

Daniel Barbu and Yaacov Deutsch (eds.). *Toledot Yeshu in Context: The Jewish “Life of Jesus” in Ancient, Medieval, and Modern History*. Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 182. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020. VIII, 358 pages. 144,00 €, ISBN 978-3-16-159301-7

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Things are afoot in scholarship on the *Toledot Yeshu*, the unflattering medieval (?) compilation of ancient (?) Jewish traditions about Jesus of Nazareth. In 2014 Michael Meerson and Peter Schäfer published a new two-volume edition of the text, whose textual and codicological history is complex.¹ Three years previous, Schäfer, Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch had published ‘the Princeton volume,’ i.e. *Toledot Yeshu (“The Life Story of Jesus”) Revisited*, another landmark in the study of the text.² Research continues apace. The present volume marks another major step in that progress and involves many of the usual suspects involved in the earlier academic conversations. This volume does an exemplary job of including a diverse yet coherent collection of essays that all have important things to say about *TY* as a text and the *TY* tradition, including its manuscripts, reception, parallels, and meanings. The reader will find little to complain about in this well-edited and information-dense volume, a volume which any scholar working on *TY* must now come to know intimately.

Barbu’s and Deutsch’s short introduction (I–II) does a commendable job of framing the volume’s studies on *TY* in terms of the history of scholarship and the *status quaestionis* while providing a provocative framework in terms of theory and method. In particular, they draw upon Amos Funkenstein’s and David Biale’s well-known discussions of ‘counter-history’ to suggest that, not only does *TY* represent a polemical replacement of another group’s history and memory with “a new, supposedly more trustworthy narrative,” it may actually constitute an attempt to “reclaim a Jewish voice in the context of Christian hegemony” (2).³ This perspective resonates with another medieval Jewish work, namely *Sefer Yosippon*, a rewriting of the Second Temple Period which turns the Latin, Christianized versions of that story on their head for a Hebrew-reading audience

¹ The present volume builds upon, though also challenges at times, the recent edition: Michael Meerson and Peter Schäfer, eds., *Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus* (2 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

² Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch, eds., *Toledot Yeshu (“The Life Story of Jesus”) Revisited: A Princeton Conference* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

³ See Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 36–40; David Biale, “Counter-History and Jewish Polemics against Christianity: The *Sefer toledot yeshu* and the *Sefer zerubavel*,” *Jewish Social Studies* 6 (1999): 130–45.

in the early Middle Ages. In fact, it would be easy, on reading Barbu's and Deutsch's introduction, to think that *TY* and *Sefer Yosippon* were quite similar works, given that they label *TY* a "counter-history," refer to it explicitly as "historiography," and claim that it "has much light to shed on both Christian and Jewish history" (3). But of course, as Barbu and Deutsch admit, *TY* contains barely a trace of historical content, reading instead like parody or satire or, perhaps better, a novel. To refer to it as history or historiography can be justified in a technical sense because it is a narrative of the putative past, but this language could be confusing when comparing *TY* to historiography per se or other quite different historically-oriented texts. Then again, this taxonomy of genre by no means represents a premodern norm, and in fact Barbu's and Deutsch's historical language may help to remind us that "history" can be and has often been something quite different literarily from what we might assume today.

The introduction includes a wealth of prerequisite knowledge for the study of *TY*: the text's date is unknown, its textual history complicated, though most scholars agree that two text traditions predominate, the "Pilate" and "Helena" traditions, named after which ruler presides over Jesus' trial in the narrative.⁴ Yet the volume's editors make a virtue of *SY*'s diffuse and diverse text tradition. They point out that particular linguistic strains of the tradition, e.g. the Judeo-Arabic and the Yiddish, actually shed light on how it developed over time. Moreover, they frame the volume as a series of studies interested in exposing the diverse interests, identities, and socio-historical contexts belonging to those who wrote, rewrote, read, used, and transmitted the *TY* tradition across centuries, both Jewish and Christian. While these things cannot always be perfectly known, they provide a productive way of approaching *TY* as an object of study. Thus do Barbu and Deutsch cast their volume as a contribution to the literary history of Jewish-Christian relations.

William Horbury's chapter on "Titles and Origins of *Toledot Yeshu*" is well-placed at the beginning of this volume (13–42). He deals with the historical pendulum by which Jews and Christians have seen *TY* as alternately ancient or very recent in origin. Such assessments were almost always attached to dispositions toward the text's (or texts') contents as either fantastic, libelous, and ridiculous or indicative of a real Jewish critique of Christianity's imagined beginnings. Thus did Johan C. Wagenseil (in 1681) and Moses Mendelssohn (in 1771) embody a tradition that gave little credence to the tradition and saw it as a produce of the Middle Ages. Later, Samuel Krauss (in 1902) renewed a perspective that imputed an ancient date to *TY* and held the text up as a symbol of a Jewish independence from and stance toward Christianity. Horbury notes that recent work by Riccardo di Segni, Yaacob Deutsch, Peter Schäfer, and Michael Meerson has returned *consensus opinio* to a medieval dating for the text. But it should be noted that early-medieval and ancient traditions of Jewish *contra Christianos* polemics do exist that evince some connection to material found in *TY*. Was the latter then a late compilation

⁴ Following Riccardo di Segni, "La tradizione testuale delle *Toledoth Jeshu*: Manoscritti, edizioni e stampa, classificazione," *Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 50 (1984): 83–100.

of many (much) earlier traditions? Horbury discusses this intricate web of questions as well (see 17–19).

Horbury's contribution to the conversation comes in an analysis of the titles imputed to this work over time.⁵ In particular, he examines the titles “Book of the Sentence of Jesus Son of Pandera” and “Toledot Yeshu” respectively, titles which Horbury sees as corresponding to the different emphases of the “Pilate” and “Helena” narratives—“on trial and death and on events from conception onward” (20). Horbury begins by discussing the former title, “Book of the Decree of Judgment of Jesus Son of Pandera” (ספר גזר דין (דישו בן פנדירא) and related ones as they appear in manuscripts and printed editions. The argument is nuanced, but its upshot is that such titles “do indeed attest the importance attached in the reception of *TY* to the sentence and crucifixion” (26). Since such a title is attached to one of the surviving texts of the “Pilate” narrative (New York MS JTS 8998, 15th century),⁶ which lacks an opening conception story, Horbury wonders if this points to a stage in *TY* tradition antedating any account of Jesus' descent. But more than one version of *TY* contains a conception story not at its beginning but later in the story. Here Horbury's study runs into the complications so familiar to examining Jewish traditions preserved in medieval manuscripts dispersed across time, space, and language (Hebrew, Aramaic, Judeo-Arabic, etc.): he deftly puts into conversation a host of texts and external witnesses, all of which have notable idiosyncrasies, to show that a number of texts whose titles point to an emphasis upon Jesus' judgment and crucifixion also seem to attest to the significance of a Jesus-origins story as part of the *TY* tradition.

This leads Horbury to assess the traditional title *TY*, which itself “can seem to hint at descent” (34)⁷ and which is often correlated with arguments for a late-added birth story to the narrative. This title is typical of Ashkenazi “Helena” text traditions but goes back at least to the 13th–14th centuries, and its singular counterpart, *Toladah (de-) Yeshu* dates to the 12th century or earlier. But no evidence restricts this Jewish title-group to early conception stories. If such a narrative existed separate from the larger tradition (and it need not have), this must have antedated the 13th–14th centuries (contra Meerson/Schäfer), and the “Helena” narrative is itself as least as early as the 11th century (38). In the end, Horbury's essay makes a critical contribution to scholarship on *TY* by clarifying that while the “Pilate” and “Helen” narratives *do* point to narrative versions with primary interests in judgment/execution or birth/origins respectively, the story of Jesus' birth has an apparently integral place in *both* iterations; yet, further still, the account of Jesus' conception/birth was moved to the beginning of the narrative within the “Helena” tradition at some point. Moreover, both birth and execution as sites of

⁵ These include also *Ma'aseh Yeshu* (“Story of Jesus”) and *Ma'aseh Talui* (“Story of the Hanged Man”).

