

Toledot Yeshu:
The Life Story of Jesus

Two Volumes and Database

Edited and Translated by
MICHAEL MEERSON and
PETER SCHÄFER

Volume I
Introduction and Translation

*Texts and Studies in
Ancient Judaism*
159

Mohr Siebeck

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Michael Meerson and Peter Schäfer

with the collaboration of
Yaacov Deutsch, David Grossberg,
Avigail Manekin, and Adina Yoffie

Volume I
Introduction and Translation

Mohr Siebeck

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For access to the database of all *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts visit
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Preface

The Princeton *Toledot Yeshu* project was started in 2008 with the purpose of collecting and transcribing all the available *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts in order to construct an electronic database serving as a research tool that would facilitate an analysis of all the *Toledot Yeshu* macro- and microforms. More than one hundred manuscripts were eventually uploaded to the online database and presented in a manner opening new perspectives for students of *Toledot Yeshu*. With this database it has finally become possible to compare the structure of the *Toledot* versions, the manuscripts of these versions, and individual paragraphs of different manuscripts, whose development inside the narrative can now be easily tracked. The first product of working with the *Princeton Toledot Yeshu Database* is presented in this book containing an elaborate introduction with an analysis of all significant microforms, an edition of the respective versions, and their translation with brief footnote comments.

We divided the *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts in three major groups (I–III) of versions or recensions (Early Oriental, Yemenite, etc.), each following an identical narrative structure, organized according to a presumed chronological sequence. Manuscripts of one version with substantial and continuous variant readings are arranged in different subgroups of that particular version.

The edition combines a traditional critical edition with a synoptic presentation. The latter is chosen for the subgroups, whose variant readings are too significant to be buried in an *apparatus criticus*. In this case each column in the synoptic table of two or at most three manuscripts renders the manuscript chosen as representative of that particular subgroup. Additionally, some of these representative manuscripts are supplemented with a critical apparatus showing the variant readings in other manuscripts of the same subgroup. Line breaks are usually indicated in the right column manuscript only, which is also the one that is translated. Both the edited manuscripts and their translations are divided into titled microforms corresponding to the identical division of the manuscripts in the database.

Together with the printed book we provide access to a full database containing 107 transcribed manuscripts with all the available research options: searching for a word or phrase, browsing any number of manuscripts in separate screens, browsing and comparing all manuscript variants of any single microform.

The most elaborate and time consuming part of the project was the transcribing and editing of the *Toledot* manuscripts. This goal could only be accomplished

with the contribution of the following students from Princeton University and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, who dedicated much time and effort to our project: Itamar Bar-Zakay, Reva Haselkorn, Benji Gabler, Miriam Sapphire-Bernstein, Arielle Sandor, Devorah Unterman, Avital Hazony, Inbar Gabay, Ori Daniel, and Abraham Berkovitz. Major contributions were made by Adina Yoffie, who worked with us on the editing of the transcribed manuscripts and prepared a draft translation of the Byzantine, Ashkenazi B, and Italian A versions; by Avigail Manekin, who carefully transcribed numerous manuscripts and drafted a translation of the Late Yemenite version; by David Grossberg, who worked with us on the critical edition and translation of the Wagenseil version; and by our colleague in Jerusalem, Yaacov Deutsch, who generously checked and edited Mss. Tel Aviv Gross 67.2, Jerusalem Heikhal Shelomo 1.27 and 22, and Benayahu 25.4 at the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts. Jon Henry kindly and meticulously proofread the English book manuscript. We are deeply grateful to all these contributors.

We express our gratitude to Princeton University's Firestone Library for purchasing eleven *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts, and to the following libraries which kindly provided us with images of the manuscripts and gave us permission to publish their transcription:

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Last but not least, our special thanks go to the Mellon Foundation, whose generous grant made this project possible.

