

***An Unknown German Translation of Toledot Yeshu  
by Franz Ferdinand Engelsberger,  
a Seventeenth-Century Christian Convert from Judaism***

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**The History and Reception of *Toledot Yeshu***

*Toledot Yeshu* is the name usually given to a corpus of Jewish stories retelling the life of Jesus from a polemical point of view. They are in many ways parodies of the New Testament narrative. These texts have been known since the early Middle Ages and were popular among Jews throughout the medieval and early modern periods. They often include a description of Jesus's birth, his youth, the miracles he performed, his capture at the hands of the rabbis and his death. Some versions also recount the events occurring after his death and leading to the separation of Judaism and Christianity.<sup>1</sup> At some point, probably in the late Middle Ages, it became customary among central European Jewish communities to read the book on Christmas Eve, as Jews refrained from studying the Torah that night, a custom that persisted up to the nineteenth century, if not later.<sup>2</sup>

Judging by the number of extant manuscripts, *Toledot Yeshu* is one of the most popular Hebrew texts that has survived from the medieval period, and arguably the most popular Hebrew polemical text of all times.<sup>3</sup> In addition, *Toledot Yeshu*

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<sup>1</sup> On *Toledot Yeshu* see: SAMUEL KRAUSS, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: S. Calvary & Co., 1902); WILLIAM HORBURY, 'A Critical Examination of the Toledoth Jeshu' (PhD diss., Clare College, Cambridge, 1970); RICCARDO DI SEGNI, *Il vangelo del Ghetto. Le "storie di Gesù": leggende e documenti della tradizione medievale ebraica* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1985); PETER SCHÄFER, MICHAEL MEERSON, and YAACOV DEUTSCH, eds, *Toledot Yeshu ("The Life Story of Jesus") Revisited: A Princeton Conference* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); MICHAEL MEERSON and PETER SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus*, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014); DANIEL BARBU and YAACOV DEUTSCH, eds, *Toledot Yeshu in Context: The Jewish Life of Jesus' in Ancient, Medieval and Modern History* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> MARC SHAPIRO, 'Torah Study on Christmas Eve,' *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (1999): 319–53; REBECCA SCHARBACH, 'The Ghost in the Privy: On the Origins of Nittel Nacht and Modes of Cultural Exchange,' *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (2013): 340–73; DANIEL BARBU, 'Feeling Jewish. Emotions, Identity, and the Jews' Inverted Christmas,' in *Feeling Exclusion: Emotional Strategies and Burdens of Religious Discrimination and Displacement in Early Modern Europe*, eds GIOVANNI TARANTINO and CHARLES ZIKA (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 185–206.

<sup>3</sup> In their 2014 edition Meerson and Schäfer mention 149 manuscripts (*Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus*, vol. 2, 1), but the number of extant manuscripts is in fact higher. This survey does not mention all of the manuscripts that are recorded in KTIV, the National Library of Israel's database of Hebrew manuscripts, such as Ms. Amsterdam, Rosenthaliana 212, a Hebrew manuscript of *Toledot Yeshu* from the eighteenth century, or Ms. Jerusalem, Krupp 4256 from 1874. Moreover, other manuscripts have been sold over the years in auctions, for example, a nineteenth-century manuscript sold by Kedem in

manuscripts circulated in almost every place where Jews were found, from Eastern and Western Europe to Yemen, Persia, and North Africa. Moreover, records of inquisitional trials reveal that many New Christians (i.e., converted Jews) in places like the Canary Islands and even Peru were familiar with the *Toledot Yeshu* traditions.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, there are still many unknown versions of the story. In this article I will focus on one such version, a text published in 1640 by a Christian convert from Judaism named Franz Ferdinand Engelsberger, which has hitherto never attracted scholarly attention. I hope to offer some considerations on the uniqueness of this text and its importance for the study of *Toledot Yeshu*.

In his research on the various existing versions of the narrative, Riccardo Di Segni divided all of the *Toledot Yeshu* texts into three major groups, named after the person ruling over the land of Israel in the story: Pilate, Queen Helena or Herod.<sup>5</sup> In many ways the general outline of the story in each of these three groups is similar,<sup>6</sup> yet, when looking more closely at certain details, we can discern significant differences. Thus, for example, in all three text types, Jesus acquires magical forces, but the explanation of exactly how he did so diverge. According to the ‘Pilate’ group, he learned magic in Egypt using ancient books. In the ‘Helena’ versions, we are told that he stole the Holy Name of God from the Jerusalem temple, while in the ‘Herod’ texts, he simply learned the name while at the Beit Midrash (the Jewish school).

This is but one example of the significant divergences existing between the three groups of manuscripts. If we consider the major building blocks of the story, however, all of the versions are very similar and differ only at the level of details.<sup>7</sup> Thus, with respect to the example just mentioned, regarding the way Jesus acquired his magical powers, we may note that despite the differences, all three versions relate how Jesus used his illegitimately acquired powers to perform miracles. Furthermore, differences in details do not only allow us to distinguish between distinct groups of manuscripts. We may also note many divergences within texts belonging to the same group. In many cases, these differences reveal the local character of *Toledot Yeshu* and its nature as a fluid text that could be changed for various reasons and depending on the context.

Most of the research on *Toledot Yeshu* to date has focused on broader textual families and few studies have dealt with specific texts and their local contexts. The

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auction 37 (2014), lot 273, or a manuscript from 1889 offered for sale by Winner’s in auction 87 (2015), lot 390. In addition, a number of manuscripts are also kept in private collections.

<sup>4</sup> For the Canary Islands see: LUCIEN WOLF, ed., *Jews in the Canary Islands* (London: Jewish Historical Society, 1926), 33. For Peru see: IGNACIO JAVIER CHUECAS SALDÍAS, ‘Felippa Cardosa y el Sefer Toledot Yeshu: agencia femenina, prácticas judaizantes y polémica anticristiana en un proceso ante la Inquisición de Lima (1588–1603),’ *Memorias: Revista Digital de Historia y Arqueología desde el Caribe colombiano* 18, n. 47 (2022): 8–42.

<sup>5</sup> See DI SEGNI, *Il vangelo del Ghetto*, 29–41.

<sup>6</sup> Günter Schlichting was the first to divide the text into its components, or narrative blocks; see GÜNTER SCHLICHTING, *Ein jüdisches Leben Jesu: Die verschollene Toledot-Jeschu-Fassung Tam u-mu’-ad* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1982), 230–66.