⁶ Here Horbury corrects Meerson and Schäfer's reading of the title from *Sefer gezarin she-nigzar al Yeshua ben Pandera* (“Book of Sentences decreed concerning Yeshua son of Pandera”) to *Sefer gezar din ...* (“Book of Sentence Decreed ...”). Why transliteration is necessary for Hebrew and Aramaic throughout the chapter I don't know.

⁷ *Toledot Yeshu* = “generations of Jesus,” or something like that (cf. Gen 5:1; Matt 1:1, 18).

polemical engagement can be traced back through Jewish late antiquity to polemical traditions as early as the second century.⁸

The chapter by Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, “On Some Early Traditions in *Toledot Yeshu* and the Antiquity of the ‘Helena’ Recension” (43–58), deals both with the “Helena” text-type and with a manuscript that contains an important version of that narrative: Strasbourg codex BnU 3974 (héb. 48, fol. 170a–175b). After establishing that the Strasbourg manuscript is of 16th-century vintage, not 18th-century as recently argued by Horbury,⁹ Ben Ezra sets out to gauge the age of the text tradition contained in that manuscript. In so doing, Ben Ezra corrects not only Horbury but also Schäfer and Meerson, the latter having (e.g.) unnecessarily assumed a linear development of the *TY* narrative (45) and failed to appreciate the relative antiquity of the Judeo-Arabic manuscripts/fragments from the Cairo Genizah (46). Some of those fragments are among the earliest known texts of *TY* and, importantly, many of these (some quite early) attest to the “Helena” text-type. This shakes the foundations of the assumption that the “Pilate” text-type is much older than the former.

Going further, Ben Ezra challenges the interpretation of a key piece of evidence: the external witness of Agobard and Amulo, 9th-century archbishops of Lyon to the “Pilate” recension of *TY* “should ... not be over-interpreted as evidence against the existence of the ‘Helena’ recension in the first millennium” (48). The “sheer number of early ‘Judeo-Arabic manuscripts’ of this recension makes such an absence *a priori* unlikely (49). Moreover, none of these early Judeo-Arabic manuscripts lacks an “Anti-Acts” ending—some stories about Jesus’ early followers countering the triumphalist narrative of the Acts of the Apostles—or a beginning without a Jesus birth narrative, both of which portions of the narrative have been used to identify ‘earlier’ and ‘later’ recensions in various manuscripts. Ben Ezra next moves to assessing five traditions that have been used to date the “Pilate” and “Helena” recensions—which Ben Ezra sees as mutually influential and not chronologically sequential. Most interesting is his treatment of the “trial of the disciples,” a narrative recounting the trial of some of Jesus’ disciples, apparently corresponding to a famous Talmud passage (*b. Sanh.* 43a). But Ben Ezra argues that while the “Pilate” recension may be coeval with the Talmud pericope, the “Helena” text “seems to transmit a short, more distant, and therefore probably older version” (53). By way of comparison of one scene Ben Ezra argues that the text-form from the Strasbourg manuscript is probably ancient.

Finally, Ben Ezra deals with one of the stranger parts of *TY*, where Jesus is said to have been crucified on a cabbage plant.¹⁰ This legend has been linked to a line in Tertullian’s *De spectaculis* 30.¹¹ With some clever comparative etymological footwork, Ben Ezra

⁸ See Clement of Alexandria *Contra Celsum* 1.28, 32 and 2.5 and the late antique Jewish traditions on p. 41.

⁹ William Horbury, “The Strasbourg Text of the *Toledot*,” in *Toledot Yeshu ... Revisited*, 49–60, at 51ff.

¹⁰ Many mss have a legend where Jesus uses the divine name to compel all trees to refuse their service as supports for crucifixion, but because the cabbage plant was not a tree, it was exempt from this magic and thus became the only possible source-material for constructing Jesus’ cross (55).

¹¹ “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 visitors” (trans. Meerson & Schäfer, 1.7).

suggests that an early Jewish pun mocking Jesus implied that the Jesus movement misunderstood Jesus' death "by confusing the notion of Jesus's death on the חוסיא, 'mercy seat,' with the חסיא, the 'lettuces,' among which he died" (57). Ben Ezra then posits that the transfer from oral to written tradition effected a transfer from lettuces as place of burial to lettuce/cabbage plant as tool of execution. This argument is impossible to verify, but enjoyable to contemplate. This is also true of Ben Ezra's overall argument that the traditions in *TY* are late antique ones—5th-century ones, in fact, both the "Pilate" and "Helena" recensions. Ben Ezra calls these "two distinct anti-Christian Jewish compositions or proto-*Toledot Yeshu*" (58), and his arguments are not without merit.

Gavin McDowell, in "The Alternative Chronology: Dating the Events of the Wa-genseil Version of *Toledot Yeshu*" (59–80), examines a tradition wherein Jesus' birth/life is retrojected to 100 years before its conventional date in the first third of the first century CE. This tradition, which eventually finds unique expression in one iteration of the *TY* complex, traces back to the Babylonian Talmud: at *b. Sanh.* 107b and *b. Sotah* 47a, Jesus' career is placed toward the end of the reign of the Judean king Alexander Jannaeus. When Jannaeus began persecuting the sages, we are told, Jesus fled to Egypt with his master Joshua ben Perahyah; when later returning with his master, Jesus is rejected and disgraced after some apparently untoward insinuations regarding a female innkeeper. The story has many complexities, and may draw upon New Testament traditions (namely Matthew 2:13–23, when Jesus fled to Egypt with his family following Herod's massacre of the innocents), earlier rabbinic legends (Jesus' teacher Joshua seems to have replaced Judah ben Tabai, one of the 3rd generation of *zugot* to rule over the Sanhedrin with Simon ben Shetaḥ; *m. Avot* 1:8), and perhaps late antique Aramaic magic bowls from the 5th and 6th centuries (which mention both Joshua and Jesus, though never together).

This "alternative chronology" of Jesus found adherents in the Middle Ages too. By this point, "writers are fully aware of the traditional chronology" (65), and thus Medieval Jews either accepted the alternative chronology in the face of the conventional, Christian one or else claimed that the alternative chronology concerned a different Jesus. McDowell marshals a diverse smattering of Medieval authors to illustrate the varieties of this tradition, from Saadiah Gaon's overtly anti-Christian deployment in the early 10th-century to the more oblique renderings of Judah ha-Levi and Moses Maimonides to the powerfully polemical Abraham Ibn Daud, whose *Sefer ha-Qabbalah* explains carefully and at length how the alternative chronology represents an accurate timeline which "the Gentiles" (i.e. Christians) willfully misconstrue to support their own crucifixion ideology. Things are more complicated with Ibn Daud, but his testimony is important because it clarifies why the traditional chronology would bother Jews: because the proximity in which it placed Jesus' crucifixion to the Temple's destruction fueled one of the more powerful Christian anti-Jewish polemics, whereby the Temple's downfall proved Jesus' divinity, God's rejection of the Jews, etc. After discussing a few other uses of this alternative chronology, McDowell comes to the *Toledot Yeshu*.

