

When Jesus Spoke Yiddish. Some Remarks on a Yiddish Manuscript of the “Toledot Yeshu” (MS. Günzburg 1730)*

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Zusammenfassung

Im folgenden Artikel sollen exemplarische Passagen eines der jiddischen “Toldot-Yeshu”-Manuskripte diskutiert werden, das bis zum gegenwärtigen Zeitpunkt noch nicht wissenschaftlich untersucht wurde: Die Handschrift mit der Signatur MS. Günzburg 1730 wird in der Russischen Staatsbibliothek in Moskau aufbewahrt und in das 17. Jahrhundert datiert. Das Manuskript ist in die sogenannte ‘Herodes Tradition’ der “Toledot Yeshu” einzuordnen. Demzufolge ist die vorliegende jiddische Handschrift MS. Günzburg 1730 mit der hebräisch gedruckten Version verwandt, die zusammen mit einer lateinischen Übersetzung von dem Schweizer Pastoren und Theologen Johann Jacob Uldrich (Huldricus, 1683–1731) im Jahre 1705 in Leiden unter dem Titel “Historia Jeschuae Nazareni” publiziert wurde. Obschon die genaue Datierung der jiddischen Handschrift nicht möglich ist, erlauben exemplarische Vergleiche zwischen den hebräischen und den jiddischen Texten dennoch spezifische Merkmale der jiddischen Version herauszustellen, und Fragen über die Übermittlung und der Rezeption dieses anspruchsvollen und interessanten Textes aufzuwerfen.

Abstract

In this paper, I wish to bring some evidences from a Yiddish manuscript of the “Toledot Yeshu” which has not yet been the object of research: MS. Günzburg, 1730 kept in the Russian State Library in Moscow and dated 17th century. The manuscript is part of the so-called ‘Herode-tradition’ of the “Toledot Yeshu”. This means that the Yiddish manuscript is connected to the version printed in Hebrew and accompanied by a Latin translation by the Swiss pastor and theologian Johann Jacob Uldrich (Huldricus, 1683–1731) in Leiden in 1705, bearing the title “Historia Jeschuae Nazareni”.

*I am thankful to Joyce Klein for revising the English of this paper and for her suggestions.

Given the uncertainty about the exact dating of the Yiddish manuscript, a comparison between the Hebrew and the Yiddish can still allow some remarks concerning the characteristics of the Yiddish version and posit some questions about the transmission and the reception of this challenging and intriguing text.

1. Introduction

Carlos Fuentes, in his essay on “Don Chichotte” (1976), offers a roster of the heterodox traditions on the life of Jesus, mentioning the Docetists, Saturnin and Syrian Gnosticism, Basilides and the Egyptian Gnostics, the Ebionites, the monarchist Patripassianism, the Sabellians, the Sirians, the dualist Apollinaries, the Nestorians and adding that:

“Esta estirpe de herejes, al re-escribir el dogma, multiplicaron el punto de vista sobre asuntos propios de la vida y personalidad de Cristo, la Trinidad y el Pankreator. La sumaria revisión de sus teorías bastaría, acaso, para asegurarles un lugar como los verdaderos novelistas de la Edad Media. Su reciclaje de las verdades inconmovibles de la Iglesia non es demasiado diferente de lo que muchos escritores contemporáneos [...] hacen.”¹

If Fuentes’ reading is right, and the many heretics could be considered the real novelists of the Middle Ages, to his list we could add Sholem Ash’s “Der man fun natseres” 1943 (“The Nazarene” 1939, translated by Maurice Samuel),² José Saramago’s “O Evangelho Segundo Jesus Cristo” (1991), Colm Toibin’s recent novel, “The Testament of Mary” (2012), and Emmanuel Carrère’s “Le

¹ “This lineage of heretics, through their re-writing of the dogma, multiplied the point of view on particular themes of Christ’s life and personality, the trinity and the Pankreator. A brief revision of their theories would be enough to allow them to be considered the true novelists of the Middle Ages. Their recycling of the inalterable truths of the Church is not much different from what many contemporary writers do.” Fuentes, Carlos: *Cervantes o la crítica de la lectura*. Madrid 1994 (First edition 1976), p. 23 (the translation is mine).

² A German translation appeared soon after the first English publication: see *Der Nazarener*. Translated by Paul Baudisch. Stockholm 1940. The book was strongly criticized, partly because it was published in English before it came out in Yiddish, but prominent critics of Yiddish literature, such as Shmuel Niger and Meylekh Ravitsh, defended the work as an “emphatically Jewish novel”. Just as the image of Jesus on the cross was going to be used by Jewish artists as a universal symbol of human suffering, so Jesus becomes, in Ash’s vision, the icon of every persecuted Jew. See Norich, Anita: *Sholem Asch and the Christian Question*. In: *Id., Discovering Exile. Yiddish and Jewish American Culture during the Holocaust*. Stanford, California 2007, pp. 74–95, in particular p. 74 and p. 77.