<sup>7</sup> See YAACOV DEUTSCH, ‘*Toledot Yeshu* in Christian Eyes: Reception and Response to *Toledot Yeshu* in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period’ (MA diss., Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1997), 7–17 [Hebrew].

articles gathered in this thematic section of *Cromobs* try in particular to offer a more local approach. In what follows, I will focus on one specific text, dating from the seventeenth century and probably circulating in central Europe. As mentioned, this previously unknown text was published in 1640 by Franz Ferdinand Engelsberger, a former Jew who had converted to Christianity in 1636. Like other converts, he used his familiarity with Judaism to reveal the ‘secrets’ of the Jews, especially Jewish texts and ceremonies that he considered to be anti-Christian.<sup>8</sup> As I hope to show, this text has a number of unique features that do not appear in other versions of the narrative. It also seems to include certain narrative elements that had hitherto been known only from the Huldricus version of the story, which is from a later date however, namely 1705. These elements show that the boundaries between the three main families of texts identified by Di Segni are not as strict as previously thought, and that there could indeed be much fluidity between the different versions.

Before considering this specific text, however, and in order to understand its importance, I will start with some remarks about the textual traditions of *Toledot Yeshu* and the role played by Christians in the transmission of the narrative.

### **The Textual Transmission of *Toledot Yeshu***

The earliest manuscripts of *Toledot Yeshu* were uncovered in the Cairo Genizah and are dated to the eleventh or twelfth century. These manuscripts are either in Judeo-Arabic or Aramaic and belong to the ‘Pilate’ group. Later manuscripts from the Cairo Genizah dating from the twelfth to fourteenth century also attest to the ‘Helena’ version.<sup>9</sup> All the texts from the Cairo Genizah are fragmentary and we thus lack a full picture of the various versions circulating in this early context.<sup>10</sup> Aside from the fragments found in the Cairo Genizah, we have one early Hebrew fragment, from the fifteenth century, preserved in the Maria Saal library.<sup>11</sup> Our earliest complete Hebrew manuscript, however, comes from St. Petersburg and is dated to 1536.<sup>12</sup> There are several other Hebrew manuscripts from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but most of the

<sup>8</sup> In general on Christian converts from Judaism revealing the ‘secrets’ of the Jews, see ELISHEVA CARLEBACH, *Divided Souls: Converts from Judaism in Germany, 1500-1750* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); MARIA DIEMLING and YAACOV DEUTSCH, “‘Christliche Ethnographien’ von Juden und Judentum: Die Konstruktion des Jüdischen in Frühneuzeitlichen Texten,” in *Die Konstruktion des Jüdischen in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, ed. MICHAEL KONKEL (Paderborn: Schöningh Verlag, 2003), 15–27; YAACOV DEUTSCH, ‘Jewish Anti-Christian Invectives and Christian Awareness: An Unstudied Form of Interaction in the Early Modern Period,’ *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 55 (2010): 41–61; YAACOV DEUTSCH, *Judaism in Christian Eyes: Ethnographic Descriptions of Jews and Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> See MIRIAM GOLDSTEIN, ‘Jesus in Arabic, Jesus in Judeo-Arabic: The Origins of the Helene Version of the Jewish “Life of Jesus” (*Toledot Yeshu*),’ *Jewish Quarterly Review* 111, no. 1 (2021): 83–104.

<sup>10</sup> Many Genizah fragments, in Aramaic, Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic, have been published over the years. Currently, Gideon Bohak is completing a monograph on all the ‘Pilate’ fragments from the Genizah while Miriam Goldstein’s book on all the ‘Helena’ fragments is in press.

<sup>11</sup> URSULA RAGACS, ‘MS Maria Saal: Ein originelles Fragment aus der *Toledot Yeshu* Tradition,’ in *Let the Wise Listen and Add to Their Learning’ (Prov 1:5): Festschrift for Günter Stemberger on the Occasion of his 75th Birthday*, eds CONSTANZA CORDONI and GERHARD LANGER (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 593–604.

<sup>12</sup> YAACOV DEUTSCH, ‘New Evidence for Early Versions of *Toledot Yeshu*,’ *Tarbiz* 69 (2000): 177–97 [Hebrew].

extant manuscripts are in fact from later, the eighteenth or nineteenth century, and even the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the Hebrew manuscripts, we have many references to *Toledot Yesbu* in medieval and early modern Christian sources. Due to the small number of extant early modern Hebrew sources, they are of great significance for the textual history of *Toledot Yesbu*. Many Christian authors, starting with Agobard of Lyons in the ninth century, mention the Jewish story of Jesus and provide many details from the narrative.<sup>14</sup> In some cases they offer, if not the entire text, at least long parts of it, and hence shed light on its transmission history. Thus, already in the thirteenth century we can find a sizeable part of the story in Latin translation in Raymundus Martini's *Pugio fidei*.<sup>15</sup> Later on, in the fifteenth century, following an investigation and the arrest of Jews in Trévoux, the text was also translated into French;<sup>16</sup> and just a few decades later, probably around 1450, the entire text was again translated into Latin by Thomas Ebendorfer in his *Falsitates Judeorum*.<sup>17</sup> These last two translations actually provide the earliest witnesses of the full text of *Toledot Yesbu*, given the fact that the earliest complete Hebrew version dates from the sixteenth century. The role of Christians as transmitters of information about *Toledot Yesbu* continued in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with numerous references to components of the text in the works of Christian scholars and polemicists. Moreover, Martini's text from the *Pugio fidei* was printed in Alonso de Espina's *Fortalitium fidei* no later than 1471, the first time a partial version of the text was printed.<sup>18</sup> In 1520 it was printed again in Porchetus Salvaticus's *Victoria adversus impios Hebraeos*.<sup>19</sup> Salvaticus's book was the source of Martin Luther, who quoted this text of *Toledot Yesbu* in his treatise *Vom Schem Hamphoras*, published in 1543.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>13</sup> For a list of the manuscripts see MEERSON and SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yesbu*, vol. 1, 2–46.

<sup>14</sup> On the reception history of *Toledot Yesbu* see: DEUTSCH, *Toledot Yesbu in Christian Eyes*; YAACOV DEUTSCH, 'The Second Life of the Life of Jesus,' in *Toledot Yesbu ... Revisited*, eds SCHÄFER, MEERSON, and DEUTSCH, 283–95. KRAUSS, *Das Leben Jesu*, was the first to refer to the Christian sources that mention *Toledot Yesbu*; HORBURY, 'A Critical Examination' added a few more sources to Krauss's list. See also DANIEL BARBU, 'Some Remarks on the Jewish Life of Jesus (*Toledot Yesbu*) in Early Modern Europe,' *Journal for Religion, Film and Media* 5, no. 1 (2019): 29–45.

<sup>15</sup> The text that appears in Martini's book does not include the beginning of the story describing Jesus's birth, but starts with the description of Jesus stealing the holy name of God from the temple. Martini's text ends with the description of Jesus's death and does not include the description of what happened to his body after it was buried, elements that appear in all the versions of the text. For a discussion of Martini's reference to the text see: DEUTSCH, *Toledot Yesbu in Christian Eyes*, 32–34. Martini's text is translated in MEERSON and SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yesbu*, vol. 1, 10–12.