The alternative chronology identified by McDowell does not appear in the "Pilate" (or "Group I") or "Helena" (or "Group II") recensions of *TY*, but only in one exemplar of a

third group of idiosyncratic texts. This group, which tends to draw more upon Talmudic tradition, includes not only the “Huldreich” version but also a “Slavic subgroup,” both of which contain fascinating if wild chronological frames.¹² Even in this milieu, however, the Wagensil version of *TY* is unique, situating Jesus’ birth firmly in the reign of Alexander Jannaeus assigning and his arrest to the reign of Salome Alexandra, whom the author conflates with Queen Helena (74). Here McDowell affirms this dating of the Wagenseil version, contra Meerson and Schäfer, who saw the dating of Jannaeus to “the year 671 of the fourth millennium” as an error for what should have read “the year 761 ...”¹³ More importantly, McDowell tries to explain why Jesus is placed in the reign of Jannaeus in the Wagenseil version: because Jannaeus was a figure infamous for having crucified hundreds of Pharisees (Josephus *Antiquities* 13,379–80). Yet here, at arguably the most critical point of this chapter, the logic appears to become confused. First McDowell cites the Nahum Peshar (4Q169 3–4 I, 6–8) as prophesying that Jannaeus (“the Lion of Wrath”) will hang the Pharisees (“the seekers-after-smooth-things”). He continues like this:

The Nahum Peshar uses the Hebrew verb תלה to describe the action of Jannaeus. This verb, which means “to hang,” is also frequently employed in the sense “to crucify.” Examples are numerous [McDowell cites one], but in this case one need look no further than the *Toledot Yeshu* tradition itself, where Jesus is always hanged instead of crucified. Therefore, when a medieval source like *Sefer Yosippon* claims that Alexander Jannaeus hanged eight hundred Pharisees (יתלו על עצים את שמונה) (מאות הפרושים), the implication is that he crucified them. (75–76)

The order of argumentation here is not easy to follow. The verb means “to crucify” in some places, yet “Jesus is always hanged” in *TY*? Moreover, it isn’t clear what the “therefore” means before the statement about *Yosippon*, but there crucifixion only remains implicit to the theoretical medieval reader of *Yosippon* who did not know that text’s Latin sources (drawn predominantly from the Latin Josephus tradition). Modern scholars can see that *Yosippon*’s primary source, *On the Destruction of Jerusalem (De Excidio Hierosolymitano)*, says explicitly that “eight hundred [Pharisees] were suffixed to crosses by Alexander in the middle of the city” (*octingentos illos in medio urbis ab Alexandro cruci suffixos*; 1.12.4). *Yosippon* was not merely implying “hanged” with תלה here. The thought never crossed the author’s mind; rather, he used the term תלה as the *de facto* way to say “crucify.”

Regardless of infelicities of articulation, McDowell’s general point is well taken: Jesus was famous for being crucified, Alexander Jannaeus for crucifying, so there you go: “Crucifixion is the one common element of these two very different people. It is perhaps sufficient to explain why there is a persistent tradition that Jesus lived in the

¹² The Slavonic subgroup dates Jesus to 320 years after the construction of the Second Temple. The Huldreich *Toledot Yeshu* recension contains a smattering of inconsonant details from chronologies ranging from the time of Alexander Jannaeus to the time of the *Tannaim* in the early-2nd century CE (see 73–74).

¹³ Citing *Seder ‘Olam Rabbah* (see 75).

time of Alexander Jannaeus” (76). This theory has merit, and one should also consult here McDowell’s short appendix on the birth of Jesus’ in Epiphanius’ *Panarion*.

The next chapter is on “Jesus the Magician in the ‘Pilate’ Recension of *Toledot Yeshu*” (81–98). The familiar reader will be neither surprised nor displeased to find as the author of this chapter Gideon Bohak, more or less the modern guru on *Ancient Jewish Magic* since the publication of his book by that name in 2008.¹⁴ Predictably, but no less fascinating for that, Bohak’s object of study is “one of the central features of *TY*’s anti-Christian polemics.” Namely, the fact that “it does not deny the claim that Jesus performed many miracles, but insists that he did so by using magic” (82). Bohak approaches this question within the “Pilate” recension, assuming this to contain the oldest extant *SY* text tradition. First, he uses scenes from *TY* concerning magic to illustrate the relationships and issues related to the Aramaic, Judeo-Arabic, and Hebrew texts of the “Pilate” recension. The Aramaic Cairo Genizah texts, for example, retain 1) a story where John the Baptist is questioned by Jewish leaders about magic and about Jesus’ eleven disciples, after which five of Jesus’ disciples are executed (cf. *b. Sanh.* 43a); 2) a tale of Jesus and John the Baptist brought by Jewish leaders before the Roman Emperor Tiberius at Tiberias. Jesus and John, claiming to be sons of God and healers, claim the ability to impregnate women without sex; ordered by Tiberius to do so (to Tiberius’ daughter), she is so impregnated, but prayer on the part of the Jewish community prompts God to turn the fetus into a stone, leading John’s and Jesus’ executions to be ordered; 3) an ensuing scene where, after John is crucified in Tiberias and Jesus sees a cross prepared for himself, Jesus flies away in the air, but his quintessential condemner in *TY*, Joshua ben Perahyah, flies after him and captures him, leading to his crucifixion. Hereafter Jesus’ body is desecrated as part of a demonstration to his insistent followers that he is in fact dead, not in heaven.

Summarizing these scenes, Bohak concludes: “Clearly, *Toledot Yeshu* is not a text of high literary qualities or aspirations, nor does it make a great effort to follow the Gospel accounts or build up any kind of historical plausibility.” Nevertheless, Bohak avers that “it is quite effective in deconstructing some of the main Christian claims about Jesus,” and that its “nasty tone and colorful stories clearly would have pleased any Jewish audience exposed to Christian missionary propaganda” (85). But how can we know what is or would have been “quite effective” or “clearly” pleasing to any Jews who knew Christians? The answer to this question is not given.

After this, Bohak moves to the Judeo-Arabic version of the *TY*, which fills in some of the gaps in the magic episodes left by the Aramaic fragments. In these fragments we find a rather detailed story where Jesus’ healing abilities are imputed to certain books of magic which he uses and which date back to the biblical Balaam son of Peor (Numbers 22), along with new details relating to John’s and Jesus’ executions and postmortem fates. Bohak sees it as significant that the Judeo-Arabic fragments end their stories with the titular statement, “Here ends the Judgment of Jesus the Heretic” (תם גזר דין ישו אלמארק), a

¹⁴ Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); see also Gideon Bohak, “Prolegomena to the Study of the Jewish Magical Tradition,” *Currents in Biblical Literature* 8 (2009): 107–150, and his 2012 entry on “Ancient Jewish Magic” on Oxford Bibliographies online.

title confirmed in other texts and signaling the fact that “in the ‘Pilate’ recension of *Toledot Yeshu*, the focus is on Jesus’s trial and death, and not his birth and childhood” (86). Finally, Bohak discusses three Hebrew versions of *TY*, including some Genizah fragments only some of which have been published. Some are important because of their affinity with the Aramaic and Judeo-Arabic versions.¹⁵ Another Bohak finds “problematic” (87), namely a Hebrew translation of the Aramaic version with a Judeo-Greek-influenced opening added.¹⁶ Finally, Bohak identifies two other Hebrew texts as being close to the Aramaic.¹⁷ He then shows that the Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic can help correct orthographic or textual errors within the Aramaic tradition, while still arguing that the latter should receive scholarly priority; more importantly, Bohak stresses that “the Aramaic fragments from the Cairo Genizah do not preserve the *Urtext* of *Toledot Yeshu*, if there ever was one, and they do not even represent a single unified text” (88). The moral of the story is that one must be extremely wary of building “elaborate historical reconstructions” upon the earliest *TY* texts. For this is, Bohak says, “like dancing on quicksand, with every misguided step leading you deeper into the mud” (89).¹⁸

The latter part of this chapter features a helpful and nuanced discussion of how the “Pilate” recension of *SY* subverts the admitted fact that Jesus did perform miracles by attributing them to magic. The text’s author(s) worked hard and carefully “to create as wide a gap as possible between Jesus’s magic and the legitimate means taken by the ‘good Jews’ who opposed him” (91). Bohak here also examines an interesting pericope following the episode of Jesus’ and Judah’s flights where Jesus hides himself in the cave of Elijah, locks the cave magically, forcing Judah (the Gardner) to open the cave magically. In this scene Bohak sees an ancient magical spell formula and even suggests that the invocation that Judah uses to open the cave—פִּתְחָא פִּתְחָא אִיפְתְּחָא (“o cave mouth, o cave mouth, open up!”)—may be a “playful allusion” to Jesus’ use of the same (?) verb in Mark 7:34 when he opens a deaf man’s ears with the imperative Ἐφφαθά (93–94). But the important point here is that the “Pilate” recension of *TY* plays on the familiar theme of arguing that Jesus’ miracles were born of magic¹⁹ yet gives a clear and distinctive answer

¹⁵ Namely Paris, Collection Mosseri, I.81 and Cambridge, UL, T.-S. N.S. 329.820, both published in Yaacob Deutsch, “New Evidence of Early Versions of *Toldot Yeshu*,” *Tarbiz* 69 (2000): 177–97 [Hebrew], and two other unpublished fragments of the same text.

