which is open to a number of different interpretations in meaning. The Scriptural term *toledot* usually designates “generations”, “offspring”, “descendants”, and, by extension, “family history”. However, this term also referred to “history”, until the emergence of Modern Hebrew, when this use became obsolete and the term *historyah* took its place.<sup>18</sup> This polysemy makes it difficult to assess what the most obvious understanding of the title *Toledot Yeshu* for each place and time actually was: did this text designate the “birth” of Jesus, or did it report “stories” about him? In this context, the expression *haggadot we-toledot* – which is not documented in rabbinic literature and appears only in the Hebrew report of the second disputation of Paris – points to a subtle difference in meaning. Thus, the reference to the *Toledot Yeshu* either as *creatio Iesu* (in our *Extractiones*) or *generatio Iesu* (later in Ebendorfer) appears to stress the Christological implications of this work. On the contrary, the expansion of the title *Toledot Yeshu* with the hendiadys *haggadot we-toledot Yeshu* seems to focus rather on the parodic aspect of this polemical text.<sup>19</sup> In other words, the Latin title of the *Toledot Yeshu* as either *creatio Iesu* or *generatio Iesu* emphasizes the Christian readers’ concern with the theological implications of negating Jesus’ divine nature: Jesus would not have been “generated” as the son of God but rather as the illegitimate son of an unwilling adulteress. By contrast, when referring to

<sup>17</sup> See the text in J. Shatzmiller, *La deuxième controverse de Paris. Un chapitre dans la polémique entre chrétiens et juifs au Moyen Âge* (Paris/Louvain: Peeters, 1994), p. 45 (Hebrew) and p. 59 (French), as well as the study by U. Ragacs, *Die zweite Talmuddisputation von Paris 1269* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001), p. 152. See also the more recent work by S. Offenberger, *Expressions of Meeting the Challenges of the Christian Milieu in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature* [Hebrew] (PhD Thesis Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2008), pp. 132–133. Offenberger still situates the second Paris dispute in 1271–1272, even though Shatzmiller has already critically discussed this suggested time period, based on the writing of the Hebrew date. See Shatzmiller, *La deuxième controverse de Paris*, pp. 17–18. Meerson and Schäfer appear not to take into account this occurrence while discussing the title *Toledot Yeshu*. Cf. Meerson – Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus*, pp. 40–42.

<sup>18</sup> For a modern, linguistic treatment of this term, see M.A. Thomas, *These are the Generations: Identity, Covenant, and the ‘Toledot’ Formula* (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2011). In Rabbinic Hebrew, the term *toledot* also has a supplementary, here negligible use: it designates “secondary acts” whose legal consequences are caused by a superior cause, usually called after kinship terminology. For the treatment of these terms, see F. Dal Bo, *Massekhet Keritot. Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), pp. 387–388.

<sup>19</sup> Shatzmiller’s French rendering “les récits et les histoires sur Jésus” is somehow overcorrect, as it neutralizes any possible parodic intent.

the role of the *Toledot Yeshu* during the Talmud affair of the 1240s, the Jews of the second disputation in Paris deliberately downplay this theological relevance, and instead present the text in more satirical terms as a collection of "stories" about Jesus, as opposed to an overt attack on Christology.

#### 4. *The Contents of the Toledot Yeshu According to the Extractions*

It is not only the title, or rather the incipit, of the *Toledot Yeshu*, as referred to in the *Extractiones*, which suggests that their author had direct access to a copy of the work stemming from the Ashkenazi milieu. The description of its content, along with further lexical details, clearly supports the assumption. Thus, the reader is informed that this text targets Jesus' lineage and especially *intemeratam Virginem matrem eius* ("his mother, the unspoiled Virgin [Mary]"). Considering the interpolation of the Latin adjective *intemerata*, this Latin sentence reflects the Hebrew *we-haith imo Miriam* ("and his mother was Myriam"), clearly extracted from the first line of manuscript group 'II: Ashkenazi A' of the *Toledot Yeshu*, as represented by the Strasbourg manuscript: "The beginning of the creation of Yeshu. His mother was Miriam from Israel."<sup>20</sup> The Latin addition *intemerata* is most probably a rhetorical compensation for the antagonist figure of Queen Helene – possibly elaborated from Constantine's wife – who plays a dominant role in the trial against Jesus in the same manuscript tradition of the *Toledot Yeshu*.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, the mention of the *gloriosos apostolos Petrum et Paulum* ("the glorious Apostles Peter and Paul") is also eloquent. The Ashkenazi manuscripts of the *Toledot Yeshu* mention both "Petrus" (as Keifa) and "Paulus" in the text. Again, the use of the Latin adjective *gloriosus* is probably a reaction to Hebrew slanders in the original and presents no real issue. More interesting is the lexical sequence *Petrum et Paulum*. It should be emphasized that only one fragmentary manuscript, MS Maria Saal, Codex 19, explicitly reports the lexical sequence *Petrus we-Pa'lush* ("Peter and Paul").<sup>22</sup> This important philological congruence might validate the assumption that our author had examined a version of the *Toledot Yeshu* that was philologically and historically close to this fragmentary manuscript. Yet it is not compelling, as it is difficult to judge correctly the Latin mention of *Petrum et Paulum*. While the congruence is striking, it is important to recall that the author of the