<sup>16</sup> DANIEL BARBU and YANN DAHHAOUI, 'Un manuscrit français des *Toledot Yesbu*. Le ms. lat. 12722 et l'enquête de 1429 sur les juifs de Trévoux,' *Henoch* 40, no. 2 (2018): 223–88.

<sup>17</sup> BIRGITTA CALSEN et al., eds, *Das jüdische Leben Jesu Toldot Jeschu: die älteste lateinische Übersetzung in den Falsitates Judeorum von Thomas Ebendorfer* (Vienna: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> ALONSO DE ESPINA, *Fortalitium fidei* (Strasbourg: s.n., 1471), fol. 65v.

<sup>19</sup> PORCHETUS SALVATICUS, *Victoria Porcheti adversus impios Hebraeos, in qua tum ex Sacris Literis, tum ex dictis Talmud, ac Caballistarum et aliorum omnium auctororum, quos Hebraei recipiunt, monstratur Veritas Catholicae Fidei* (Paris: François Regnault, 1520), 30–32.

<sup>20</sup> STEVEN BURNETT, 'Martin Luther, *Toledot Yesbu* and Judaizing Christians in *Vom Schem Hamphoras* (1543),' in *Toledot Yesbu in Context*, eds BARBU and DEUTSCH, 219–30; see also MATTHIAS MORGENSTERN, 'Martin Luther und das Jüdische Leben Jesu (*Toledot Jesbu*),' *Judaica* 72, no. 2 (2016): 219–

Besides these early printings of part of the text, two versions of the entire text were published by Christian Hebraists. First, in 1681 Johann Christoph Wagenseil included the text in his collection of Jewish polemical writings, *Tela Ignea Satanae*.<sup>21</sup> The version published by Wagenseil, in Hebrew with a parallel Latin translation, belongs to the ‘Helena’ group. Twenty-four years later, in 1705, Johann Jacob Ulrich (using the Latinised name Huldricus) published a very different text under the title *Historia Jeschuae Nazareni*.<sup>22</sup> The text published by Ulrich belongs to the ‘Herod’ group and is in fact the earliest known example from this group. Like Wagenseil, Ulrich published the original Hebrew text with a parallel Latin translation. While Christian authors published the narrative for polemical and anti-Jewish purposes, their services to scholarship and to our knowledge of *Toledot Yeschu* cannot be underestimated, as they preserved variants of the story not known from other sources. Therefore, any study of the textual traditions of *Toledot Yeschu* must take the reception history of the narrative and these Christian chains of transmission into account.

### Franz Ferdinand Engelsberger

Let us now turn to Franz Ferdinand (or Chaim, as was his given name) Engelsberger, an important and yet almost unknown figure in the reception history of *Toledot Yeschu*. Personal information about him is very scarce and based mainly on what that he said about himself in his writings as well as on the few accounts of his life that appeared after his death.<sup>23</sup> According to these sources, he was born in Engelsberg in Bohemia (today Andělská Hora in the Czech Republic), probably at the beginning of the seventeenth century. According to some, he had been a rabbi and circumciser, but there is no extant evidence in contemporary Jewish or non-Jewish sources to support this claim or any other information about his earlier years. In 1636 he was caught stealing money from one of the synagogues in Prague and put on trial. Before he was convicted, he decided to convert to Catholicism and as a result was saved from punishment. After his and his wife and children’s conversion, which took place in Rackonitz (now Rakovník) in Bohemia, he apparently wrote several books, including one addressing *Toledot Yeschu*.

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52; MATTHIAS MORGENSTERN, ed., *Martin Luther und die Kabbala: vom Schem Hamephorasch und vom Geschlecht Christi* (Wiesbaden: Berlin University Press, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> JOHANN CHRISTOPH WAGENSEIL, *Tela Ignea Satanae. Hoc est: Arcani et horribiles Judaeorum adversus Christum Deum, et Christianam religionem libri anekdotoi* (Altdorf: John. Henricus Schönnerstaedt, 1681).

<sup>22</sup> JOHANN JACOB ULRICH, *Sefer Toledot Yeschua ha-Notsri / Historia Jeschuae Nazareni* (Leiden: Johannem du Vivie, Is. Severinum, 1705). See Evi Michels’s remarks on this text in the present thematic section, as well as Ignacio Javier Chuecas Saldias’s essay concerning its possible Ladino *Vorlage*.

<sup>23</sup> FRANZ FERDINAND ENGELSBERGER, *Dieses Büchlein offenbahrt die Geheimniß Gottes den verstockten blinden Juden* (Vienna: bey Maria Rickhesin Wittib, 1640). Reports about him include the following anonymous texts: *Warhaffter Bericht So sich zu Wien in Oesterreich mit dreyen Juden zugetragen...* (s.l., 1642); *Warhaffte und erschrockliche Zeitung, So geschehe[n] diß 1642. jar, den 26. Augusti, in der Kays. Hauptstatt Wien in Österreich, von drey Gottlosen Juden...* (Augsburg: s.n., 1642); *Kurtzer Innhalt der Execution, So inn der Statt Wien den 22. Augusti dses Jahrs durch rechtmessiges Urthail zween verzweyffleten Juden so jünger* (s.l.: s.n., 1642). I am currently preparing a monograph on Engelsberger, in which I intend to discuss these sources extensively. In the meantime, see the discussion in VICTORIA LUISE GUTSCHE, *Zwischen Abgrenzung und Annäherung: Konstruktionen des Jüdischen in der Literatur des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 99–122.

Following the publication of these writings, Engelsberger became known to Emperor Ferdinand III and was received at the imperial court in Vienna. However, he seems to have maintained a fondness for theft even after his conversion, or he may simply have not had any other source of income. Indeed, in 1642 with two other Jews he was again caught stealing a very expensive vessel from the emperor's treasury room. The three thieves stood trial and were convicted and sentenced to death. The execution was set for August 22, 1642. On that day, a Jesuit friar offered him Holy Communion and instructed him to confess his sins. According to a contemporary report of the events, because he was now a Christian, Engelsberger apparently thought that he would not receive the death penalty.<sup>24</sup> To his great disappointment, however, all three culprits were sentenced to death and Engelsberger realised that he was not going to be pardoned. At that point, he took the crucifix that he was holding in his hand, threw it onto the floor, stamped on it and smashed it. When asked what he was doing, he answered that he was ready to go to hell as he had no intention of dying a Christian. He also declared that he had desecrated the host he had just been given, a detail that was soon confirmed. These shocking developments led the authorities to send him back to prison and subsequently to charge and sentence him for blasphemy too.