Royaume”.³ I think this point is important because the Jews are among other groups that, since the beginning of the first millennium, have felt the fascination and the challenge to rewrite the ‘biography’ of Jesus, and perhaps the “Toledot Yeshu” should also be seen in this wider perspective.

The figure of Jesus is, therefore, at the center of many religious diatribes but he is also the main character of a “novel” which is always on the shelves and has a potentially strong power of attraction. The story of his life could perhaps be defined as a sort of novel which is at the very center of Western literature.⁴

Jesus is constantly present in the Jewish tradition, even in his ‘absence’; his name is often substituted with tabooistic forms such as *Oto ha-Ish*, and followed, in folklore, by apotropaic gestures. For European Jewry, which developed in the midst of Christianity, Jesus and everything connected with the Christian religion were clearly marked as the other side. Persecutions in the name of the cross strengthened the connection between idolatry on one side, and violence, false accusations, murder and forced conversion on the other. It is therefore no wonder that it is only in the 19th century that Jews, probably because of the background created by the *Aufklärung*, started to research Jesus and his ties with Judaism. As it has been put, “the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* started writing the history of Christianity as a branch of Jewish history.”⁵ However, at the same time, from the Talmud through the polemic texts of the Middle Ages to the “Toledot Yeshu”, the figure of Jesus carries a complex and violent burden, due to the necessity of constant confrontation with a majority Christian culture which was perceived as aggressively anti-Jewish. Yet, as Avigdor Shinan wrote recently, “it is difficult even to try to imagine the historical process of the world, especially of the Western world, including that of the Jews, without the constant presence of the figure of Jesus and without Christianity”.⁶

³ A novel that could be ascribed to the same tradition has been just published: “Ha-besura ‘al pi Yehuda” by Amos Oz (2014). See the review by Yassif, Eli: Ha-rasha’ she-ba-sippur ’eno Yeshu ’ela’ ha-hevra ha-yehudit. In: Haaretz. Tarbut ve-Sifrut (12.12.2014), p. 4.

⁴ On the Bible and European literature, the bibliography is infinite. It should suffice to mention the classical study Frye, Northrop: *The Great Code. The Bible and Literature*. London 1982.

⁵ Heschel, Susannah: *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*. Chicago – London 1998, p. 2.

⁶ Shinan, Avigdor: ‘Oto ha’ish. Yehudim mesapperim ‘al Yeshu (Jesus through Jewish Eyes). Israel 2008 (in Hebrew), p. 9. The translation is mine.

2. The “Toledot Yeshu” as a Jewish Life of Jesus

The “Toledot Yeshu” is, as pointed out in the title chosen in the seminal study by Rav Riccardo Di Segni from 1985, a Jewish version of the Gospels, the Gospel of the Ghetto, *Il Vangelo del ghetto*,⁷ and is an expression of confrontation and hostility toward Christianity. The date of its composition is almost impossible to determine, first of all because of the many existing variants, and secondly since it fuses together older and newer elements. What is important to underline is that the textual tradition is also the history of an extraordinary reception, since it survives in many Jewish Languages, such as Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Persian.⁸

At the same time, it is the story of a life, the life of Jesus, a biography of Jesus, perhaps on the model of Philo’s *On the Life of Moses*, Plutarcus’ *Parallel Lives*, the *Roman of Alexander*, or *De viris illustribus*, or Valerius Maximus’ *Facta et dicta memorabilia*, that is: it is the foundation text of a new religion, but at the same time it is also structured as what in Greek classical literature was the genre of a ‘life’, *bios*. In a certain sense, if we go back in time, it can be said that the Gospels themselves are part of a literary genre which was known in Greek literature, in which the life and deeds of great men were told in order to awaken admiration and the desire to emulate them.⁹

3. “Toledot Yeshu” in Yiddish. A short survey of research

The “Toledot Yeshu” in Yiddish still awaits a comprehensive bibliography and research. In 1895, Erich Bischoff published a version of the manuscript in Amsterdam, which is in the possession of the Bodleian Library in Oxford, MS.Rawl. Or. 37, in his “Ein jüdisches Leben Jesu. Zum erste Mal nach dem

⁷ Di Segni, Riccardo: *Il Vangelo del Ghetto*. Roma 1985.