¹⁶ MS St. Petersburg, RNL, Evr 1.274, penned by Israel ben Yequiel in 1536.

¹⁷ MS New York, JTS 8998 (= Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, N^o 50712), consisting of two copies of the text, only one of which was edited by Meerson & Schäfer (*Toledot Yeshu*, 1:137–44, 2:59–62). These texts belong with the Genizah fragment Cambridge, UL, T.-S. K 1.17.

¹⁸ For this reason, Bohak finds himself puzzled by the debate between Willem F. Smelik, “The Aramaic Dialect(s) of the *Toldot Yeshu* Fragments,” *Aramaic Studies* 7 (2007): 39–73 and Michael Sokoloff, “The Date and Provenance of the Aramaic *Toledot Yeshu* on the Basis of Aramaic Dialectology,” in *Toledot Yeshu* (“*The Life Story of Jesus*”) *Revisited*, 13–26, because “[t]he very fact that two competent linguists reached very different conclusions on the basis of the very same textual data is a possible sign that the entire enterprise is suspect” (89). In fact, I would suggest that it is Bohak’s reasoning here that is suspect: arguing toward competing conclusions on the basis of the same data is a crux part of every academic discipline of which I am aware and, indeed, is the means by which *Wissenschaft* moves us collectively towards *Wissen*.

¹⁹ Cf. Celsus in Origen *Contra Celsum* 1.6,28,38 and *b. Sanh.* 43a, 107b; *b. Shabb.* 104b.

to the question of where Jesus acquired his magical skill: from the secret knowledge of magical books. These books Bohak expertly contextualizes and discusses in the final pages of this excellent chapter.

Sarit Kattan Gribetz's chapter, "The Mothers in the Manuscripts: Gender, Motherhood, and Power in *Toledot Yeshu*" (99–129), assesses how Tiberius Caesar's daughter, Jesus' mother Mary, and Queen Helena figure within the anti-Christian polemics of *TY*. These women, Gribetz argues, while rarely all appearing "fully developed" in the same manuscript (99), each in her own way "contest Christian eschatological, historical, and imperial(ist) discourse" (100). Gribetz first examines the story in which Tiberius' daughter conceives a fetus by Jesus' magic which subsequently turns to a stone, prompting Jesus' (and John the Baptist's) execution (from the "Pilate" recension). Gribetz rightly identifies a "striking" contrast between the Gospel narratives, in which "Jesus effortlessly heals women with no more than a gentle touch," and this *TY* episode where "an anonymous woman exposes Jesus's identity as a false magician through her failed pregnancy and her consequent death" (104). She sees this as all the more significant given that in some manuscripts this woman is the only female character. And while Gribetz wonders if Augustus' daughter Julia the Elder (d. 14 CE) and/or Julius Caesar's daughter (d. 54 BCE) "might be in the far background" of this story (105), she posits that the anonymity and namelessness of the female character have a narrative function, as they render her unimaginable, unmournable, and undistracting (so, one might ask, why the need for oblique historical referents?). In the end, Gribetz posits that the woman's stone fetus and unsuccessful conception serve as metaphors for Jesus' failed messianism. This suggestion is convincing, given the strong association between the pregnancy/labor/birth metaphor and messianic hope in ancient and medieval Jewish and Christian texts, which Gribetz discusses.²⁰

Next Gribetz turns to Jesus' mother Mary, situating her role in *TY* among the apparently later traditions and within the developing mariologies and related ideas ascendant into and through the high and late Middle Ages. She finds that Mary is not always negatively portrayed in *TY*, instead retaining her Jewish identity and carry relatively little culpability for the whole Jesus debacle. We learn here that various parts of the *TY* tradition concentrate on aspects of Mary's body, as she is Jesus' biological mother, but all signal the primary point that Jesus was not the son of God, but an illegitimately-conceived human. In the Hulderich version, Mary plays an extra role: buried under the tree on which Jesus and his siblings were hanged, Mary's tombstone is stolen by Jesus'

²⁰ Gribetz also briefly parallels this *TY* tradition, where "an unnamed daughter who bears a stone child who stands in for Christ but is presented as a false messiah," with the 7th-century *Sefer Zerubbabel*, which presents a "stone mother"—a statue of a beautiful virgin—as the wife of Belial and sex object of Satan, whose offspring eventually kills the Messiah of Joseph's lineage (109–111). Gribetz sees a heuristically helpful correlation between these two Jewish texts which use women 'of stone' to drive anti-Christian/Jesus polemics.

relatives and its epigraph replaced.²¹ This tradition combats any Christian notion of Mary herself having ascended to heaven.

Gribetz finally turns to Queen Helena, the main ruling figures in Group II and III manuscripts of *TY*. She sees an undeniable association between the Adiabenean Queen Helena, the apparent historical figure behind the text, and the later legendary mother of Constantine, the empress Helena of the early 4th century CE. As the Queen of Adiabene had converted to Judaism (see Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 20.17–96),²² so Helena had converted to Christianity. Gribetz notes how Ora Limor and Israel Yuval (*inter alia*) have identified echoes of the Constantinian Helena in *TY*, as a few manuscripts have Helena demanding that the cross on which Jesus was crucified be found, a clear allusion to the historical Helena’s famed role in the ‘finding of the true cross.’²³ On this basis Gribetz parallels Helena’s role in *TY* to that of Mary: both bear witness to Jesus’ falseness in different ways (and while Helena is never identified as a mother in *TY*, Gribetz argues that the historical Helena’s underlying her character insinuate this identification).

Tacked onto the chapter just before the conclusion is a helpful section in which Gribetz identifies a few other mothers and grandmothers that crop up in various *TY* manuscripts (123–25). Finally, Gribetz concludes that *TY* contains “a series of complicated mothers,” each “limited in her capacity to mother” and each enriching the *TY*’s anti-Christian commentary on Jesus’ illegitimacy (125). She theorizes over a few pages about bodies, gender, social history, and literary discourse, eventually implicating the role that women could have played in the development and transmission of these traditions. This leads to admittedly unanswerable questions, such as: “What aspects of these stories might have originated with women, how did the narratives change when they were retold by women, and what roles did women have in their transmission?” (128–29). Such musings are interesting, but by ending on such an ambivalent note, Gribetz robs her chapter of some of its explanatory and revelatory power as a fascinating display of one key and enlightening angle from which *TY* must be understood.