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Introduction

Toledot Yeshu as a Tool of Polemic

The history of *Toledot Yeshu* research presents a paradox: Public excitement and interest for this composition had to subside in order for scholarly inquiry to commence. This happened only in the second half of the 19th century; before that, *Toledot Yeshu* was used as a tool of polemic or studied with the sole purpose of sharpening or, more often, destroying this tool. Not only Johannes Jacob Huldreich and Johannes Christoph Wagenseil but even some of the 19th-century scholars – such as Sabine Baring-Gould,¹ George W. Foote and Joseph M. Wheeler² – were not completely free of an obsessive desire to disprove the *Toledot*'s claim of being an authentic report of Jesus' life, or to demonstrate just the opposite.

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

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

¹ Baring-Gould, *Lost and Hostile Gospels*.

² Foote and Wheeler, *Jewish Life of Christ*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁹ See the "Execution" section.

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

¹¹ See the "Burial" section.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁸ Justin, *Dialogus cum Tryphone*, 69.

¹⁹ Justin, *Dialogus cum Tryphone*, 108.

²⁰ Jerome, *Epistola* 3:9: *audiui quondam de Hebraeis ... Romae ... de Christi genealogiis facere quaestionem.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²² John Chrysostom, *Ad Ps.*, 8:3.

²³ Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 4:18.7.

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁶ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1:32: ὡς ἐξωσθεῖσα ἀπὸ τοῦ μνηστευσαμένου αὐτὴν τέκτονος, ἐλεγγθεῖσα ἐπὶ μοιχείᾳ καὶ κύουσα ἀπὸ τινος στρατιώτου Πανθήρα τοῦνομα.

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

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

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

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

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

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

³⁰ See the "Execution" and "Burial" sections.

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

³² *Gospel of Nicodemus*, 13.

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

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

³⁵ Commodian, *Carmen apologeticum*, 440: *magis infamant: In puteum misimus illum*.

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

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

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

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

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

They blaspheme that we believe in him who the Law of God says is suspended from a tree and is accursed by God. Therefore, on the same day that he was suspended, they ordered him buried, lest he remain on the gallows through the night and their land become polluted by him . . . , and their teacher Joshua cried out and ordered that he be quickly taken down from the tree, and he was cast into a grave in a garden full of cabbages, lest their land be contaminated . . . And they say, according to their ancestors, that when he was taken down from the tree and buried in a grave, in order that all should know him to be dead and not revived, he was removed again from the grave and dragged back through the entire city and thus cast aside.⁴¹

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴⁹ Translated from *Pugio fidei*, 2:8.6. The Latin text of this excerpt can also be found in Felieu, "Un antievangelii Jueu de l'edad mitjana: el Séfer Toledot Iesu," 247 ff.

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Conventions

Copying the *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts, we tried to present the text as closely as possible to its appearance in the manuscript. For this reason, our edition does not propose any emendations of the numerous scribal errors in the original text; instead, our emendations appear in the critical apparatus.

In both the database and the printed edition, we divided each manuscript into titled sections in order to display the structure of the *Toledot*'s different versions and to facilitate their electronic comparison (see the “compare” option in the database navigation table). To provide the reader with the best means of judgment with regard to the *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts, we developed a series of editorial conventions that we used throughout the database and edition.

1. A question mark after a letter (?κ) signifies that the character is blurred or only partially preserved, so that our reading is not certain.

2. A question mark between two asterisks (*?*) signifies that the character cannot be figured out with any degree of certainty.

3. Three question marks between asterisks (*???) indicate that the entire word cannot be read.

4. A text between two “dollar” signs (\$...\$) contains a scribal correction or a supplement written above the line or in the margins. The scribe usually provided indications as to where his correction or supplement must be inserted.

5. Braces {...} indicate that the text included between them was crossed out or erased by the scribe.

6. Brackets [...] indicate lacunae. A number of dots (if less than six), or a numeral (if more than five) inside the brackets refer to the suggested number of missing letters. If no suggestion can be made, the brackets are left open in the database and closed but empty in the printed edition.