⁸ The bibliography is very rich. See among others Travers Herford, R.: *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash*, London 1903; Deutsch, Yaacov: ‘Eduyiot ‘al nusah qadum shel “Toledot Yeshu” (New Evidences of Early Version of “Toledot Yeshu”’. In: *Tarbiz* 69 (2000), pp.177–197 (in Hebrew); Schäfer, Peter: *Jesus in the Talmud*. Princeton and Oxford 2007; on Jesus in the Hebrew sources, Avigdor Shinan edited an anthology: “Oto ha’ish”.

⁹ On this fascinating topic, see Momigliano, Arnaldo: *The Development of Greek Biography*. Expanded Edition. Cambridge 1993; see also Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture. Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament. Edited by Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts, Leiden – Boston 2013, in particular Harrison, James R.: *The Imitation of the “Great Man” in Antiquity: Paul’s Inversion of a Cultural Icon*. *Ibid.*, pp. 213–254, and Köstenberger, Andreas J.: *The Genre of the Fourth Gospel and Greco-Roman Literary Conventions*. *Ibid.*, pp. 435–462.

Oxford *Manuskript* herausgegeben".¹⁰ To my knowledge, this is the first print of a Yiddish version ever. All the others remain in manuscript form until today. Samuel Krauss, in his classic monograph, presents detailed descriptions of the different versions of the "Toledot Yeshu", indicating the Yiddish sources as well.¹¹

In 1985, Rav Di Segni included in his description of the existing manuscripts the indication of the language of each text, thus already providing a first hint of how many manuscripts we have in Yiddish.¹² This list of manuscripts had already been published in an earlier version in 1984.¹³

More recently, in the comprehensive and rich collection of essays on the "Toledot Yeshu" edited by Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson and Yaacov Deutsch in 2011, Michael Stanislawski published a study of the Yiddish versions of the "Life of Jesus."¹⁴

Stanislawski writes that he knows of 15 Yiddish manuscripts of the "Toledot Yeshu", which he lists¹⁵ – and in the quoted paper, he presents, in particular, the manuscript JTS MS. 2211. To this short bibliographic list, a publication by Elisheva Carlebach should be added. It appeared in 1993, and contained many interesting insights on anti-Christian texts in Yiddish from the Early Modern, including the "Toledot Yeshu".¹⁶

I have no access to the material collected for the a research project on the "Toledot Yeshu" taking place at Princeton University;¹⁷ however, I have the fortune of being able to work at the Institute of Microfilmed Manuscripts of the National Library of Israel, in Jerusalem. Even if it is possible that

¹⁰ Bischoff, Erich: *Ein jüdisches Leben Jesu. Zum ersten Mal nach dem Oxfordter Manuskript herausgegeben.* Leipzig 1895.

¹¹ Krauss, Samuel: *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen.* Berlin 1902.

¹² Di Segni: *Il Vangelo del Ghetto*, pp. 225–231.

¹³ See Di Segni, Riccardo: *La tradizione testuale delle Toledoth Jéshu: Manoscritti, edizioni a stampa, classificazione.* In: *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 50 (1984), pp. 84–100. See also Id.: *Due nuove fonti sulle Toledoth Jeshu.* In: *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 55.1 (Gennaio – Aprile 1989), pp. 127–132.

¹⁴ Stanislawski, Michael: *A Preliminary Study of a Yiddish "Life of Jesus" („Toledot Yeshu“): JTS MS. 2211.* In: *Toledot Yeshu ("The Life Story of Jesus") Revisited. A Princeton Conference.* Edited by Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson and Yaacov Deutsch. Tübingen 2011, pp. 79–87.

¹⁵ Stanislawski: *A Preliminary Study*, p. 80, footnote 6.

¹⁶ Carlebach, Elisheva: *The Anti-Christian Element in Early Modern Yiddish Culture.* Braun Lectures in the History of the Jews of Prussia, No. 10. Ramat-Gan 2003.

¹⁷ The project can be seen in the following site: <http://www.princeton.edu/judaic/special-projects/toledot-yeshu/>.

the catalogue is not complete and sometimes the descriptions of some manuscripts are still in progress, I think there are nearly thirty known Yiddish manuscripts, and I am sure there are more.¹⁸ Besides, it is undoubtably true that every new essay on the Yiddish “Toledot Yeshu” will owe a lot to the new catalogue of Yiddish manuscripts from Holland prepared by Evi Michels, in particular the chapter “Polemische Schriften gegen das Christentum: *Toledot Jeschu*”.¹⁹

In this study, I would like to present some remarks on a manuscript which is one of the oldest extant versions in Yiddish we have, and which has not been studied yet: MS. Günzburg 1730.