Alexandra Cuffel’s chapter on “*Toledot Yeshu* in the Context of Polemic and *Sīra* Literature in the Middle East from the Fatimid to the Mamluk Era” (131–67) builds upon Philip Alexander’s key insight that the Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Persian versions of *TY* addressed two different ‘gospels,’ as it were, i.e. both Christian and Muslim versions of Jesus’ life.²⁴ Cuffel goes further by situating *TY* within the literary genre of *Sīrah* (pl. *Siyar*), which could range from biography or travelogue to epic hero tale,

²¹ The original epitaph read: “Here the children of whoredom were hanged, and their mother is buried beneath them. Shame on them!” (the first line a reference to Hosea 2:6), but was replaced with “Behold, a ladder is set up on the earth with its top reaching to the heavens, and the angels of God are ascending. The mother of the children rejoices. Praise the Lord!” This inscription conjures both Genesis 28:12 and Psalm 113:9.

²² Gribetz at first rightly cites Josephus’ *Jewish Antiquities* thus (119n76), but then in the next footnote inexplicably reverts to the antiquated and no-longer-used numbering system for referencing Josephus’ works (119n77).

²³ See Ora Limor and Israel Jacob Yuval, “Judas Iscariot: Revealer of the Hidden Truth,” in *Toledot Yeshu* (“*The Life Story of Jesus*”) *Revisited*, 208–18 and others listed in 121n84.

²⁴ Philip Alexander, “The *Toledot Yeshu* in the Context of the Jewish-Muslim Debate,” in *Toledot Yeshu* (“*The Life Story of Jesus*”) *Revisited*, 137–58.

the most famous of which is the life of Muḥammad, *Sīrat Muḥammad* (or *Sīrat Rasūl Allah*), written by Ibn Ishāq (d. 761 CE). More specifically, Cuffel classes *TY* somewhere “between the religious *Siyar* and the epic *Siyar*” (133), focusing on a religious figure yet containing entertaining aspects of adventure stories.²⁵ Cuffel also draws upon the fact of *TY*’s appearance in four Middle Eastern languages to reflect upon the possibility of diverse target audiences of the text(s), and sees the pervasiveness of Jewish-Christian polemic, along with Muslim interest in Jesus traditions,²⁶ and most especially the latent potential of Muslims converting to Christianity or Judaism, as further items necessary for contextualizing *TY* within an Islamic milieu.

Cuffel begins in earnest by stressing that “Middle Eastern, or at least Egyptian Jews” of the kind that would have produced the Judeo-Arabic *TY* texts from the Cairo Genizah were demonstrably interested readers of texts written by and about Christians and Muslims as well (138). Indeed, religious polemic constituted one of their “central genres of interest.” This may suggest, Cuffel says, that *TY*’s popularity was due both to its anti-Christian but also its anti-Muslim refutatory power. More diffident is Cuffel’s subsequent suggestion that some Muslims *might* or *could* have read *TY*. It was possible. In the same vein, we read that Eastern Christian communities “likely ... had some awareness” of the *TY* tradition (140). These are interesting possibilities to entertain, but it is difficult to take them very far.

Another means of contextualization that Cuffel tries out is a comparison of *TY* with the works of Samaw’al al-Maghribī (1130–1180), a Jewish convert to Islam who wrote polemics and an autobiography. His autobiography describes a journey towards Islam that involved reading some Islamic texts, which Cuffel takes as evidence of “a culture of reading among Jews that included a thirst for ... tales of adventure across denominational lines” (141). This leads her to wonder whether Christians and Muslims too might not have been interested in reading out-group texts with “a pronounced religious bias” (142). The information introduced here is salient, but the upshot is simply a guided tour of the imagination: ‘It certainly *seems like* Christians and/or Muslims *would have* been interested in *TY* and *might have* read it...’

Next Cuffel revisits whether *TY* traditions might be reflected in the Qur’an, especially given the Jewish influences within the *ḥadīth*. She marks that Suras IV 156–57 and XIX 27–28 show Jews denigrating Mary’s virtue, which of course need not implicate the *TY* at all, as Cuffel notes. She then targets a portion of Sura IV where Jews take credit for crucifying Jesus, though the reader is told that it only appeared to them that they had. Remarkably, here Cuffel ‘leaves aside’ “musings about Docetic or Valentinian influences” (which have seem quite striking here to some) and suggests that such Jewish self-claiming of responsibility for Jesus’ crucifixion “is much closer to the claims made

²⁵ See already Alexandra Cuffel, “Between Epic Entertainment and Polemical Exegesis: Jesus and the Empress Helen as Anti-Heroes in *Toledot Yeshu*,” in *Medieval Exegesis and Religious Difference: Commentary, Conflict and Community in the Premodern Mediterranean*, ed. Ryan Szpiech (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 155–70.

²⁶ See here Zeki Saritoprak, *Islam’s Jesus* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014).

in the *Toledot Yeshu* and the Talmud” (144). Equally surprising is Cuffel’s remark from the attribution of Jesus’ miracles to magic in the Qur’an (twice with the formula *إِنْ هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ*)²⁷ that this might implicate the *TY*, though she refrains from fully endorsing this conclusion.²⁸ Traditions associating Jesus with magic are much older and more widespread than the *TY* tradition (see Origen *Contra Celsum* 1.28–32, e.g.), and the Qur’an’s engagement with this discourse is quite general.

Also relatively generalized are the statements that Samaw’al al-Maghribī makes about Jesus and Moses in his *Ifhām al-Yahūd*. He attributes the miracles of both to magical skills, particularly the practiced use of God’s name. Such instrumentalization of the divine name is a known phenomenon already in antiquity. Yet Cuffel concludes: “Based on the resemblance between Al-Maghribī’s portrayal of Jesus and his abilities in the *Toledot Yeshu*, it seems likely that Al-Maghribī was drawing from *Toledot Yeshu* and constructed this parallel depiction of Moses and Jesus as a counter to the polemical thrust of the *Toledot Yeshu*” (147). This seems like a stretch—it is, of course, not impossible, but how far must one look for source material associating Jesus and/or Moses with the use of the divine name? Certainly no further than the Jewish and Christian Scriptures themselves (see Exodus 3:15; John 10:25). A later statement about Jesus in the same work is overtly engaged with stories from the Gospels (see 148n57). Certainly the richer stories in the *TY* add texture to these Jesus traditions, but here it seems that an author like Al-Maghribī would have needed little more than the Gospels themselves, let alone the traditionary baggage they had accrued over a thousand years of use and transmission, both written and oral, to depict, for example, Jews accusing Jesus of healing sick people on the Sabbath.

Cuffel deals with a related passage in Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya’s (1292–1350) *Book of Gifts for the Confused in Answering the Jews and the Christians* (*Kitāb Hidāyat al-Ḥayārā fī ajwibat al-Yahūd wa al-Naṣārā*). Here again one wonders if Cuffel overstates her case in finding the combination of illegitimacy and magic attributed to Jesus by the Jews as evidence of *TY*’s influence. Of course, *TY*’s fluidity and extent within early Jewish polemic seems to have been quite diffuse and difficult to track, but is the *TY* tradition itself a necessary explanatory mechanism for such cookie-cutter accusations against Jesus? Is the text’s mention of Jesus being called a “swindler/trickster” by Jews also in need of a *TY*-as-source explanation? To be clear, all of Cuffel’s suggestions are interesting and worth taking seriously, but none are markedly compelling. So again when *Hidāyat al-Ḥayārā* records the Jews as having called Jesus a bastard whose father was “the adulterer al-Bandīra.” These traditions are as old as the third century at least (Origen *Contra Celsum* 1.32–33, 69), and certainly the roots of the *TY* might tentatively be located back that far as well, but no definite connections are made. It is indeed difficult to imagine these anti-Jesus traditions apart from the influence of certain polemical discourses, be they those of the Talmud, the *TY*, or others, but what the influences actually were and how they might have been mediated remains a mystery. The most we can say is that Muslims

²⁷ Qur’an V 110; LXI 6.

²⁸ She eventually only allows that *TY*’s influence here “is not precluded” (145).

read, recognized, and reproduced certain anti-Christian polemics purveyed by and/or involving Jews.