<sup>20</sup> See Meerson - Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus*, vol. I, p. 167 (English, slightly modified) and vol. II, p. 82 (Hebrew).

<sup>21</sup> The ramping figure of Helene is characteristic of the so-called Group II of manuscripts. For a description and classification, see Meerson - Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus*, pp. 28-39, and pp. 120-124 for the description of Helene's interference in the trial against Jesus.

<sup>22</sup> See U. Ragacs, "MS Maria Saal. Ein originelles Fragment aus der *Toledot Yeshu* Tradition", in C. Cordoni - G. Langer (eds.), *'Let the Wise Listen and Add to Their Learning' (Prov. 1:5). Festschrift für Günter Stemberger on the Occasion of his 75<sup>th</sup> Birthday* (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2016), pp. 593-603, at p. 600.

passage from the *Extractiones* is actually not quoting from the *Toledot Yeshu* but rather briefly reporting its content, possibly out of decency towards the Christian faith. Therefore, we must consider the possibility that this congruence is only a fortunate coincidence and that the author of the passage had aptly summarized the content of the *Toledot Yeshu*, providing the names of the Apostles in the same order.

Of course, in his description of the content of the *Toledot Yeshu*, our author does not forget to mention blasphemies against Jesus Christ. While his remarks in this context do not point to any specific version of the *Toledot Yeshu*, they betray the apologetic nature of his writing. It is certainly not by chance that our author speaks of Jesus Christ in terms of “he who is the brightness of the glory and the image of God’s substance”, that is, quoting from the Epistle to the Hebrews 1:3. With this verse, he actually counters the licentious stories about the all-too-human origin of Jesus with a decidedly metaphysical account of his divine origin and his being son of God. Interestingly, this same verse appears in the prologue to the Latin account of the trial against the Talmud from the year 1240:

Insuper, unigenitum Dei filium, qui est “splendor gloriae et figura substantiae eius portansque omnia verbo virtutis suae” [Heb 1:3], in nefandis ipsorum scripturis, in verbis et factis, privatim et publice, semper et ubique multipliciter blasphemant.<sup>23</sup>

In addition, in their infamous writings, in words and acts, privately and publicly, always and everywhere, they are many times blasphemous [against] the only-begotten son of God, “who is the brightness of the glory and the image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power” (Heb 1:3).

The biblical quotation along with the reference to the “infamous writings” establishes a clear line of continuity between the trial against the Talmud and our fragment, which also echoes other writings belonging to the context of the trial, as we shall see in what follows.

### 5. *Alleged Talmudic Obligations of Using Blasphemies against Foreign Cults*

The first unit of our passage from the *Extractiones* informed the Christian reader about the existence of the *Toledot Yeshu* – a text that was admittedly far more blasphemous than the Talmud itself. At first, one might have the impression that the author of this passage was implying that the Talmud might be a more lenient text with respect to Christianity and should therefore be excused from its allegations. However, the second unit specifies the alleged anti-Christian nature of the Talmud and justifies the measures that

<sup>23</sup> Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 16558, fol. 230va.

the Church was to take against it. More specifically, the author of this passage apparently acknowledges that the Talmud might not be as blasphemous as the *Toledot Yeshu* but is surely responsible for creating the very cultural milieu that inspires such animosity. The Talmud would be instrumental in assessing the alleged obligation of reacting against foreign cults by any means, including lies and blasphemies. Our author especially mentions two passages from the Talmud: one from "the book *Iessuhot*, in the chapter *Arbamithot*" and a passage from "the book *Mohed*, in the chapter *Hakore*". The first of these Talmudic passages can be identified with the tractate *Sanhedrin* when dealing with the "four forms" (*arba' mitot*) of capital punishment that the Jewish court can deliver against a Jewish blasphemer (bSanh 63a). The second refers to the chapter *ha-qore'* ("whoever reads") from tractate *Megillah* when treating the obligation of reading the Book of Esther during the Festival of Purim (bMeg 25b).