4. Some textual examples from MS. Günzburg 1730

Krauss described the versions of the “Toledot Yeshu” according to *Typus Wagenseil*, *Typus De Rossi*, *Typus Huldreich*, a *Modern-slavischer Typus*, and *Typus Cairo*;²⁰ Di Segni built instead a stemma of the tradition of the “Toledot Yeshu” according to the name of the ruler mentioned in the text, and came to identify three branches: the Pilatus-tradition, the Helena-tradition and the Herod-tradition.²¹

Most of the Yiddish versions of the *Toledot Yeshu* are part of the so-called ‘Helena-tradition’.²² Di Segni, in his bibliography, lists a manuscript he had not been able to see: manuscript Günzburg from the Lenin Library in Moscow, today the Russian State Library. He mentions that his investigations received the answer that “for technical reasons” it was not possible to confirm the presence of the manuscript.²³ Thanks to the Institute of the Microfilmed Manuscripts and to the Library in Moscow, I have been able to receive a copy of the microfilm.²⁴ The complete signatura is MS. Günzburg 1730 (mic. F 48731). This manuscript is, in fact, important for the Yiddish tradition of the “Toledot Yeshu”, because it is one of the oldest that survived, being copied in the 17th

¹⁸ I wish to publish an updated list of them in a future publication.

¹⁹ Michels [Butzer], Evi: *Jiddische Handschriften der Niederlande*. Leiden – Boston 2013, pp. 403–426.

²⁰ Krauss: *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen*, pp. 27–37.

²¹ Di Segni: *Il Vangelo del Ghetto*, pp. 29–50.

²² See Michels: *Jiddische Handschriften*, p. 403.

²³ Di Segni: *La tradizione testuale*, p. 93; and *Id.*, *Il Vangelo del Ghetto*, p. 231.

²⁴ I would like to express my gratitude to Yael Okun of the National Library of Israel, and to Alina Lisitsyna of the Russian State Library for their help.

century,²⁵ and also because it is connected to the tradition in which King Herod is the ruler, that is, it is part of the so-called Huldricus-tradition. The Swiss pastor and theologian Johann Jacob Uldrich (in Latin Huldricus, 1683 – 1731) published a Hebrew version of the “Toledot Yeshu” with a translation into Latin in Leiden (Lugdunum Batavorum) in 1705: “Historia Jeschuae Nazareni a Judaeis blasphemae corrupta ex manuscripto hactenus inedito nunc demum edita ac Versione & Notis [...] illustrata”. Huldricus’ source was clearly a manuscript, where he says he found blasphemies that “nec in Wagenseilii Toledos Ieschu, nec in Talmude, nec alibi etiam accurrunt, praeterquam in scripto scelerato, quod nos publicamus” (*Praefatio*). Other Hebrew versions of the same group are known. Adina M. Yoffie, in a study published in 2011, lists five main manuscripts: Frankfurt 249, Amsterdam MS. Ros. 442; Amsterdam, MS. Ros 504, Princeton Firestone Library 24, Manchester Gaster 1989, adding that “The rest are likely to be either copies or translations of those five, which are nearly identical to each other.”²⁶

According to Di Segni, there is also a manuscript which he calls “LoJ2” (London, Jews’ College?), Montefiore 449 (F 8774), Hirschfeld 1904, p. 135, n. 449 which is a translation, he writes, probably in Yiddish, of Huldricus, made by Jacob Sobels of Wladislavow,²⁷ but in fact the text is in Hebrew and apparently, I would say at this stage of my knowledge, this manuscript is later than the one in Moscow.

If ms. Günzburg 1730 was copied during the 17th century, it means that it is older than Huldricus’ print in 1705. But the manuscript is not dated, and

²⁵ According to my temporary list, there are four extant manuscripts from the 17th century: Aside from the one kept in Moscow, there are: Cambridge (Mass.) – Harvard University Heb. 101, from 1652, copied in Prague, ff. 48, which was part of the collection of Eliakim Carmoly (see Glatzer, Mordechai: Hebrew Manuscripts in the Houghton Library of the Harvard College Library. Cambridge, Massachusetts 1975, p. 28); Oxford, the Bodleian Library, MS. Rawl. Or. 37, probably copied towards the end of the 17th century (see Neubauer, Adolf: Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library and in the College Libraries of Oxford. Including mss. in Other Languages, which are Written with Hebrew Characters, or Relating to the Hebrew Language or Literature, and a Few Samaritan Mss. Oxford 1886–1906, vol. II, N. 2793, p. 206); and MS. 2211 from the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, which could be composed in the 1670’s or 1680’s (see Stanislavski: A Preliminary Study, p. 80, and *ibid.*, footnote 6). See also Yoffie, Adina M.: Observations on the Huldreich Manuscripts of the Toledot Yeshu. In: Toledot Yeshu (The Life Story of Jesus) Revisited, pp. 61–77, in particular p. 69.