7. In the critical apparatus, variant readings replace the word in question or the phrase starting with precisely the same word/s in the main text. Otherwise, we point to the passage that may be replaced with the variant reading: For shorter passages we indicate the word after which the variant reading starts, and for longer passages we give their beginning and ending words, often with the line number.

Manuscripts of *Toledot Yeshu*

The present edition includes 107 manuscripts in Hebrew and Aramaic. In addition to these, there are a number of manuscripts not included in our publication but nevertheless listed below: 18 manuscripts in Yiddish, 21 manuscripts in Judeo-Arabic, two in Ladino, and one in Judeo-Persian.

Although the Aramaic fragments are clearly the oldest manuscripts of *Toledot Yeshu*, the earliest dated copy, Ms. St. Petersburg RNL EVR 1.274, comes from a much later period: Its colophon indicates the year 1536. The next oldest among the dated manuscripts are Mss. New York JTS 6312, copied in 1653, and Rostock Orient. 38, copied in 1695. Most of the remaining manuscripts were copied in the 18th–19th centuries.

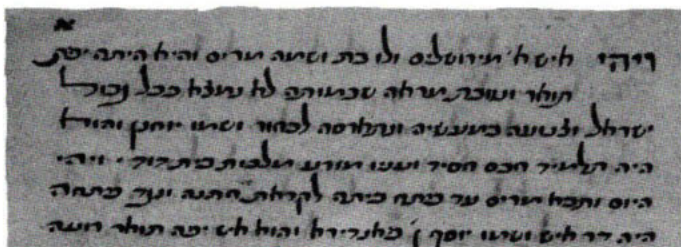
Provenances of the manuscripts include the Netherlands (e. g. Ms. Amsterdam Hs. Ros. 442), France, Germany, and Northern Italy (the Italian A–B, Wagenseil, and Huldreich versions), Eastern Europe (e. g., Ms. New York JTS 2208a), Russia (e. g., Ms. New York PL 123), North Africa (e. g., Ms. Cincinnati Klau Library 2073), Yemen (e. g., Ms. Jerusalem JNUL Heb. 8° 5187), Bokhara (e. g., Ms. New York JTS 1491), and Baghdad (e. g., Ms. Jerusalem JNUL Heb. 8° 864). One single manuscript comes from the US: Ms. Jerusalem, Yad Ben Zvi Institute 961 (copied in 1895).

Toledot Yeshu rarely circulated as a separate pamphlet. In Europe, it was frequently appended to other polemical works: The Wagenseil version was bound with *Hizug Emunah* by Isaac Troki and *Sefer Nitsahon* by Yom-Tov Lipman Muhlhausen; the Italian recensions were bound with *Asham Talui* by Judah Briel, poems by Joshua Segre, and *Kelimmat ha-Goyim* by Profiat Duran. In the Orient, the choice of works accompanying *Toledot Yeshu* was random, not necessarily including polemical and anti-Christian treatises.

Hebrew and Aramaic Manuscripts

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Hs. Ros. 414

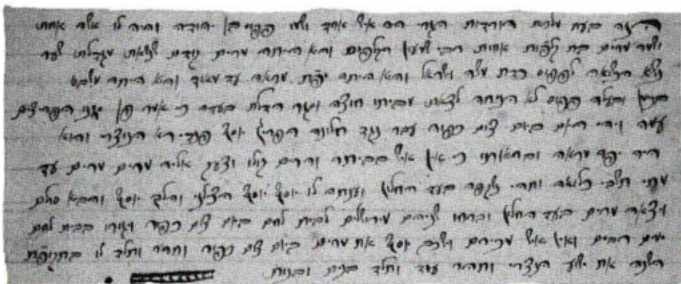


cm 15,8 × 9,6; fol. 1r–12r; 23 lines to a page; *Ma'aseh Gezerot Yeshu*; Italian (Rabbinic) semi-cursive; foliated by the same hand that wrote the text of *Gezerot Yeshu*; colophon on fol. 11r; 18th–19th centuries; descr.: Fuks and Fuks-Mansfeld, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana*, 135 no. 290 [Ashkenazi B].