The two passages from the Talmud address the punishment of blasphemies in a Jewish context. The common rationale underlying both passages – the one from tractate *Megillah* and the one from tractate *Sanhedrin* on the punishment of specific transgressions – is that the rabbis have competence and authority exclusively concerning blasphemies addressed against the Jewish faith. This Talmudic limitation is justified in two respects: it stems from obvious cultural reasons but also involves some implicit theological-political expectations. In other words, Jewish authorities should refrain from interfering in a non-Jewish environment, especially out of fear of political consequences. Similar limitations are frequent in Talmudic literature and reflect the need for prudence and privacy that the Jewish communities had to preserve for the sake of their safety within a non-Jewish – Islamic and especially Christian – context. With respect to these political and social precautions, it is apparent how the Latin translator is manipulating the Talmudic sources and interpreting them in bad faith. While the Talmud focuses on the specific issue of Jews who are blasphemous against the Jewish faith, it excuses them from blasphemy against non-Jewish religions – identified with the rabbinic expression *'avodah zarah* ("foreign worship"). Talmud legislation here is relatively neutral, possibly out of indifference rather than tolerance. Jewish courts are supposed to act within Jewish perimeters and to neglect what takes place outside, also out of fear of unfortunate political consequences.

How should one judge the intention of the Latin author with respect to these two passages? There is no doubt that he expresses animosity against Judaism, which he perceives to be an enemy of Christianity. Yet it is more complex to determine how far his prejudices have influenced him in reading these passages. This has to do with the reticent nature of Talmudic literature – as a cultural expression of a religious minority, which fears persecution. On the one hand, the strictly legal rationale of the Talmud is obvious: the treatment of blasphemy against foreign cults obviously escapes the competence of a Jewish court. On the other hand, its theological-political implica-

tions are not so obvious, and again reflect the complex dialectics between “writing and persecution”.<sup>24</sup>

Since it does not overtly stigmatize blasphemy against foreign cults, the Talmud is ambiguous with respect to what takes place outside the Jewish perimeter. Exemption in strictly Talmudic terms means only to be exonerated – *patur* in Hebrew – from bringing a sacrifice to the Temple of Jerusalem and, by implication, from undergoing any correlated form of social stigmatization. Yet exemption can easily be interpreted as a form of lenience or indulgence – as in the specific case of tolerating animosity against foreign cults, for example. The Latin author intervenes exactly at this point and suggests that the Talmud is not only tolerating but also *encouraging* animosity against the foreign cult – unilaterally identified, in the present context, with Christianity.

Yet this tendentious reading of these Talmudic passages does not simply reflect ill will against Judaism but rather a more complex reception of these texts through other tendentious sources, namely Nicholas Donin’s notorious thirty-five articles against the Talmud from the year 1238/9, which triggered the trial against the Talmud. In his Article 28, Donin accuses the Talmud of saying “that it is a sin to speak any unclean word, except those who are known to verge on contempt of the church”. He substantiates this claim with two Talmudic texts, which our author has summarized, as the following table shows:

Donin, Article 28 <sup>25</sup>	Our text, (2)
Hoc legitur in Iessuhot, in macecta Cenhezerym, in perec Arba Mithot, ubi dicitur: ‘Omnis blasphemia vetita est praeter blasphemiam avozazara, ecclesiae.’	Scriptum est autem in libro Iessuhot, in capitulo Arbamithot, et in libro Mohed similiter, in capitulo Hacore, quod omnis blasphemia vetita est, praeter blasphemiam servitii peregrini, hoc est Ecclesiae.
Eadem verba sunt in Mohed, in macecta Meguilla, in perec Hacore ez ha Meguilla.	

<sup>24</sup> See the *opus classicus* by L. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

<sup>25</sup> I. Loeb, “La controverse de 1240 sur le Talmud”, *Revue des études juives* 1 (1880), pp. 247-261; 2 (1881), pp. 248-270; 3 (1881), pp. 39-57, here art. 3, p. 49. Loeb’s edition is based on the manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 16558, fol. 216vb; a new critical edition, which takes into account all extant manuscripts, by Piero Capelli is forthcoming. For the English translation reported above, see Friedman - Connell Hoff - Chazan, *The Trial of the Talmud: Paris, 1240*, pp. 117-118.