²⁶ See Yoffie: Observations on the Huldreich Manuscripts, p. 62. See also Di Segni: Il Vangelo del Ghetto, p. 41.

²⁷ Hirschfeld, Hartwig: Descriptive Catalogue of the Hebrew Mss. of the Montefiore Library. London 1904, p. 135, N. 449 (Mic.f. 8774).

even if it is evident that it is older than the other Yiddish manuscripts I have been able to see, we cannot be sure about the date of its composition.²⁸ Yoffie says that “[t]here was no ‘Huldreich’ before Huldreich; that is, there are no extant manuscripts of the Huldreich type before Huldreich published his book in 1705. All of the subsequent manuscripts appear to have been copied from Huldreich’s book, or perhaps from other manuscripts that were copied from it,” among which she mentions three manuscripts in “Judaeo-German” (i. e. Yiddish),²⁹ and it is possible, as Di Segni suggested, that, since Huldricus’ Hebrew text seems composed in Germany a short time before its publication, it could be a forgery,³⁰ even if it recycled old materials.

If we accept the temporary assumption that the Günzburg manuscript is older than the Huldricus print, I believe that some textual examples from it could be relevant for a better understanding of the tradition of the Herod group, and I would like to compare it with the Hebrew version published by Huldreich. The Yiddish manuscript seems copied from a Hebrew source, because it has the elements that are traditional in the translations from *Losbn-kegydesb* into Yiddish:

1. At the beginning of every new paragraph we find Hebrew words, in big bold letters and in quadrat script
2. Hebrew and Aramaic words and expressions are usually in round brackets.³¹

4.1 *Tonsura*

In the following passage, Rabbi Akiba, notwithstanding any anachronism, manages to meet with Miriam, who confesse her story: how she was married to Pappus ben Yehuda, ran away with Yosef Pandera and had many children with him, who, according to the *halakha*, are all ‘bastards’. Rabbi Akiba then

²⁸ I believe a codicology analysis of the manuscript could offer more precise hints about the date and the place of the production of this manuscript. As far as I know, the Hebrew manuscripts kept in the Russian State Library are still awaiting a comprehensive and updated catalogue. See Richler, Benjamin: Guide to Hebrew Manuscripts Collections. Second Revised Edition. Jerusalem 2014, p. 87 and pp. 145–146.

²⁹ Yoffie: Observations on the Huldreich Manuscripts, p. 63.

³⁰ Di Segni: La tradizione testuale, pp. 89–90. Here Di Segni presents the hypothesis that this version was written by a Christian who decided to use the tradition of Jewish polemics in order to criticize his own religion. See also Yoffie: Observations on the Huldreich Manuscripts, pp. 65–66.

³¹ On this use, see Neuberger, Simon: Pragmatische Aspekte der jiddischen Sprachgeschichte am Beispiel der *Zenerene*. Hamburg 1999, in particular pp. 16–27.

tears his clothes as a sign of mourning and goes to Jerusalem, where he and other rabbis seize Yeshu and shave the hair of his head and then wash his head with a type of water that does not allow hair to grow ever again, so that this will remain a sign of his being a bastard and as such, kept out of the community:

ויהי כאשר שמע רב עקיבא / את הדברים האלה ויקרע / את בגדיו ויומר לה הכי / קרא שמו מצריא
 כי עשה מעשה מצרים ואת קרחת כי / עשית קרחת בישראל וישוב / רבי עקיבא לירושלים והגיד / את
 הדברים האלה לפני ר"א ור"ב ולכו שלשתן לבית מדרשו של ר"יבפ ולקחו את ישוע יימח ז"כרו /
 וי"מח ש"מו וגלחו שער / ראשו סביב ורחצו במי בולט / שלא יגדלו השערות / סביב לעולם כי כן נהגו
 לעשות סימן לממזרים שלא יתערבו בקהל ישראל