The manuscript contains another polemical tractate starting on fol. 12r: מעשה בקיסר א' שרצה לנסות ולידע איזה אמונה טובה.

Almost identical to JTS 2221, except for the sections concerning the miracles of Yeshu and the envoys from the queen. The hand is similar to that of JTS 2221.

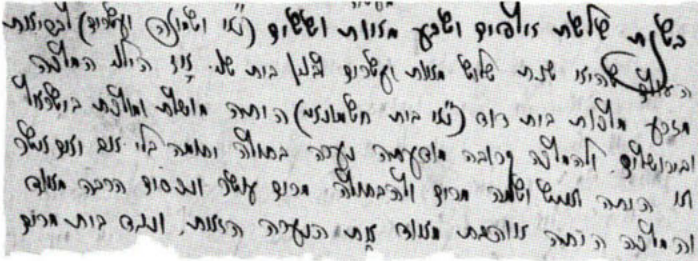
Hs. Ros. 442



cm 20,1 × 15,8; fol. 1r–4v; 34 lines to a page; *Toledot Yeshu ha-Notsri*; Ashkenazic cursive; irregular lines; divided into paragraphs; not foliated; colophon on fol. 4v; copied by Zis bar

Nahum; Rotterdam 1839; descr.: Fuks and Fuks-Mansfeld, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana*, 137, no. 293 [Huldreich].

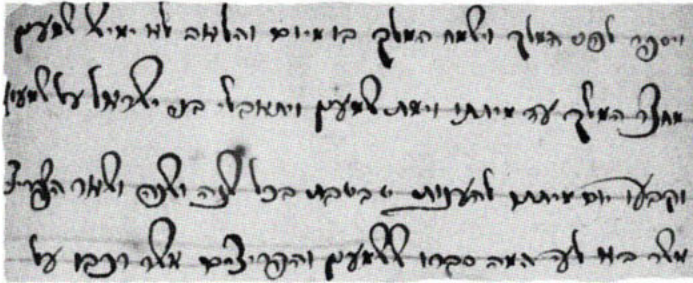
Hs. Ros. 467 (1)



cm 16,1 × 9,8; pp. 3–47; 23–25 lines to a page; *Ma'aseh Yeshu ha-Notsri*; Ashkenazic cursive; paginated by the hand of the original copyist; contains catchwords on every folio; divided into paragraphs; previous owners: Lipe Fraenkel, Przemysl; 19th century; descr.: Fuks and Fuks-Mansfeld, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana*, 138, no. 296 [Slavic B2].

The manuscript also contains a polemical poem against Christianity (47–49), a Yiddish translation of *Toledot Yeshu ha-Notsri* (51–120), a letter from Zvi Hirsch Lewin (121–125), Rabbi of Berlin (18th c.), the epitaph of Yonathan Eibeschuetz, Hamburg (126), a liturgical poem by Judah Halevi (127–132), and the copy of a letter from Solomon ha-Cohen, Rabbi of Broden (140–144).

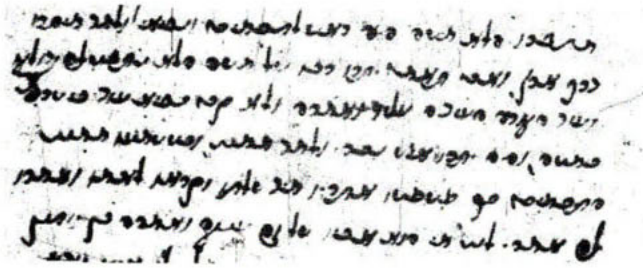
Hs. Ros. 504



cm 16,6 × 10,4; fol. 15r–v; 16–20 lines to a page; *Ma'aseh Yeshu ha-Nozri*; colophon on fol. 15v; Ashkenazic cursive; fragment; copied by Leizer ben Jonah Hene; 1782; descr.: Fuks and Fuks-Mansfeld, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana*, 134, no. 286 [Huldreich].