The two other thieves were hung as planned, on August 22. Four days later, on August 26, Engelsberger endured torture before being put to death in the cruellest manner. His body was then burned, and the ashes thrown into the Danube. According to the same contemporary source, his tongue and one of his hands were also sent to the Jewish community in Vienna.<sup>25</sup> These events are recorded by a number of different authors, among them Johann Christoph Wagenseil, who describes a memorial plaque affixed to the walls of the Vienna city hall commemorating Engelsberger's execution in order to warn anyone who might have considered blaspheming Christianity.<sup>26</sup> It is not clear when the plaque was removed but it was still visible in 1663, when the English traveller Philip Skippon visited the city.<sup>27</sup>

### Engelsberger's Writings

Wagenseil also informs us about Engelsberger's writings. In the *Tela Ignea Satanae*, he reports that, following his conversion, Engelsberger wrote a small book in Hebrew entitled מורה הדרך, or *Catholischer Wegweiser*.<sup>28</sup> Despite my best efforts, I have not been able to find additional references to this work. Wagenseil did not mention the fact that Engelsberger had also published a text on *Toledot Yesbu*. Additional information about Engelsberger's writings can be found in the fourth volume of Giulio Bartolucci's opus *Bibliotheca magna rabbinica*, a work completed after Bartolucci's death by his student

<sup>24</sup> Kurtzer Innhalt der Execution, A1v.

<sup>25</sup> Kurtzer Innhalt der Execution, A2r.

<sup>26</sup> WAGENSEIL, *Tela Ignea Satanae*, 188–92 ('Confutatio carminis R. Lipmanni').

<sup>27</sup> Skippon's text was published in AWNSHAM CHURCHILL, ed., *A Collection of Voyages and Travels, Some Now First Printed from Original Manuscripts, Others Translated out of Foreign Languages, and now First Published in English*, 6 vols., vol. 6 (London: Printed by Assignment from Mess<sup>rs</sup> Churchill, 1732), 361–736 (480). Skippon also provides the text of the inscription.

<sup>28</sup> WAGENSEIL, *Tela Ignea Satanae*, 189 ('Confutatio carminis R. Lipmanni').

Carlo Giuseppe Imbonatus.<sup>29</sup> Whether Bartolucci or Imbonatus, the author of the brief account on Engelsberger's life and work in the *Bibliotheca magna rabbinica* writes that he gathered information about him from a printer, Zacharia Dominico Acsametik, who used to work in Vienna and had known Engelsberger personally. According to Acsametik, Engelsberger had written two works, the first comparing the ceremonies of the Old and New Testaments, and the second, in German, entitled *Toledot Yesbu*. In addition, the *Bibliotheca magna rabbinica* also indicates that Engelsberger's writings had been printed in Vienna in 1640 by Matheus Rictius.<sup>30</sup> There is, however, no additional information on these editions in the *Bibliotheca magna rabbinica* and it is not clear if the author of the notice actually saw these works.

In his *Bibliotheca Hebraea*, printed in four volumes between 1715 and 1733, the great bibliographer Johann Christoph Wolf mentions the information provided in the *Bibliotheca magna rabbinica* but adds that he does not believe Engelsberger's writings were ever printed.<sup>31</sup> Later scholars of *Toledot Yesbu* like Samuel Krauss used the same information, but admitted that they had not seen the work.<sup>32</sup> George Mead for his part simply stated that 'no copy of it is now known to exist.'<sup>33</sup>

Fortunately, they were wrong: I was able to locate two different editions of a book by Engelsberger, made up of two parts, the first being his treatise comparing the ceremonies of the Old and New Testaments and the second a German translation of *Toledot Yesbu*, with further references to other Jewish texts against Christianity.<sup>34</sup> Both editions of the work were indeed printed in Vienna in 1640, however not by Matheus Rictius (as stated in the *Bibliotheca magna rabbinica*) but by his mother, Maria Rictius, who inherited the printing house from her husband Michael Rictius after his death in 1635. It was only after her death, in 1640, when Matheus inherited the printing house, that he started printing under his name.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> GIULIO BARTOLOCCI, *Bibliotheca magna rabbinica, de scriptoribus, & scriptis rabbinicis ordine alphabetico hebraice, & latine digestis*, 4 vols., vol. 4 (Rome: Ex Typographia Sacrae Congreg. De Propag. Fide, 1693), 348.

<sup>30</sup> Matheus Rictius was indeed a printer in Vienna, but according to ANTON MAYER, *Wiens Buchdrucker-Geschichte, 1482-1882*, 2 vols., vol. 1, 1482-1682 (Vienna: Wilhelm Frick, 1883), 265–70, he started to work as a printer only in 1641.

<sup>31</sup> JOHANN CHRISTOPH WOLF, *Bibliotheca Hebraea*, 4 vols., vol. 1 (Hamburg: Christiani Liebezeit, 1715), 982.

<sup>32</sup> KRAUSS, *Das Leben Jesu*, 17.

<sup>33</sup> GEORGE R. S. MEAD, *Did Jesus Live 100 B.C.? An Enquiry into the Talmud Jesus Stories, the Toldoth Jeschu, and Some Curious Statements of Epiphanius—Being a Contribution to the Study of Christian Origins* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1903), 253.

<sup>34</sup> Three copies of the first edition are preserved, respectively, in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich (4 Polem. 1037), in the Ludwig Maximilian University Library, also in Munich (0001/4 H.eccl. 2116) and in the National Library of Scotland (D.C.s.88[10]). I have found only one copy of the second edition in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (Polem. 857), however, it is incomplete and six pages (5–10) from the second part are missing.

<sup>35</sup> According to MAYER, *Wiens Buchdrucker-Geschichte*, vol. 1, 225–32, between 1628 and 1635, the printing house was operated by Matheus's father, Michael, and between 1636 and 1640 by his mother Maria; see also JOSEF BENZING, *Die Buchdrucker des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts im deutschen Sprachgebiet* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1963), 459.

The two editions bear a very similar title, and any difference mainly lies in the pagination and layout. The text seems to be almost identical.<sup>36</sup> It is tempting to suggest that the work encountered such popular demand that it was reprinted, but there is no evidence to support this claim. In contrast, the fact that less than one hundred years after being printed in two different editions, a scholar like Wolf suggested that it had never been printed indicates that it was most likely little known. Another possibility is that the first edition indeed proved popular, and that the work was thus reprinted, but following Engelsberger's return to Judaism, all copies were confiscated and destroyed, hence its quasi-disappearance. But again, there is no evidence to support this assumption.