דא / ר' עקיבה דז הערט דא צו רייסט ער / זייני קליידר אונ' שפראך הייסט דוא / דארום (קרחת) דז
 איז טיישט קאלונג / ווייל דוא האשט איין קאלונג גיטאן אונטר / ישראל אונ' דיין מן מצרי ווייל דוא
 / האשט גיטאן מעשים פֿון איין מצרי / אלוז גינג ר' עקיבה ווידר נאך ירושלים / אונ' האט דיא ריד
 גיזאגט פֿר ר' אליעזר / אונ' ר' יהושיע אלוז גינגין זיא אלי דרייא / נאך דז בית המדרש פֿון ר' יהושיע /
 [ב]ן פרחיה אונ' האבין גינומן דעם ישוע / אונ' האבין אים אב גישארין דיא האר / פֿון זיין קאף אונ'
 האבין אים זיין / קאף גיוואשן מיט איין וואשיר [וז] / דא הייסט (מי בולט) ז[.]. זיין האר זאלין / ניט
 מער קענן וואקסן דען זיא האבין דעם מנהג גיהאט דז זיא אלי צייט האבין איין צייכן גימאכט אין אלי
 דיא / ממזרים דז זיא ניט זאלין פֿר מישט / ווערין אונטר ישראל

Miriam changes her name into *Karabat*, a Hebrew term meaning ‘tonsure’, which the scribe of the Yiddish text feels has to be explained according to the tradition of the *Taytsh*, the vulgarization of the Holy Text.³² Often this vulgarization is introduced by *un der taytsh iz...* or, as here, *dos iz taytsh...* (‘it means...’). In this case the Hebrew *karabat* is *fartaytsht* with the term *kalung*, which still means ‘tonsure’, but it is not attested in Middle High German dictionaries. The term *kalung* is in fact an example of the Yiddish forms of abstract names with a suffix in *-ung* so common in the tradition of the Yiddish translations of the Bible.³³

³² For *taytsh* see in particular Weinreich, Max: *History of the Yiddish Language*. Edited by Paul Glasser, translated by Shlomo Noble with the Assistance of Joshua A. Fishman. 2 vols. Haven and London 2008, vol. 1, p. 249, pp. 260–261, 315–317, 319; Neuberg: *Pragmatische Aspekte der jiddischen Sprachgeschichte am Beispiel der Zenerene*: pp. 148–151; Timm, Erika, unter Mitarbeit von G. A. Beckmann: *Historische Jiddische Semantik. Die Bibelübersetzungssprache als Faktor der Auseinanderentwicklung des jiddischen und des deutschen Wortschatzes*. Tübingen 2005.

³³ See Timm, Beckmann: *Historische Jiddische Semantik*, pp. 82–87. The term *kalung* appears indeed, for example, in the translation into Yiddish of the Pentateuch printed in Cremona in 1560 and in the one printed in Basel in 1583 as a rendering of the Hebrew *karabat*, occurring in Leviticus 13.42–43 and 55.

In the quoted passage, a second element is worthy of note: in the Hebrew text, Rabbi Akiba goes back to Jerusalem and relates what he has learned to rabbis, who are introduced by the initials of their names, while in the Yiddish the initials are all explained (Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua (ben Levi), Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perahya).

A third element worthy of being underlined is that, in the Hebrew, the name of Jesus is followed by the expressions ‘may the memory of him be obliterated’ and ‘may his name be obliterated’, curses usually accompanying the enemies of the Jewish people. They are both absent from the Yiddish text.

The ‘waters of the Bolet’, *acquis Bolet* in Huldricus’ translation, poses a problem to the author of the Yiddish version, which does not offer any explanation – he just calls it ‘a water’. Huldricus tries instead to investigate the origins of the term (see p. 31, note 11).³⁴

In addition, I do not know if the mentioned *minbag* to make a *tonsura* on the head of a *mamzer* in order to mark and isolate him from the society is more than a sort of etiology for the Medieval use of the *tonsura* among the Christians. In other versions of the “Toledot Yeshu” we find different explanations of how the tonsure was born.³⁵

4.2 *Taytsh*

I would like to bring a second example of *taytsh*: in a comic passage in which Jesus meets a gentle shepherdess and gives her the blessing that she will marry a shepherd he has met before;³⁶ we read:

ואני אל רחום מזווג זיוונים כפי מעשיהם ועלי ניבא דוד ענה בדרך כחי
 אונ' איך בין איין דער בארמיגר גאט / אונ' מאך פארין איטליכן נאך זיין / ווערק אונ' אויף מיר האט
 דוד // המלך ע"ה אין תהילם (ענה בדרך כוחי) / דו איז טייטש ער האט גיפייניגט מיט / דעם וועג מיין
 קראפט

³⁴ On this passage see also Bar-Ilan, Meir: Attitude toward Mamzerim in Jewish Society in Late Antiquity. In: Jewish History 14.2 (2000), pp. 125–170.