Budapest
Magyar Tudományos Akadémia

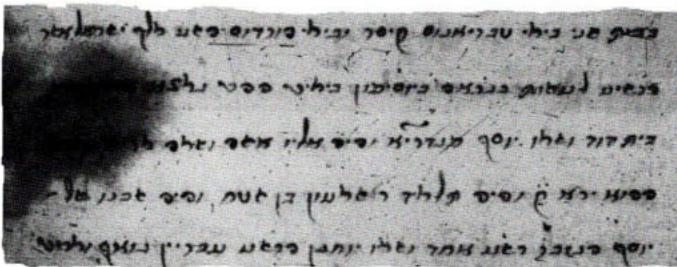
Kaufmann 229 (4)



fol. 1r–4v, pp. 109–17; 24 lines to a page; Italian cursive; fragment, starting with the story of Yeshu's heresies and ending with his burial, which is the end of this version; paper; 17th century (after 1617); descr.: Weisz, *Katalog*, 106 [Ashkenazi A].

The manuscript also contains a fragment of the disputation between Nachmanides and Fra Pablo Christiano, a fragment of an anti-Christian tractate, תשובות המינים יפה ומיופה, Duran's *Chilmat ha-gurim*, and an account of the disputation between the Jesuit Don Alfonso Caraciolo and an anonymous Jewish scholar in Ferrara (1617).

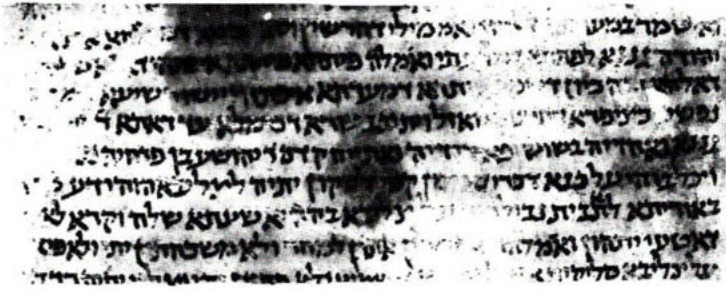
Kaufmann A559



pp. 1–48; Italian semi-cursive; 18th century; descr.: Weisz, *Katalog*, 176 [Italian A].

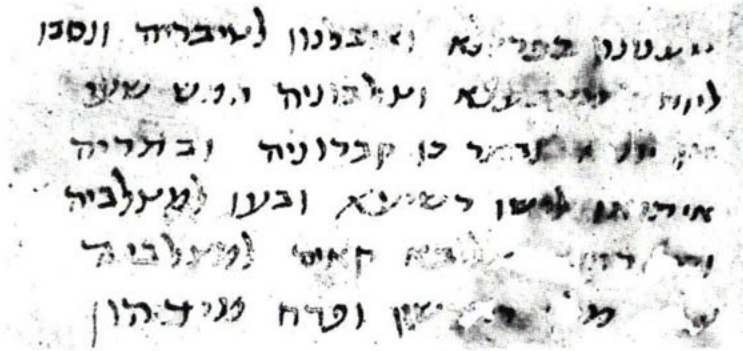
Cambridge (GB)
University Library

T.-S. Misc. 35.87 (= T.-S. Loan 87)