One reads in <i>Yeshuot</i> , Tractate Sanhedrin [63b], in the chapter <i>Arba' mitot</i> , where it says, "Every blasphemy is forbidden except blasphemy against Avodah Zarah (the Chuch).	Indeed, in the book <i>Iessuhot</i> , in the chapter <i>Arbamithot</i> , and similarly in the book <i>Mohed</i> , in the chapter <i>Hacore</i> , it is written that blasphemy is forbidden to everyone, except blasphemy [against] foreign worship, which is the Church.
The same words are in <i>Mo'ed</i> , Tractate Megillah [25b], in the chapter <i>Ha-qore'et ha-megillah</i> .	

## 6. Blasphemies against Christianity

The third unit of our passage provides a number of Hebrew expressions that denigrate Christianity. Differently from his previous reference to specific passages from the Talmud, the author appears here to report a number of expressions without specifying where they derive from. Each of these blasphemies exhibits specific traits of religious polemic: a proper term describing a specific religious institution – a cult, a prayer, an object or a location – is received in Hebrew but is also intentionally deformed for denigration purposes. Such wordplays are frequent in the Hebrew Bible and mostly address concurrent deities from the Near East. For example, the Biblical names of Canaanite deities, *Moloch* and *Beelzebub*, are more or less transparent manipulations of the original lexical material with a clear consequence: to disparage legitimate foreign deities. These names distort the names of two Canaanite deities, namely the one designated as the "King" (from the Semitic root: *m-l-k*) and the other designated as "Prince" (*b- 'l z-b-b*). The Hebrew Bible appropriates these names and distorts them with a different vocalization. The first regal title "King" (*m-l-k*) is vocalized as *Molech* (or *Moloch*) according to the vowels of the Hebrew term *boshet* ("shame"). The second term of the second regal title "Prince" (*b- 'l z-b-b*) is vocalized as *zebub* ("fly"), with the obvious implication that his residence is not in the skies but rather where flies usually abound – in filth and garbage. Consequently, their names are transformed into laughing stocks – a king of shame and the lord of flies.

The same mechanism of malapropism and deformation of lexical material is reported in our text with regard to several Hebrew expressions that translate and denigrate Christian figures and institutions. Again, the text in our passage shows many similarities with Donin's Articles 28 and 29, as the following table shows:



Donin, Article 28 & 29 <sup>26</sup>	Our text, (3)
<p>Unde habent in usu quod beatam virginem pollutam ac meretricem, et eucharistiam sacrificum pollutum appellant; beatam scilicet virginem themea, quod est polluta, et kezesa, quod est meretrix, vocant; eucharistiam zeva tame, quod est sacrificum pollutum. [...] Vocant enim sanctos kezessym, quod est scortatores, et sanctas kezesez, quod est meretrices, et ecclesiam beth mossab vel beth kyce, quod est latrina. Item abucem et ecclesiam toheva, quod est abominatio; aquas benedicats maym temeym, i.e. aquas pollutas, benedictionem kelala, quod es maledictio; praedicationem nebua, quod est latratus. [...] Omnibus etiam festis nostris imponunt nomina blasphemiae.</p>	<p>Et ex hoc habent in usu quod beatam Virginem themea, id est pollutam, et kezesa, id est meretricem, appellant. Sacramentum altaris zeva tame vocant, id est sacrificum pollutum; et sanctos kezesez, id est fornicatores; sanctasque kezesez, id est meretrices, appellant. Ecclesiam autem beth mossab seu beth hakice, quod est domus sedis in latrina, vocant. Aquam benedictam maym temeym, id est aquas pollutas; benedictionem kelala, id est maledictionem; praedicationem nostram nybuah, quod est latratus, nominant. Omnibus etiam festis nostris imponunt nomina blasphemiae.</p>
<p>Hence they are accustomed to calling the blessed Virgin unclean and a prostitute, and the eucharist an unclean sacrifice; namely, they call the blessed Virgin <i>teme'ah</i> (which means unclean) and <i>qedeshah</i> (which means prostitute) and the eucharist <i>zevah tame'</i> (which means unclean sacrifice) [...] For they call male saints <i>qedeshim</i> (which means fornicators) and female saints <i>qedeshot</i> (which means prostitutes) and the Church <i>bet moshav</i> or <i>bet kisse'</i> (which means latrine). Also [they call] the cross and the Church <i>to'evah</i> (which means abomination); holy water <i>mayim teme'im</i> (which means unclean water); blessing <i>kelalah</i> (which means curse); preaching <i>nevu'ah</i> (which means barking). They even apply blasphemous names to all our feasts.</p>	<p>From this, they are accustomed to calling the blessed Virgin <i>teme'ah</i>, which is unclean, and <i>qedeshah</i>, which is prostitute. They call the sacrament of the altar <i>zevah tame'</i>, which is unclean sacrifice, and they call the male saints <i>qedeshim</i>, which is fornicators, and the female saints <i>qedeshot</i>, which is prostitutes. Indeed, they call the Church <i>bet moshav</i> or <i>bet hakisse'</i>, which is house of the toilet seat. They call the holy water <i>mayim teme'im</i>, which is spoiled waters, blessing <i>kelalah</i>, which is curse, our preaching <i>nevu'ah</i>, which is barking. They even apply blasphemous names to all our feasts.</p>