The next part of Cuffel's chapter takes the themes of impurity, illegitimacy, and religious deception so characteristic of the *TY* and describes how these "would have resonated with various types of Jews, Christians, and Muslims" in Egypt (154). In other words, Cuffel here combines particular articulations of Christian, Jewish, or Muslim thinking about a host of issues as they pertain to the person of Jesus. This section is a helpful overview of multi-religious thought on these topics in the pre-Mamluk Middle East, and students of polemical exchange among the Abrahamic religions will find interesting material mentioned in these pages. The place of *TY* in this discussion is simply as a textual tradition testifying to a type of discourse in which it fits well and which it conversely can help to delineate. Adding real value to Cuffel's article are its two short appendices comprising editions and translations of Cambridge UL, T.-S. NS 298.57 and Petersburg RNL, Evr.-Arab. II.3014 respectively.

Expanding further the 'reception of *TY*' theme is Jonatan M. Benarroch's chapter: "A Real Spark of Sama'el: Kabbalistic Reading(s) of *Toledot Yeshu*" (169–86). Benarroch begins by stating that *TY* likely influenced Kabbalistic traditions, though this is hard to prove, and that Kabbalah left its mark upon certain recensions of *TY*. The most striking correlation is the theme of the knowledge and magical use of the "Ineffable Name." Building upon his own previous work in this area (170n7), here Benarroch argues that particular interpretations of the biblical blasphemer (Lev 24:10–23) in the Zohar "were developed into a clear Kabbalistic reading of *Toledot Yeshu* by the sixteenth and seventeenth century kabbalists R. Isaac Luria and R. Naftali Hertz Bakhrakh" (173). First he approaches places where Jesus is associated with the *Mesite*, the Israelite who entices his fellows to idolatry described in Deuteronomy 13:7–12, in Kabbalistic texts. For example, R. Hayim Vital (1542–1620), a student of R. Isaac Luria, directly identifies Deuteronomy 13:7 with Jesus in his *Ets ha-Daat Tov*, where he also identifies Jesus' father as "Pandera the Nazarene" (פנדר"א הנוצרי). Vital also links Jesus with the blasphemer from Leviticus 24:10–23 in his *Sefer ha-Gilgulim*. This discussion, while interesting, is not so far as I can tell the promised demonstration of a link between *TY* and later Kabbalah; rather, we read here of what "might ... be evidence" of Vital's "acquaintance with a version of *Toledot Yeshu*" and of things that "may well derive from *Toledot Yeshu*" (such as Jesus being described as a bastard, *mamzer*, by Vital; 176–77). In other words, anti-Jesus polemic in later Kabbalah has many affinities with themes present in the *TY*. But we already knew that.

The next section deals with passages in Naftali Hertz Bakhrakh's *Emek ha-Melekh* which contain both probable and nearly-certain derivations from the *TY* tradition. For example, the story told in *Emek ha-Melekh* 5, 32:20d–21a where R. Simon Kepha and R. Judah of the Sanhedrin use the Ineffable Name, which Jesus is said to have stolen, to defeat Jesus (sacrificing themselves in the process), only appears elsewhere in *TY*. Most interesting in this section are the ways in which Kabbalistic authors bring together anti-Jewish polemics and Jewish mysticism into an intricate web of symbolism and allegory: Jesus appears as the serpent (= Devil, = Sama'el) who defiled Adam and Eve, and

the origin of Cain, and enjoys a series of convoluted and half-articulated relationships with Israel, the *Shekhinah* (the feminine divine presence endemic to Kabbalah), his parents, and even Moses—at one point Moses appears as a prototype messiah who beats the Serpent-qua-Jesus (and Christendom) with the “staff of Metatron,” the Kabbalistic arch-angel who himself turned from a serpent into a staff for the occasion. And this is only the tip of the iceberg. The fantastic imaginaries of Kabbalah mysticism run full-tilt through this section, and a knowledge of that milieu becomes necessary for making sense of the complex discourses under discussion. However, Benarroch’s basic argument remains simple enough, though the correlations between *TY* and these later Kabbalistic texts seems to exude more allusion and parallel than demonstrable source and reception relationships. The diverse *TY* and Kabbalah traditions engaged a world of Jewish discourse and polemic populated by many interrelated themes and tropes, textual and otherwise, and simply pointing to the variegated affinities linking *TY* and, e.g., Naftali Hertz Bakhrakh may be the point of the exercise.

Finally, Benarroch shows that a passage from the “Slavic Ar” recension of *TY* contains a passage that appears to draw upon a writing of the 17th-century R. Isaiah Horowitz (*Shnei Luchot ha-Brith ha-Shalem*) and on the *Emek ha-Melekh*. Here Jesus and Christendom are identified with Sama’el, i.e. “the prince of Edom (Esau),” and the Golden Calf. By this late period, influence ran both ways between *TY* versions and Kabbalistic texts.

In “The Secret Booklet from Germany: Circulation and Transmission of *Toledot Yeshu* at the Borders of the Empire” (187–218), Daniel Barbu and Yann Dahhaoui take a minor episode in the history of Jewish-Christian conflict—the 1429 prosecution of the Jews of Trévoux—as an example of “the sort of historical accidents that bring *Toledot Yeshu* to the surface” (187). From this they make deductions about the reception, use, and cultural positioning of *TY* in the Middle Ages.

The primary source for Barbu’s and Dahhaoui’s investigation is a manuscript: MS Paris, BnF, Lat. 12722. This document provides the basis for a story in which thirteen Jews from the town of Trévoux were arraigned and the books of the town’s Jewish community investigated. Their books were taken, their Talmuds confiscated, their Bibles returned. Further investigation eventually led to the discovery of “an original text of *Toledot Yeshu*” (190). Several Jews disavowed knowledge of the book, whereas its owner, a certain Peyret, confessed to having commissioned it and commentated upon it (though never having shown it to anyone). And while we do not know what became of Peyret, we do know that the Jews were theoretically expelled from that French town for at least several decades hence; then again, the presence of some eleven Jews, including Peyret, is attested just a few years later.

Barbu and Dahhaoui parallel the nebulous Peyret to another historical figure, Perez Trabot, who produced a Hebrew-Italian glossary in one manuscript of which we read of the author’s tribulations—expulsion, imprisonment, selling into slavery—and in the prologue of which the author encourages Jewish parents to resist Christian “heretics” (by teaching their own children biblical Hebrew). Trabot also penned other works evincing fodder for anti-Christian polemics. This leads Barbu and Dahhaoui to conclude: “It is not impossible to think that a similar impulse could have encouraged a member of just

such a community to take pains to copy, read, and maybe teach *Toledot Yeshu*" (192). The authors next contextualize the event of 1429 historically before linking the confiscation of Jewish books that occurred there to similar occurrences in the early-15th century states of Savoy. These witch hunts targeted Jewish material that carried particular pockmarks of anti-Christian sentiment.

Eventually Barbu and Dahhaoui engage the seminal 1885 article by Isidore Loeb on BnF Lat. 12722,²⁹ disagreeing with the latter's opinion that it is the copy of an original and arguing instead that this manuscript is the original record of the event. They then assess the highly valuable Middle-French text of *TY* contained in the manuscript (a striking feature of the codex, spanning fol. 135r-140r). Based on a few clues, they suggest that this text constitutes a translation of the work "carried out (orally) in the immediate context of the inquiry" and note that it constitutes a "quite faithful rendition" of the "Helena" recension (202-203); in fact, its text aligns quite well with the famous Hebrew Strasbourg manuscript (MS Strasbourg, BnU, 3974 [héb. 48], fol. 170r-175v). A notable variant of BnF Lat. 12722, however, is the inclusion of a rather explicit sexual component to a scene in (certain versions of) *TY* in which Judas Iscariot and Jesus are flying by using the name of God. Importantly, this shows that this episode was not added to *TY* by the Viennese theology professor Thomas Ebendorfer, who around the 1450s included a Latin translation of *TY* in his *Lies of the Jews (Falsitates Judeorum)*, as has been recently argued.³⁰

Overall, Barbu's and Dahhaoui's case study is indeed, as they say, "an extraordinary testimony of a *Toledot Yeshu* text in context" (211), and evidence of one way in which medieval Jews fought back against the oppression of their religious, literary, dogmatic, and even ownership capacities within a Christian world. Two appendices to the chapter provide a calendar of the 1429 Trévoux investigation and a catalogue of BnF Lat. 12722's contents.