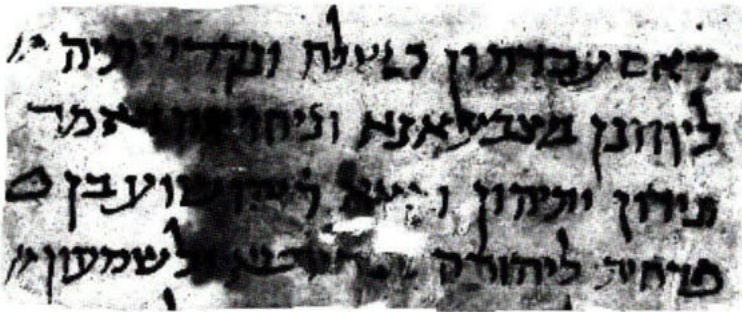
cm 20 × 15,2; fol. 1r-2v; Aramaic; fragment, starting with the trial of Yeshu's disciples and ending with his burial, the list of witnesses and the chronology of the described events; 9th-10th centuries; published by Ginzberg, *Genizah Studies*; Horbury, "The Trial of Jesus"; re-published by Deutsch, "New Evidence of Early Versions of *Toldot Yeshu*" [Early Oriental A].

T.-S. Misc. 35.88 (= T.-S. Loan 88)



cm 11 × 9, fol. 1r-v; Aramaic fragment, starting with the arrest of Yeshu and the execution of Yohanan and ending with Yeshu's burial; published by Ginzberg, *Genizah Studies* [Early Oriental A].

T.-S. Misc. 298.56

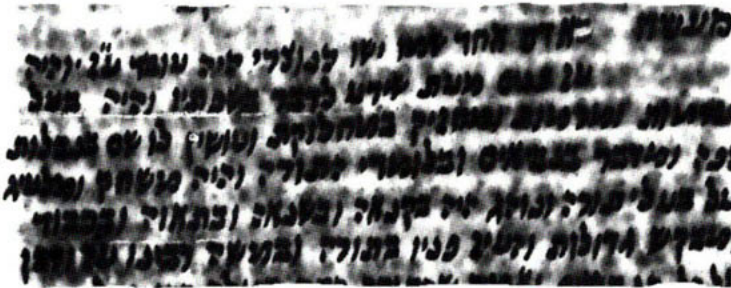


fol. 1r-v; Aramaic fragment, starting with the request of the sages concerning Yeshu and ending with the interrogation of Yohanan; published by Falk, "A New Fragment of Toledot Yeshu"; idem, "A New Fragment of the Jewish Life of Jesus"; Boyarin, "A Revised Version and Translation of the 'Toledot Yeshu' Fragment" [Early Oriental B].

T.-S. NS 329.820

fol. 1r-v; Aramaic fragment containing the interrogation of Yeshu; published by Deutsch, "New Evidence of Early Versions of *Toldot Yeshu*" [Early Oriental B].

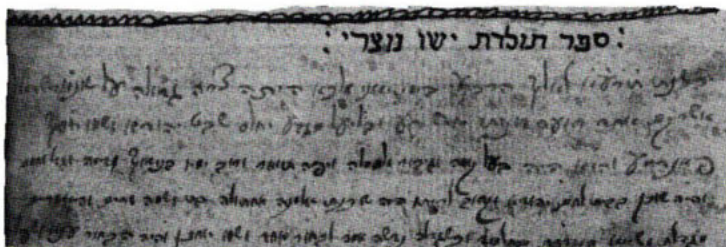
Or. 455 (557)



fol. 183r-88r; *Ma'aseh be-Yeshu ha-Notsri shem resha'im yirqav*; Yemenite script; 1866 [Late Yemenite A].