### Engelsberger's *Toledot Yeshu*

The book has two title pages: the first serves as a title page for the entire volume, with its two parts, and the second serves as a title page for the second part of the volume, namely the translation of *Toledot Yeshu* and discussion of Jewish anti-Christian texts. The first reads as follows:

Dises Buch offenbaret die Geheimnussen Gottes den verstockten blinden Juden welche Christum den Herrn verspottet vn[d] verachtet haben [...] Der Erste Theil erweist vnd widerspricht das Jüdische Gesetz, daß es schon langst auffgehoben ist worden [...]. Der ander Theil erweist wie die Juden lästern den Christlichen Glauben [...]

This book reveals the mysteries of God to the blind Jews who mocked and despised Christ the Lord [...] the first part shows and proves that the Jewish law has been abrogated long ago [...]. The second part shows how the Jews blaspheme the Christian faith.

The title page of the second part is:

In dem Anderen Thail dieses Buchs ist zu erfahren, wie die Juden ein Büchlein haben trucken lassen von der Geburth Christi, und wie sie mit Ihm umgangen seyn, auch von der grossen Lästörung Unserer lieben Frawen [...].

In the second part of this book we learn how the Jews had printed a little book about the birth of Christ, and how they dealt with him, also about the great blasphemy against our dear lady [...].

The text of *Toledot Yeshu* is entirely in German with just a few words in Hebrew which are transliterated and printed in italics rather than Hebrew characters. Most of it is probably a verbatim translation of a Hebrew version of *Toledot Yeshu* but, as I will argue, it is not similar to the other known versions of the text. In some places the text seems

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<sup>36</sup> The title of the first edition is: *Dises Buch offenbaret die Geheimnussen Gottes den verstockten blinden Juden welche Christum den Herrn verspottet vn[d] verachtet haben*. The first part has 27 pages and the second 22. The title of the second edition is: *Dieses Büchlein offenbahrt die Geheimbnuß Gottes den verstockten blinden Juden welche Christu den Herrn verspottet vnd verachtet haben*. The first part has 58 pages and the second 44 (as mentioned before, pages 5–10 in this section are missing).

to have been abridged. Engelsberger himself states at one point that he is not providing the entire text.<sup>37</sup> In his introduction to the text, Engelsberger starts by claiming that the Jews from *Welschlandt* (probably Trentino, in southern Tyrol) have printed a book entitled *Toldus Jeschua*. He adds that the Jews could not print the book ‘here’ (probably referring to Vienna where he was living, or to the Holy Roman Empire), and therefore had to copy it from one another in order to be able to study it.

There is no evidence to support Engelsberger’s claim that *Toledot Yeschu* was printed in Trentino or in Italy (‘Ein Buch haben die Juden trucken lassen in Welschlandt’), as no printed edition of the entire work has reached us prior to 1640. On the other hand, a significant number of *Toledot Yeschu* manuscripts were copied in Italy in the seventeenth century, and external evidence also suggests that the text was well known among Italian Jews in the same period.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, it is not impossible to believe that Engelsberger was in fact referring to a manuscript and not a printed edition, perhaps even a manuscript that looked like a printed edition. Alternatively, we may speculate that a version of *Toledot Yeschu* had indeed been printed in Italy before 1640 and that we simply do not have any extant copies of it.

Whether Engelsberger used a printed edition of *Toledot Yeschu* or a manuscript, it is nevertheless clear that he was using a text, and not oral traditions, as the main source of his translation, and thus had a copy of the written work in front of him. For instance, in several places the story includes quotations of biblical verses, and Engelsberger’s text provides the exact source for each of these quotations. Of course, one may argue that he took the time to check each reference and include citations from a German translation of the Bible. The biblical citations included in the text, however, diverge from contemporary German translations of the Bible, and it seems more likely that Engelsberger translated these verses as they appeared in his Hebrew source. Moreover, in one instance, the text translated by Engelsberger refers to the claim that the Jews had sent an impostor named Shimon (i.e., Peter) among Jesus’s disciples in order to give them their own laws.<sup>39</sup> According to Engelsberger’s text, Shimon also changed the alphabet and created an alphabet especially for Christians (I will return to this point later). When recounting this episode, the text provides three different examples of letter combinations that have no meaning in or by themselves; therefore, it is likely that these letter combinations were simply copied by Engelsberger, further confirming that he was indeed using a written and not an oral source.<sup>40</sup>

As a matter of fact, Engelsberger’s text is the first known complete version of *Toledot Yeschu* to have been printed.<sup>41</sup> Prior to that, only the partial text included in

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<sup>37</sup> ENGELSBERGER, *Dises Buch offenbaret*, part 2, 8–9.

<sup>38</sup> See Daniel Barbu’s contribution to this thematic section.

<sup>39</sup> On this episode, see SIMON LEGASSE, ‘La légende juive des apôtres et les rapports judéo-chrétiens dans le haut moyen âge,’ *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique* 75 (1974): 99–132; JOHN G. GAGER, ‘Simon Peter, Founder of Christianity or Saviour of Israel?’ in *Toledot Yeschu ... Revisited*, eds SCHÄFER, MEERSON, and DEUTSCH, 221–45.

<sup>40</sup> See p. 156–58 for a discussion of this episode.

<sup>41</sup> Unless of course his reference to a prior printed text is not a fantasy.

Martini's *Pugio fidei* had been printed. Thus, although it is a German translation, its importance for the history of *Toledot Yesbu* cannot be neglected. Moreover, as noted above, most of our manuscripts are relatively late (from the eighteenth century onwards). Engelsberger's text thus records an early version of the narrative as it would have circulated in the first half of the seventeenth century. The fact that Engelsberger provides a different version of the narrative from the texts we know again suggests that any serious study of the textual history of *Toledot Yesbu* needs to take into consideration not only the Hebrew manuscripts, but also manuscripts in vernacular languages such as Yiddish, Ladino or Judeo-Arabic, as well as all indirect testimonies we can find in both Christian and Jewish sources.<sup>42</sup>

For the convert Engelsberger, *Toledot Yesbu* was first and foremost a sign of the Jews' hatred of Christianity and of the blasphemous nature of Judaism. As we know, Engelsberger was not the first convert to use the *Toledot Yesbu* text for this purpose.<sup>43</sup> It is tempting to suggest, however, that Engelsberger, who had thus accused the Jews of blasphemy, himself sought to die as a blasphemer in order to atone for the anti-Jewish polemics he had engaged in while a Christian.

### **The Jewish Story of Jesus According to Engelsberger**

As mentioned above, the version of the story that Engelsberger included in his book is similar to other known versions of *Toledot Yesbu*, but with important differences. Some details are unique to his text, which seems to combine elements from different versions of the story rather than follow one specific text type.