<sup>26</sup> Loeb, "La controverse de 1240 sur le Talmud", art. 3, pp. 49-50. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 16558, fol. 216vb. For the English translation reported above, see Friedman - Connell Hoff - Chazan, *The Trial of the Talmud: Paris, 1240*, p. 118.

Christian readers would obviously find these stigmatizations of Christian institutions particularly offensive, although they apparently replicate the same cultural and linguistic mechanism examined above. For instance, the denomination of the Virgin as *qedeshah* is based on a slight difference in vocalization between the feminine Hebrew adjective *qedushah* ("saint") and the Biblical term *qedeshah*, which is a euphemistic designation for a cultic prostitute, already stigmatized in Scripture (Deut 23:17).<sup>27</sup> The same logic applies to the other euphemistic term *qedeshim* ("cultic male prostitutes") in place of the expected Hebrew term *qodashim* ("the Holy Ones"). Slightly more elaborated is the slander *bet kisse'* ("latrine"): this expression clearly derives from the genuine rabbinic expression *bet kisse' shel kavod* designating the restroom for the high priest (mTam 1:1), but is also poking fun at the phonetically close expressions *bet ha-keneset* ("house of congregation") and *kenesiyyah* ("congregation"), traditionally designating a synagogue and a church, respectively.

This brief linguistic analysis shows how the wordplays replicate Jewish polemical strategies as laid out in the Hebrew Bible, which surely reflect linguistic practices of the Jews living under Christian rule. It is relevant however that the author mentions these examples not only in order to document specific linguistic usages among the Jews but also because he assumes that they mirror the rationale of the two above-mentioned Talmudic passages. In other words, the Jews of his time are accused of clearly manifesting a linguistic habit of denigrating Christianity. These specific customs underscore, from an ethnographic-anthropological point of view, how diffuse and pervasive Talmudic legislation, which would encourage these anti-Christian practices, was at the time.

## 7. Conclusions

The passage from the thematic version of the *Extractiones de Talmud*, which features what is probably the first explicit reference to the *Toledot Yeshu* in Latin literature, has proven to be a very complex and multilayered polemical attack against Rabbinic Judaism and its revalidation among the Jews of thirteenth-century France. It is meant to show that the Talmud had a pivotal place at the origin of anti-Christian attitudes and behavior among contemporary Jews, which are apparent within both popular writing and linguistic conventions. Eventually, this interaction between the Talmud, widely read booklets and common linguistic conventions among the Jews, would show once more the pressing historical necessity of subduing the Jews and their religious tradition.

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<sup>27</sup> For Gender Studies observations on these cultic prostitutes, see again Dal Bo, *Massekhet Keritot*, p. 179.

## ABSTRACT

*The article analyzes the first explicit mention of the Toledot Yeshu – a polemical Jewish account of Jesus' life – in Christian literature. The text under scrutiny is located in the Extractions de Talmud, a Latin translation of hundreds of passages from the Babylonian Talmud, which was prepared during the 1240s in Paris as part of the legal proceedings against the Talmud. While its author does not include the Toledot Yeshu in his translation, he clearly refers to the title of the work and comments on its content, placing it in the wider context of alleged Jewish anti-Christian blasphemies.*