Cambridge (MA, USA)
Harvard University, Houghton Library

Heb. 57

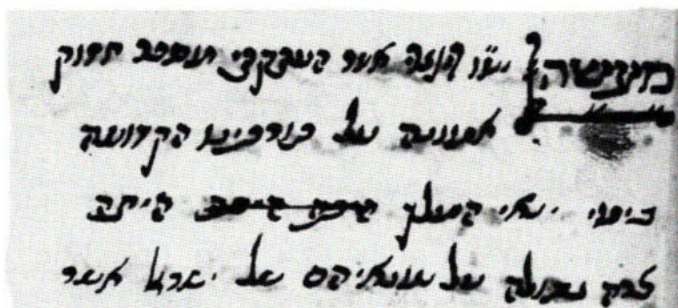


cm 24 × 20,5; fol. 22r–27r; *Sefer Toledot Yeshu Notsri*; Ashkenazic cursive; catchwords at the bottom of each page; 19th century; descr.: Glatzer, *Hebrew Manuscripts*, 16–17; previous owner: Felix Friedmann [Wagenseil].

The manuscript also contains *חזוק אמונה* by Isaac Troki and *ספר נצחון ישו*.

Cincinnati (OH)
Hebrew Union College, Klau Library

2073 (1)



fol. 65r–66r; *Ma'aseh Yeshu ha-Notsri*; Sefardic cursive; fragment, containing only the birth narrative; copied from *ספר חזוק אמונה*; followed by a liturgical poem composed by Samuel Amadi; North Africa; 19th century [Wagenseil].

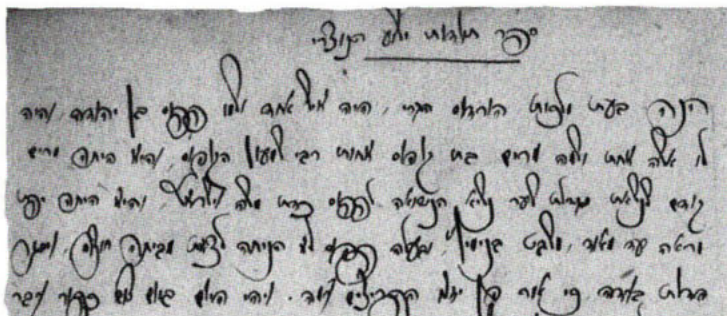
Bound in one volume together with poems written by Abraham ibn Ezra and other, mostly Moroccan, writers: Samuel Ammar (Rabbi of Meknes, d. 1890), Maimon Ammar, and others.

2073 (2)

fol. 117v–18v (same as above).

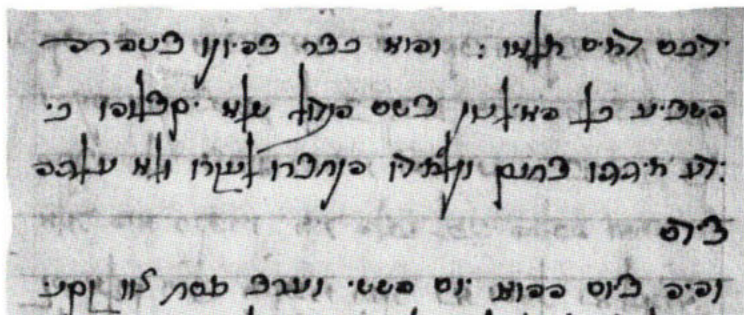
Frankfurt am Main
Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek

Heb. 249



cm 20 × 17; fol. 2v–5v; *Sefer Toledot Yeshu ha-Notsri*; Ashkenazic cursive; colophon on fol. 2r; copied by Grunberg; Leipzig, 1812; descr.: Kirchheim, *Catalog*, no. 27; Striedl, *Hebräische Handschriften*, 165, no. 257 [Huldreich; copied from the printed edition].

Heb. 54



cm 15 × 20,5; fol. 170r–173r; Italian semi-cursive; fragment, starting with the arrest of Yeshu; 18th–19th centuries; previous owners: Bibliotheca Merzbacheriana Monacensis; descr.: Striedl, *Hebräische Handschriften*, 86, no. 58 [Italian B].

A poem by Joshua Segre is appended to the text. A short scribal note (concerning the identity of Peter) is incorporated into the text. Personal names are written in larger characters with a curved line above them.