In order to understand the distinctiveness of Engelsberger's version I will start with a brief summary of the text he provides, which will serve as a basis for the analysis that follows.<sup>44</sup> According to Engelsberger, Yohanán (John) was betrothed to Mary, but he had left her alone to go and study. Next to their house, in Nazareth, lived a carpenter named Joseph Bandera, who opened a hole in the roof of Mary's house one night, entered the house and slept with her. Thus, she became pregnant. This occurred while she was menstruating. As a result of her pregnancy, her betrothed rejected her and she fled to her relatives in Bethlehem. The latter, however, refused to help her. Abandoned by all, she gave birth in a stable. Later, the baby was circumcised and named Jesus. When people saw that he had survived, there was a great dispute between the Pharisees and other rabbis as to what to do with him. Many wanted Jesus and his parents, Mary and Joseph, to be executed. Jesus was not killed and was eventually sent to the temple, in Jerusalem, to study. There, he became an excellent student and people started wondering and inquiring about his parentage. Jesus replied that he was an orphan and

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<sup>42</sup> On *Toledot Yesbu* in Islamic sources, see PHILIP ALEXANDER, 'The *Toledot Yesbu* in the Context of Jewish-Muslim Debate,' in *Toledot Yesbu ... Revisited*, eds SCHÄFER, MEERSON, and DEUTSCH, 137–58; ALEXANDRA CUFFEL, 'The Judeo-Arabic *Toledot Yesbu* and Its Implications for Jewish Relations with Christians and Muslims in the Fatimid-Mamluk Periods,' in *Toledot Yesbu in Context*, eds BARBU and DEUTSCH, 131–67.

<sup>43</sup> See DEUTSCH, *Toledot Yesbu in Christian Eyes*.

<sup>44</sup> ENGELSBERGER, *Dises Buch offenbaret*, part 2, 3–9.

that he did not know his parents. We are also told that he was so learned that he knew the Holy Name of God, and that he then entered the temple, using this name. Later on, Jesus went to a place where the three most important rabbis were accustomed to meeting, with his head uncovered. When the rabbis saw him, they proclaimed that his uncovered head was a sign of the fact that he was a bastard, the son of a whore and a menstruate woman.

Subsequently, the rabbis decided to investigate, and they discovered the circumstances of Jesus's birth. This is when Jesus decided to use the divine Name and perform miracles, claiming to be the son of God who had been sent to redeem the world from hell. He abrogated the commandments of circumcision and the Sabbath and permitted the consumption of forbidden food. As a result, many people began following him and his fame spread. The Jews decided to send a rabbi named Judas to fight against him. As such, Judas also learned the Holy Name of God. He then started performing miracles too, contending that Jesus was making false claims and requesting that the latter stand trial. When Jesus heard this, he proclaimed the Name and flew off in order to see all the trees. He then made the trees vow that they would not allow him to be hung on them at any future time. Judas flew after Jesus and urinated on him. As a result, Jesus lost his powers and fell to the ground. The Jews caught him and sentenced him to death. He was tried together with two other people, a father and son. The Jews who captured him took his clothes and divided them among themselves. When Jesus arrived at the execution place, he was thirsty, and the Jews gave him vinegar to drink. Jesus was then stoned, and his body was set to be hanged. When the time came, however, the trees refused to let his body be hung from them. A rabbi named Jose said that his father had planted a cabbage in his garden that was as tall as a tree, so Jesus was hung on this cabbage stalk. When the evening came, his body was taken down and buried according to the biblical mandates.

The narrative continues: some Jews were afraid that Jesus's disciples would take him out of his grave and claimed that he was resurrected. Therefore, a rabbi named Gamliel, who lived far from the city, extracted Jesus's body from its grave and buried it in his own garden before moving a stream of water to run over the new resting place. After several days, Jesus's followers discovered that the original grave was empty. They told the Jews that if they could not find the body, they would pay for it with their lives. The Jews were highly fearful, they fasted and prayed but Gamliel was unaware of this unfortunate turn of events. Eventually, when Gamliel saw people searching for the body, he told them what he had done, and the Jews were very happy. They opened Jesus's new grave and tried to pull him out by his hair. Because the body was soaked with the water from the stream, however, the hair stuck to their hands. This, explains Engelsberger, is why friars shave their heads.

At the same time, some people refused to believe that this was the body of Jesus, and they started causing an uproar. The Jews consulted each other and decided that a rabbi named Shimon should preach to Jesus's believers as if he was one of them. Shimon joined Jesus's followers and told them that he had seen Jesus in a dream and

that Jesus had told him that he was now sitting in heaven on the right side of his father. Jesus, he claimed, also ordered him to tell his people to abrogate the Scriptures and the holidays. In addition, Shimon taught Jesus's followers a new alphabet as well as some abbreviations that stood for phrases reflecting the beliefs of the new religion he had invented. In this way, Shimon was able to trick Jesus's followers, who believed that he was indeed a messenger sent by Jesus. But Shimon was afraid that following his death, the Christians would turn him into a saint and put a cross on his grave. Therefore, he chose to live in a special tower where he died a Jew.

### Some Unique Features of Engelsberger's Text

The outline of the story as told by Engelsberger will be familiar to readers of *Toledot Yeshu*. Most of the text resembles other versions of the 'Helena' group. Parts of it, however, are reminiscent of the 'Herod' version, thus suggesting that the accepted divisions between the two textual families are not cut and dried. Moreover, as I will show, some details that appear in this text are unique and are not attested in any other version, suggesting the circulation of further variants of the narrative of which we have no knowledge.

The story of Jesus's conception and birth varies dramatically depending on the various versions of *Toledot Yeshu*. According to some versions, Mary was tricked or raped by an acquaintance of her betrothed (or husband), but in other versions she willingly cooperated with her lover.<sup>45</sup> The result, however, is the same in all versions of the narrative: she became pregnant and gave birth to Jesus who was thus the fruit of an adulterous union, in other words, a bastard. In Engelsberger's text, Yohanan is described as a student from Nazareth who was betrothed to Mary. When he left home, a neighbour, Joseph Bandera, slept with Mary, who was menstruating, and impregnated her. What is unique to this version is the mention of the fact that Yohanan had left his betrothed in order to study outside the land of Israel, as well as the detailed description of Joseph entering Mary's house via a hole in the roof. It is not clear from Engelsberger's text whether Mary knew that Joseph was not her betrothed, and thus willingly committed adultery, or not. Joseph is also explicitly said to have violated the Jewish law (*halakhab*) by opening a hole in the roof on the Sabbath and by having sex with a woman who was married to another person, what is more while she was menstruant. Another detail that stands out in this version is the mention of the fact that Joseph was a carpenter, something that could reflect more detailed knowledge of the Christian version of the story. In the rest of the *Toledot Yeshu* corpus, this detail only appears in two other versions of the narrative, the late Oriental and Byzantine types (following Meerson and Schäfer's classification).<sup>46</sup> The story of Jesus's

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<sup>45</sup> On the portrayal of Mary in the different versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, see SARIT KATTAN GRIBETZ, 'The Mothers in the Manuscripts: Gender, Motherhood, and Power in the *Toledot Yeshu* Narratives,' in *Toledot Yeshu in Context*, eds BARBU and DEUTSCH, 99–130.