³⁵ In the version published by Bischoff, for example, Jesus loses his hair after his death: when Jehudah Ginnah reveals that Jesus’ body is in his garden and the *pritzim* pull him out, his hair remains in their hands and we read that the *galokbim*, the priests, shave their head in memory of this fact. See Bischoff: Ein jüdisches Leben Jesu, p. 46. On this passage, see also Krauss: Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen, pp. 220–223.

³⁶ On this passage, see Krauss: Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen, p. 162.

The quotation is from Psalms 102.24 and the Yiddish explains the reference saying *in Tillim*. Besides, here the *taytsh* is very similar to the one we find in Elia Levita's translation of Psalms printed in Venice in 1545 and reprinted several times (in Zurich in 1558, in Mantova in 1562, in Cracow in 1598, in Prague in 1661–1688, in Amsterdam in 1676, again in Prague in 1708):

ער הוט גיפייניקט אים וועג מיין קראַפֿט

The fact that the translation is so close means that the scribe was familiar with the tradition of the *taytsh*, and this can also leave some space for considerations about his background.

4.3 Alphabet

Another passage which is perhaps worth noting is the one in which Shimon, in his intention to detach the believers in Yeshu from the other Jews, teaches them a new alphabet, which seems to be the German one. Here, the Yiddish text adds the Latin letters, which in Yiddish are called *galkebes*, since they are identified with the tonsure (*gallabat* in Hebrew) and therefore with the Christian religion, as it is well exemplified in this case:³⁷

In the following passage, Shimon is described as the author of some of the Gospels and of the Apocalypse of John, all books written in order to *genaren*, to fool Jesus' followers:

ועוד כתב להם ספרי כזבים וקרא אותם ע"ון כלי"ון והם סברו שהוא אומר אב"ן גליו"ן כלומר אב ובן וגליי רוח הקודש ועשה להם שמעון ספרים מתלמידי יז"ש ומיה"נוס ואמר שיז"ש מסר לו כל הדברים ויכתב שמעון ברמז את ספר יהנו"ס והם סוברים שהוא סודות והוא הכל הבל ורעיון רוח כמו שכתב בספר יה"נוס פרק י"ג שראה יהנוס חיה אחת ולה ז' ראשים וגם י' קרנים וגם י' כתרים ושם החיה בשם גידוף וכו' וגמטריא של שם החיה הוא תר"סו כך הוא הפירוש של פרק זה החיה הוא יש"ו הנצרי" ולו ז' אותיות בשתי יתבות האלו יש"ו נצרי" ועשרה קרנים הם כך יש"ו נצרי" ועשרה כתרים הוא כך יז"ד יש לו תג אחד שי"ן יש לו ג' תגין נ"ון צד"ו ו' תגין הרי עשר והכל אשר נאמר בזה הסימן הוא הכל ברמז על יז"ש והגמטריא תרס"ן כי יש"ו נצרי" בגמטריא הכי הוה וכן כל הספרים של ע"ון כ"ליון עשה שמעון רק להטעותם כאשר צוה המלך והחכמים

דיא גייהיסן [עון כליון] דז איז צו זאגן איין / [.....] אונ' זיא האבין גמיינט דז ער זאגט אבן גליון דז איז צו זאגן / איין פאטר אונ' זון אונ' [מזל] פון דעם / רוח הקודש אונ' דער נאך האט ער גימאכט ספרים פון דיא תלמידים פון יז"ש או מטיאש אונ' פויל אונ' דער / נאך האט ער גימאכט

³⁷ See also Huldricus: *Historia Jeschuae Nazareni*, note 2 in his commentary to this passage, pp. 109–110, and Di Segni: *Il Vangelo del Ghetto*, p. 211.

איין ספר דו / הייסן זיא דיא אופן בארונג פֿון יאהנוס / דא האט האט ער פֿיל נארישקייט דרינין /
 גישריבן אונ' זיא מיינן דו זיינן אייטל / סודות אז וויא ער שרייבט אין דיא / אופן בארונג פֿון יאהנוס
 דו יאהנוס / זיבן קעפּף אונ' צעהן קרונין אונ' / צעהן הערנער דו מיינין זיא דו ער אייטל סודות זענין
 אבר עז ביטייט אויף / ישו הנוצרי דען דיא זיבן קעפּף דו / מיינט ער ישו הנוצרי דו זענין זיבן / אותיות
 אונ' דיא צעהן קרונין דו זענין / דיא קעף פֿון די אותיות / ישו הנוצרי דו זענין צענין קעפּף / דו גיט אוף
 ישו הנוצרי אונ' זיא / מיינן דו [...] אייטל סודות זענין אונ' // אך אלי דיא ספרים פֿון דו עון כליון . דו /
 / [.....] האט ער אלש גיטאן אום צו גינארין זיא אז / וויא דער מלך אונ' חכמים אים גי

As is the case in the entire length of the work, the two texts are very similar and yet slightly different.