Next up is Stephen Burnett's chapter on "Martin Luther, *Toledot Yeshu*, and 'the Rabbis'" (219-30). Burnett studies "Martin Luther's creative 'analysis' of *Toledot Yeshu* in his polemical book *On the Ineffable Name* (1543)" as "one of the strangest literary" uses of *TY* to be found: Luther uses it to slander "the rabbis" as biblical commentators and thus delegitimize these Jewish 'opponents' for a Christian reading audience (219). As backdrop, Burnett notes Martin Luther's surprising switch from tolerance in his 1523 *Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew* to his "vicious program of Jew hatred" represented by his three 1543 treatises. These latter were written to help Protestant ministers steel their congregations against Jewish readings of the Christian Old Testament, to encourage regional princes to quash or expel the Jews and Jewish activity in their domains, and to warn Christian Hebraists again trusting the Jews too much in deciphering the Hebrew

²⁹ Isidore Loeb, "Un episode des juifs de Savoie," *Revue des études juives* 10 (1885): 32-59. On p. 198 Barbu and Dahhaoui cite this as "his 1875 article."

³⁰ See Ruth Mazo Karras, "The Aerial Battle in the *Toledot Yeshu* and Sodomy in the Late Middle Ages," *Medieval Encounters* 19 (2013): 493-533, at 513.

Bible. A characteristic feature of these 1543 writings is a “filthy vituperative language” previously absent from Luther’s work (221).

In *On the Ineffable Name* Luther dealt with Jewish beliefs concerning the Tetragrammaton and the genealogy of Mary. Burnett calls *TY* “perhaps Luther’s chief source of ‘inspiration’” for penning that work (223), and Luther’s version of *TY* apparently contained parts 5–9 as identified by Meerson and Schäfer.³¹ Luther’s piecemeal presentation of the *TY* tradition is ruthless, as he describes the Jewish blasphemy therein in terms of all the most unseemly bodily emissions. He portrays the Jews as being in league with the Devil and parodies Jewish belief, concocting from *TY* what Burnett calls a “Jewish creed,” a kind of antithesis to the Christian catechism (225). The articles of faith that Luther identifies in *TY* are “bizarre, offensive, and wholly fictitious,” just like his deconstructive approach to Catholic texts, Burnett tells us. Luther avers that “a true Jew must forsake reason” and affirm ridiculous beliefs, such as that 1) Queen Helena ruled over Judea in Jesus’ time, 250 years before her birth, 2) the *Shem ha-Meforash* was protested by two copper guard dogs, and 3) large cabbage stalks grew in the Jerusalem sanctuary (and whatever else the rabbis told them). The long and short of it is that Luther presented a number of arguments that appear absurd and unconvincing to modern ears and which seem to display his ignorance; and he did so in the most offensive manner possible, as Burnett’s not inappropriate, though nevertheless extensive, series of condemnatory adjectives and air-quotes makes clear.

In the last few pages of his contribution Burnett explains how Luther’s inner logic connected the rabbis, who are never named as such in *TY*, with that text. The moral of the story is that Luther leveraged a tradition he scarcely understood into an exaggerated, polemical condemnation of a Jewish belief system which he apprehended as an obvious outsider.³²

Next, Evi Michels deals with “Yiddish *Toledot Yeshu* Manuscripts from the Netherlands” (231–62), which, she says, “have not received much scholarly attention” (231). Having surveyed twenty-six of these, Michels focuses on those manuscripts that reflect the temporary messianic presumptions of Sabbatai Zvi (1626–1676), especially NLI, Heb. 8^o 5622, a manuscript copied by Judah Leib ben Ozer in 1711, but also eight other manuscripts produced shortly later. Before moving to the manuscripts, Michels introduces 17th- and 18th-century Amsterdam as an unusual place in which free debate between Christians and Jews was possible. She also portrays it, and the Netherlands writ large, as a place redolent of messianic expectations and enthusiasm on the part of both Jews and Christians. This helps situate Yiddish manuscripts from there that condemn the Jewish “false messiah” Sabbatai Zvi along with the Christian messiah, Jesus.

³¹ Namely: 5) Jesus stealing the divine name, 6) Jesus in Galilee, 7) Jesus brought to justice, 8) Jesus’ trials, 9) Jesus’ execution.

³² Burnett notes that Luther actually encountered rabbinic thought most often in the biblical commentaries of several Christian Hebraists, including Nicholas of Lyra (and his *Postilla*), Martin Bucer (and his 1529 Psalms commentary), and Sebastian Münster (and his 1534–1535 *Hebraica Biblia*).

Michels begins with two manuscripts from 1711 and 1718 respectively that each contain *TY* (*Gzeyres Yeshu Nozri* or *Gezerot Yeshu*) followed by a biography of Sabbatai Zvi. She discusses parallels and details of these manuscripts, suggesting that ben Ozer may have appended the biography of Sabbatai Zvi to *TY* as a means of forestalling messianic missionary efforts, which he himself had to confront at times. Michels then moves on to another manuscript that contains both of these texts and also a parody on Purim called *Massekhet Purim*. This leads to musings about *TY*'s entertainment value and its use for wider audiences, possibly even being performed: the frontispiece on MS New York, JTS, 2219 (fol. 1r) "suggests a possible connection between *Toledot Yeshu* and theatrical performance" (244). Another manuscript with similar proclivities, namely MS Amsterdam, EH, 47 A 21 (fol. 1r), appears in fact "more humorous than properly polemical" (246). Michels goes so far as to posit that this manuscript's scribe sought "to stress that disputations between [Christianity and Judaism] ought to come to an end" (cf. fol. 65v). This leads to a short section in which she discusses religious exchanges between Jews and Christians in the 18th-century Netherlands, a milieu peppered with messianic and eschatological interests. This in turn leads to a discussion of *TY* within the context not only of "Jewish enthusiasm for Baroque theatre," but also the context of Yiddish popular literature more generally. Michels further seeks to lighten the force of *TY* in her particular context of study by, for example, discussing how *TY* does not evince real engagement with biblical tradition but, as argued by William Horbury, is grounded in Midrash, itself influenced by the ancient Greek novel.³³ One wonders here how much of *TY*'s sardonic edge the text's alleged goofiness could realistically curtail.

Nevertheless, Michels' overall argument turns out to be that in the context of the Netherlands in the 1600s and 1700s, "the goal of the narrative [of *TY*] is not to attack, but rather to entertain" (251). This argument has merit, and is in this chapter well-treated (though the chapter's English-language editing needed another run-through). An appendix with an annotated list of Yiddish *TY* manuscripts makes Michel's chapter all the more valuable. Michel's chapter is in fact interesting to compare to Burnett's: the former reads like a kind of apology for a particular strain of the *TY* tradition, whereas the latter is a determined invective against the Christian misuse of *TY* (a misuse itself carried out with apologetic intent); that is, both chapters proffer ethical valuations of *TY*'s content and use.