<sup>46</sup> It thus appears in Ms. St. Petersburg EVR. I 274 (dated 1536), the only manuscript attesting to the Byzantine version (see MEERSON and SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yeshu*, vol. 2, 74, for the Hebrew, and vol. 1, 160, for the English) as well as in Mss. Jerusalem 864, Benayahu 25.4 and Sasson 793. The last two

conception in Engelsberger's text illustrates how the latter provides a unique version of the narrative.

Moving to the episode of Jesus's birth, the story provided by Engelsberger is in fact quite different from what we find in other versions of *Toledot Yesbu*. Indeed, several details have no parallels in other variants of the story. According to Engelsberger's text, after Mary became pregnant, she was ashamed and did not want to stay in Nazareth. For this reason, she left for Bethlehem, but her friends and family did not want to help her because they were embarrassed and so she had to give birth in a stable and use a manger as a crib for the newborn baby. Here too, the story might also reflect Engelsberger's knowledge of the narrative, and his free use of the Christian tradition in retelling the Jewish story. Engelsberger's text also narrates how, after Jesus was born, his mother did not have any napkins for the baby, since everyone, including her friends, had refused to give her swaddling clothes as they wanted the baby to die. We do not know how Mary resolved this situation. We are simply told that when the baby was eight days old, he was circumcised according to the Jewish law, and named Jeschua.

There are various accounts of Jesus's birth in the different versions of *Toledot Yesbu*. In most versions of the story, however, Mary remained where she was. Also, according to some versions, Jesus was named after Mary's father while in other ones he was named after her brother. The version provided by Engelsberger again includes several details that are not part of the standard narrative. Engelsberger's text is closer to the story as it appears in the gospels. The circumstance of the pregnant Mary leaving Nazareth appears in only one other version of *Toledot Yesbu*, as found in Ms. St. Petersburg RNL EVR 1.274. In this manuscript, however, the decision to leave was her fiancé's, and the couple did not go to Bethlehem.<sup>47</sup>

Another detail unique to Engelsberger's version of the story is Jesus's birth in a stable. To the best of my knowledge, the stable is never mentioned in any other version of *Toledot Yesbu*. Yet here too, a parallel can be drawn with Ms. St. Petersburg RNL EVR 1.274, where we read that Mary gave birth in a manger.<sup>48</sup> Engelsberger, however, indicates that the manger was used as a makeshift crib for the baby, as we know from the Gospel of Luke 2:7. It is noteworthy that the story provided by Engelsberger, like the text of the St. Petersburg manuscript, are both closer to the nativity scene as it appears in the gospels than any other version of *Toledot Yesbu*. In all likelihood, this reflects how knowledge of the Christian story allowed scribes to insert new details within the narrative. Another unique feature of Engelsberger's version of the story is the fact that Mary did not have any swaddling clothes, a detail probably introduced to

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belong to the late Oriental type, of which we only have manuscripts from the nineteenth century (see MEERSON and SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yesbu*, vol. 2, 127, for the Hebrew, and vol. 1, 221, for the English).

<sup>47</sup> See MEERSON and SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yesbu*, vol. 2, 72, for the Hebrew, and vol. 1, 156, for the English.

<sup>48</sup> See MEERSON and SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yesbu*, vol. 2, 73, for the Hebrew, and vol. 1, 156, for the English.

underline the general animosity towards Jesus and his parents. This is not found in any other version of *Toledot Yesbu*.

The section describing how Jesus became an excellent student, before eventually angering the rabbis, who subsequently discussed his lineage, prompting him to learn the Name of God in the temple and start performing miracles, is relatively similar to what we find in other versions of the narrative. Nonetheless, Engelsberger's text provides some noteworthy elements in its description of the miracles performed by Jesus and their consequences. According to our text, Jesus performed various miracles: reviving the dead, curing the sick, returning sight to the blind, allowing the deaf to hear and the lame to walk. But he also abrogated the commandments of circumcision and the Sabbath and permitted the consumption of forbidden food.

Only two other manuscripts mention Jesus returning sight to the blind.<sup>49</sup> No other known version of *Toledot Yesbu* mentions the claim that Jesus made the deaf hear again. It may be noted that, in the New Testament, all four gospels mention how Jesus was able to heal the blind (Mk 8:23–24 and 10:46–52; Mt 9:27–31; Lk 18:35–43; Jn 9:1–12), but only the Gospel of Mark describes his curing a deaf and dumb man (Mk 7:32–35). Again, we can see how Engelsberger's text is closer to the New Testament gospels and differs from other versions of *Toledot Yesbu*.

The description of the events leading to Jesus's arrest and trial in Engelsberger's text is also similar to the account we find in other versions of *Toledot Yesbu*. The only difference is that, according to Engelsberger's text, the purpose of Jesus's aerial escape was not to flee from the rabbis but to see all the trees and make them vow not to carry his body upon his execution. While the vow appears, in various forms, in many other versions of the story, it is usually not connected to Jesus's flight. Engelsberger's account of Jesus's trial also contrasts with other known versions of the narrative. According to Engelsberger's text, Jesus was tried along with two other men, a father and son sentenced to death for having slept with a betrothed woman on Yom Kippur. Again, this does not appear in any other version of *Toledot Yesbu*, but likely refers to the gospel narrative in which Jesus was put to death with two other felons (Mt 27:38; Mk 15:27–28; Lk 23:33). It is probably noteworthy that the crime of Jesus's two fellow lawbreakers in Engelsberger's version, sleeping with a betrothed woman on Yom Kippur, is similar to the crime explicitly attributed to Jesus's 'true' father in other versions of *Toledot Yesbu*. Thus, according to Ms. New York, JTS 1491 (probably eighteenth century), Mary's husband was delayed at the synagogue on the eve of Yom Kippur, and this was when Joseph ben Pandera entered his house and slept with his wife.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, in the Huldricus text, published 1705, we read that Mary's husband

<sup>49</sup> Ms. New York, JTS 2221 (MEERSON and SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yesbu*, vol. 2, 101, for the Hebrew, and vol. 1, 191, for the English) and Ms. Amsterdam Ros. 414 (MEERSON and SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yesbu*, vol. 2, 110, for the Hebrew, and vol. 1, 204, for the English).