Jerusalem
Benayahu collection

25.4

fol. 35r–39r; 22 lines to a page; Oriental semi-cursive; *Ma'aseh shel Yeshu*; copied by Aaron, son of Shelomo ha-Sofer; 19th century [Late Oriental].

Jerusalem
Hekhal Shelomo Museum

27.1

שְׁשֶׁה אֲלֵפִים שֶׁ מֵאוֹת וְשָׁנַיִם וְאַחַת לְצִרְיָאֵת
עוֹלָם. מֵאֵה וְחֲמִשִּׁים וְשָׁנָה שְׁנֵה קוֹדֵם חוֹרְבָן

fol. 1r–19r; 14 lines to a page; *Sipur me-ha-ish peloni almoni ha-yadua'*; copied by Ephraim ben Moses Tsvi; 1893 [Slavic A4].

22

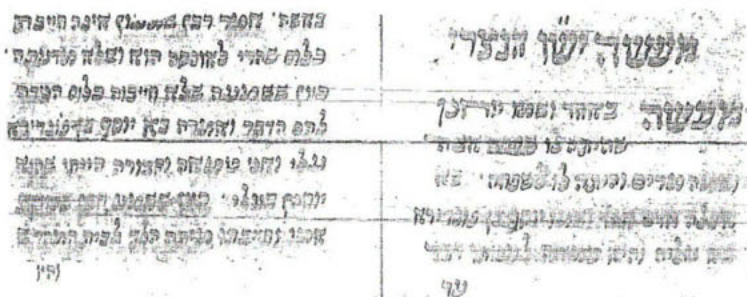
יֵשׁוּ הַנְּצֵרִי הִיָּה עוֹלָמִים וְעַתָּה
שִׁירָע לְדַבֵּר בְּשִׁנְתָּן
וְהִיָּה בְּעַל חֲרוֹת וְעֲרוֹת וְחֲרוֹת

fol. 48v–65v; 17 lines to a page; Yemenite semi-cursive; *Ma'aseh Yeshu ben Pandera*; 1849.

The manuscript (174 fol.) also contains two versions of the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* and numerous stories: מעשה רב כהנא וסליק בנו, מעשה רבי יהושע בן לוי, מעשה רב כהנא וסליק בנו, etc. [Late Yemenite A].

Jerusalem
Jewish National and University Library¹

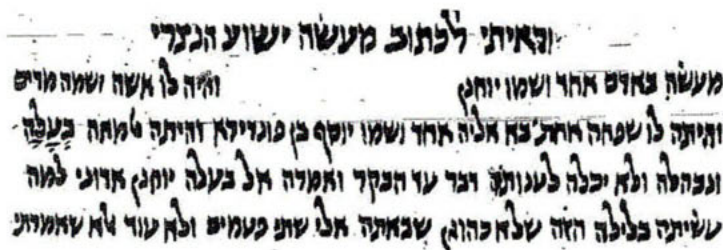
Heb. 4° 15



cm 32 × 10; fol. 140v–45r; *Ma'aseh Yeshu ha-Notsri*, square Yemenite script; written in two pre-ruled and regular columns; 19th century; descr.: Joel, *Catalogue*, no. 326 [Late Yemenite B].

The codex (176 fol.) also contains a collection of liturgical poems in Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic, stories (*ma'asiyot*) in Hebrew. One of the treatises in the codex is dated to 1304. Slightly different from the other Late Yemenite B manuscripts; contains the section describing the efforts of Eliyahu to separate the Christians from the Jews.

Heb. 4° 472



cm 25 × 18; fol. 82r–84r; *Ma'aseh Yeshu ha-Notsri*, Yemenite script, 1875; [Late Yemenite B].

The manuscript also contains an exegetical treatise on Deut. 2:16.

¹ Recently renamed National Library of Israel. In the present publication, we continue referring to its manuscripts as JNUL, rather than NLI.