Remaining in Yiddish territory is the next chapter, by Claudia Rosenzweig: "The 'History of the Life of Jesus' in a Yiddish Manuscript from the Eighteenth Century (Ms. Jerusalem, NLI, Heb. 8^o 5622)" (261–315). This was one of the main manuscripts discussed in Michels' chapter. Rosenzweig more succinctly situates the *TY* tradition within Yiddish literary and popular culture and provides a helpful list of remarks regarding what distinguishes Yiddish *TY* texts: 1) most are from the 17th and 18th centuries; 2) most are from the "Helena" recension; 3) most present themselves as having been translated from Hebrew (from *Loshn-koydesh*); 4) their translation technique includes

³³ William Horbury, "The *Toledot Yeshu* as Midrash," in *Midrash Unbound: Transformations and Innovations*, ed. Michael Fishbane and Joanna Weinberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 159–67.

the formalized practice characteristic of the translation (*taytsh*) of the Hebrew Bible into Yiddish (the “language of the *kheyder*”).³⁴

Rosenzweig gives a thorough description of the Jerusalem manuscript, which contains *TY* as first in a series of stories of false messiahs, which “should be seen as a whole” (270). The reader is here provided with some detailed and lengthy textual examinations that bear out the conceptual unity of the manuscript and its writer. This leads Rosenzweig to her conclusion, in line with Michels’, that “*Toledot Yeshu* was read in many ways and in many contexts,” including as parody, “as *shund-literatur* (a sort of trahs literature *ante litteram*),” and even “as a novel” (273). In a lengthy appendix she includes a transcription of the *TY* (*Gzeyres Yeshu ha-Nozri*) from the Jerusalem manuscript and a translation. Rosenzweig’s chapter is succinct, largely descriptive, and detailed, one of the more philologically-robust discussions of the volume, and its transcription/translation increases the value of this volume as a whole.

The final chapter of the volume is by Yonatan Moss, entitled “‘I Am Not Writing an Apology’: Samuel Krauss’s *Das Leben Jesu* in Context” (317–). Moss’s chapter deals with Samuel Krauss, the “towering giant of Judaic studies” who fled the Nazi *Anschluss* in 1938 to spend the last decade of his life in Cambridge, England and “in heartbreak” (317–18). This chapter is connected to the previous by its discussion of Erich Bischoff, who, anti-Semitist though he was, published an Oxford manuscript containing the Yiddish *TY*, which served as the forerunner to Krauss’s 1902 work, *Das Leben Jesus nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: S. Calvary & Co.). And indeed, Krauss borrowed Bischoff’s classification of *TY* manuscript types and even included and responded to glosses by Bischoff throughout his work. Yet, Moss argues, “the turn-of-the-century Central European academic playing field upon which the Protestant Bischoff and the Jewish Krauss played an apparently fair and ‘friendly’ game of historical scholars was, in fact, fundamentally uneven” and already contained the latent presence of the “ultimate, full-fledged, stark contrast” between the two that would emerge in the 1920s and 1930s (320). With this disparity in mind, Moss sets out to show that Krauss’s work on *TY* “was shaped in response to the politically dominant supersessionist Christian (particularly Protestant) perspective that prevailed throughout his lifetime” (321), an industry which Moss sees as ‘circumscribing the value’ of Krauss’s work for today yet also providing a deeper appreciation of Krauss’s achievement in his own day.

Moss shows convincingly how both Bischoff and Krauss situated their own work on *TY* within the larger game of uneven Jewish-Christian power relations in Protestant Europe. Krauss did this in part by inoculating the immediate effects of *TY*’s content by mining it as a historical source for “facts” and presenting his work as the respectable exercise of source criticism. In this Moss sees Krauss’s project as similar to *TY* itself, inasmuch as Krauss claims that the *TY* is to be traced back to Christian sources, while *TY* implies that Christianity’s story can be traced back to Jewish sources. Bischoff predictably

³⁴ This had already been noted by Erich Bischoff, *Ein jüdisches Leben Jesu: Zum erste Mal nach dem Oxforder Manuskript herausgegeben* (Leipzig: Wilhelm Friedrich, 1895), 6–7, a published version of MS Oxford, Bod., Rawl. Or. 37, the first and only Yiddish *TY* text ever printed, as far as Rosenzweig knows (267).

objected to Krauss's attempts in this regard, and so did Hermann L. Strack (1848–1922), who did not develop the anti-Semitic penchant that Bischoff did. That is, like Bischoff, Strack saw *TY* as “fundamentally satirical, and therefore unhistorical,” which Moss classes a “supersessionist outlook clothed in the language of scientific objectivity” (329). It is difficult here to avoid the impression that Moss is writing about Protestant figures he does not like, who understood *TY* as helpful mostly for understanding the late Middle Ages (i.e. its supposed time of writing),³⁵ and a Jewish figure whom he does like, who “treated *Toledot Yeshu* as a work of ancient history” (330). Then again, most humanities scholarship long ago jettisoned any notion that what it was doing was something ‘objective.’

Moving on to Krauss's inability to accept all of Bischoff's suggestions on larger questions of methodology, Moss shows how Krauss's ‘lingering anxieties’ about these appear in his translation, but they do not always dictate the direction in which he goes. When Krauss translated the anal sex/rape (משכב זכר) in the Judas Iscariot and Jesus flying scene at one level of remove—he “soiled him with seminal ejaculation”—Bischoff proffered a laconic gloss: “No; sodomy.” Moss sees in both impulses to translate this scene in different ways a motivated agenda, either a softening apologetic (Bischoff) or a damning insistence upon literalism (Krauss). Overall, Moss finds in Krauss's treatment and translation of *TY* an awareness of the risks of doing such a thing but also “a project of ‘survival and triumph,’ where anti-Christian jokes ... could simultaneously be revealed and concealed, and where the fundamentally anti-Christian agenda of *Toledot Yeshu* could be subversively turned around and rooted in Christian sources” (335). This leads to Moss's final section, where he describes the paradigm shift Krauss introduced into the study of *TY*: previously its origins had been located in the Middle Ages; subsequently the traditions it contains were seen to date to late antiquity. In conclusion, Moss assesses Krauss's claim not to be writing apologetic in light of the foregoing material, concluding that we “miss the point” if we label Krauss an apologist, because “the apologist does not write with ‘double-consciousness’ as Krauss did” (339–40). I find this definitional claim suspect (surely apologists do write and have written with such a dual perspective), but I am also not sure exactly what we might mean by “apologist” or “apologetic” nor exactly what is at stake in viewing Krauss's work—or that of other Jews or minorities-in-context—in such terms. Would it be a ‘bad’ thing? I would be far more interested in the taxonomic work that such a noun or adjective did. But I do agree with Moss that a helpful way to frame Krauss's contribution to *TY* scholarship is to emphasize his simultaneous awareness of his environment/interlocutors and his own particular perspective and methodology, informed as it was (and always is) on a particular *Sitz im Leben*.

³⁵ Moss describes the *Institutum Judaicum* in Berlin under Strack's leadership as “a missionary greenhouse for the conversion of Jews” and notes that “he considered his scholarship and contemporary defence of Judaism part and parcel of his theological enterprise of winning Jews over to the Christian side” (329). I cannot tell whether we are supposed to imagine a preferable alternative wherein Strack's motivations were non-partisan, just out of the goodness of his heart, as it were. If Strack had believed different things, and consequently followed different incentives, what kind of effect does that have on our evaluation of his actions? I leave this as an open question, and do not find its answer to be self-evident.

The volume ends with a few short but helpful indices. Overall, the contents of this volume are of a very high quality. One cannot locate one chapter in this volume that does not move scholarship forward, deal responsibly with its source material, and provide new and fresh insights on *TY*. Alongside other recent work on *TY*, much of it mentioned in the introduction and footnotes to this review, this volume becomes a starting place and *sine qua non* of a contemporary scholarly approach to *TY* in any of its many, often strikingly distinctive, and always interesting, variants.