<sup>50</sup> See MEERSON and SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yesbu*, vol. 2, 82. The same motif also appears in Ms. Jerusalem Heb. 8 3044. Unfortunately, the latter manuscript was not included by Meerson and Schäfer in their edition of *Toledot Yesbu*.

was keeping her locked inside the house because he did not want evildoers to sleep with her, but on the night of Yom Kippur, Joseph ben Pandera, who was walking by, saw that she was alone, and suggested that she run away with him. He then slept with her on Yom Kippur and she became pregnant.<sup>51</sup>

Another detail unique to Engelsberger's version of *Toledot Yesbu* but which again parallels the New Testament is the story of Jesus's clothes. According to Engelsberger's text, the Jews divided Jesus's clothes among themselves, but could not decide who would get his coat—therefore, they had to roll the dice. When Jesus saw this, he claimed that they were fulfilling the words from Psalm 22:18: 'They part my garments among them and cast lots upon my vesture.' In all four canonical gospels, Jesus's clothes were divided by casting lots. Again, Engelsberger's reliance on the New Testament is evident.

We may also note his account that Jesus was given vinegar to drink, reflecting the words of Psalm 69:21: 'And in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.' This motif, which is again taken from the gospels (Mk 15:23 and 36; Mt 27:34; Lk 23:36), can however also be found in other versions of *Toledot Yesbu*. We can thus see that although Engelsberger's text often adds details that seem to be taken from the New Testament, similar inclusions sometimes appear in other known versions of the narrative.

Engelsberger's is however the only version which names the rabbi who took Jesus's body out of its grave and buried it elsewhere as Gamliel (and not Yehudah the gardener). Moreover, Engelsberger provides an original explanation for Jesus's hair coming off his body. In most of the other versions of *Toledot Yesbu* which preserve the same motif, the reason for this is that after Jesus's body was taken out of the grave, it was tied to a horse's tail by its hair and then dragged through the streets of Jerusalem. In Engelsberger's text, the motif is connected to pulling Jesus's body from the grave by its hair.

### **The Parting of the Ways and the Christians' Alphabet**

As in many versions of *Toledot Yesbu*, the story does not end with Jesus's death. The final part of the narrative accounts for the separation between Jews and Christians into two independent religions. Engelsberger's text preserves the story as it is also known from other versions, telling how a rabbi named Shimon led the followers of Jesus astray. An interesting element in Engelsberger's text is provided by the letter combinations that Shimon is said to have taught the early followers of Jesus: the letters 'a, b, c, d,' apparently implying that Jesus was born from two people (I shall return to this below); then the letters 'l, m, n,' signifying that God did not have a mother; and finally, the letters 'a, b, q, r, s,' meaning 'heretic' or 'unbeliever' (*apikores*). Shimon also called the Christian Scriptures an *evangelion*, which, as the text suggests, in fact means

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<sup>51</sup> Ms. New York, JTS 1491, fol. 128r (MEERSON and SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yesbu*, vol. 2, 82, for the Hebrew); ULRICH, *Historia Jeschuae Nazareni*, 4.



that Shimon wrote books of lies for Christians to use, calling them *Avon Killayon* ('sin and annihilation'). However, they thought he meant *Aven Gillayon*, which they interpreted as 'the Father, the Son and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit.'<sup>55</sup> Thus, while both texts make use of the same pun, they differ in their interpretation.

The comparison of Engelsberger's text with the text published by Ulrich in 1705 thus sheds light on some of the details we find in it. It also suggests that some idiosyncratic motifs, so far in *Toledot Yesbu* scholarship only associated with the Huldricus text (e.g., the story of Shimon's new alphabet) already existed in the first half of the seventeenth century. Moreover, and more importantly, the comparison of both texts suggests that the Huldricus text may also have drawn from other, now lost versions of the narrative, sharing elements from both the 'Helena' and 'Herod' traditions (here represented by Engelsberger and Ulrich respectively). The two groups are hence likely to have more in common than previously assumed.<sup>56</sup>

### Engelsberger in Context

As noted above, Engelsberger was born in Bohemia and later moved to Vienna. The Jewish story of Jesus he translated in his works, however, has many unique features and certainly differs from the other versions of the narrative originating from the German-speaking world. Neither the text provided in Latin translation by the Austrian theologian Thomas Ebendorfer in the fifteenth century, nor the Hebrew text published in Altdorf by Johann Christoph Wagenseil in 1681, correspond to Engelsberger's text. As mentioned, Engelsberger claimed that the story he translated had been printed in Italy. If we compare his text with the extant Italian manuscripts of *Toledot Yesbu* (from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) we can observe that these are also quite different. For instance, in many Italian texts Jesus learnt God's Holy Name after the rabbis declared him a bastard; furthermore, he had to stand trial twice. In Engelsberger's version of the story, Jesus learnt the Holy Name before the rabbis discovered that he was a bastard, and he was put on trial only once. The many details from Engelsberger's text discussed above—Jesus's birth in a stable, his execution along with a father and son, Shimon's invention of a new alphabet—do not appear in the Italian versions that have come down to us. Hence, even if his text was indeed of Italian origin, as Engelsberger claimed, it would represent a different branch of the tradition.

The many unique features of Engelsberger's text confirm that, although there are more than 150 known manuscripts of *Toledot Yesbu*, they still do not represent the full wealth of this complex tradition. They also highlight the fact that *Toledot Yesbu* was essentially a flexible and fluid tradition, and that the narrative could be modified and updated depending on who told, wrote, copied, or translated the story, and where. The

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<sup>55</sup> ULRICH, *Historia Jeschuae Nazareni*, 119; see also MEERSON and SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yesbu*, vol. 2, 250, for the Hebrew, and vol. 1, 319, for the English.

<sup>56</sup> On the Huldricus text as synthesis of various *Toledot Yesbu* traditions, perhaps composed in the fifteenth or sixteenth century, see ADINA YOFFIE, 'Observations on the Huldreich Manuscripts of the Toledot Yesbu,' in *Toledot Yesbu ... Revisited*, eds SCHÄFER, MEERSON, and DEUTSCH, 61–77.

text provided by Engelsberger, as we have seen, also suggests a greater familiarity with the New Testament. Considering this, one may suggest that Engelsberger's text could be an early version of *Toledot Yesbu*, which was later edited because the copyists responsible for the transmission of the narrative knew neither the New Testament, nor the reason for many details of the story; thus, these details were omitted in other versions of *Toledot Yesbu* and only resurface here. It is, however, also possible that these details were added by Engelsberger himself, based on the knowledge he had acquired of the Christian narrative after his conversion to Christianity. As things stand, it is of course difficult to determine with certitude which of these two possibilities is more convincing. Hopefully, further research on the history and reception of *Toledot Yesbu*, including a discussion of both the existing manuscripts and the external evidence witnessing the wealth of this tradition, will continue to change our understanding of the Jewish story of Jesus and its multiple contexts.