1. Shimon is writing for the Jews who decided to follow Jesus, using as sources the books of Jesus' disciples, Matthew and Paul, but these references are absent from Huldricus' version.
2. In the Hebrew, we read about the book of Johannes – there is no mention of the title of the work.

In the Yiddish we find instead the term *Offen barung fun Yohannes*, which corresponds to the title given to the *Apokalypse* by Luther in his translation: *Die Offenbarung Sanct Jobannis* – and chapter 13, as is stated in the text, starts with the description of a beast, as in the following verse:

“VND ich trat an den sand des Meers / vnd sahe ein Thier aus dem Meer steigen / das hatte sieben Heubter vnd zehen Hörner / vnd auff seinen Hörnern sieben Kronen / vnd auff seinen Heubten namen der Lesterung” (Luther's translation, 1545)

3. Among the many *narishkaytn* which can be found in Johannis' book, the text brings an example from, as we just saw, chapter 13, but this reference appears only in the Hebrew.
4. The Hebrew mentions, as well, some alphabet transformations of the name of Jesus according to the *gematria*, as well as the *tagin*, the small signs which appears on some letters of the Bible, but both references are absent from the Yiddish version. It is difficult to explain why. A possible hypothesis would be that the 'ideal readers' of the Yiddish text expected something easier to understand, and *gematria* as well as scribes' subtleties were felt unnecessary.
5. In particular, the name of Jesus is made to correspond to the number 666. In the Hebrew text the number is written, as usual, in Hebrew letters, but

in the Latin translation it is clearly said: *Numerus vero ille 666*.³⁸ This is the number which appears in *Johannis Apocalypse*, in the same chapter 13, verse 18. Does this number have any meaning at all among the Jews? Or is it quoted as one of a long series of elements taken from Christian writings and used parodically against the Christian faith itself?³⁹ Or was it added by Huldricus in order to show that the Jews saw Jesus as the anti-Christ? Whatever the answer, we do not find any mention of it in the Yiddish text. This reference was perhaps obscure to some readers, since in the Hebrew manuscript MS. hebr. oct. 249 – *Toledot Yeshua' ha-notsri* kept in the Universitätsbibliothek in Frankfurt am Main – the scribe must have thought that it deserves a further explanation.⁴⁰

5. Final Remarks

The Hebrew version published by Huldricus and the Yiddish manuscript presented here are evidently connected. It can be said that the date given to this manuscript, 17th century, is not precise, and that the Yiddish could be dependent on Huldricus' Hebrew version or some later Hebrew manuscript; but it could also be that both versions are dependent on one or more Hebrew manuscripts, attesting to an already existing tradition.

It is striking that often the Hebrew words in the two texts are different, as, for example, in the case of *Ka-ddevarim ha-elle* (in Huldricus)/*beze halosbn* (in the Yiddish text). A further analysis in this direction will perhaps help explain why the reader receives the impression that Huldricus' Hebrew version cannot be the source – its grammar and style seems an imitation of Biblical Hebrew.

Finally, it is also possible that Huldricus, or someone else, had a Hebrew manuscript and manipulated it in order to make it more offensive to Jesus and introduced other elements, such as the reference to the beast of John's Apocalypse quoted above, in a strikingly anti-Christian image. And it can also be that the Yiddish is *fartaysbt un farbesert*, in this case that the translator/scribe/author

³⁸ Huldricus: *Historia Jeschuae Nazareni*, p. 116 and the note 3 at pp. 117–118.

³⁹ Here Funkenstein's idea of 'counter-history' as a method of 'systematic exploitation of the adversary's most trusted sources' seems perfectly fitting. See Funkenstein, *Amos: Perceptions of Jewish History*. Berkeley 1993, pp. 36–40 and 169–201, and Biale, *David: Counter-History and Jewish Polemics Against Christianity*. The *Sefer toledot yeshu* and the *Sefer zerubavel*. In: *Jewish Social Studies* 6.1 (1999), pp. 130–145, in particular pp. 130–131.

⁴⁰ See Di Segni: *Il Vangelo del Ghetto*, pp. 93–96.

decided to leave out references to the esoteric explanations and also to mitigate the anti-Christian elements. In general, in fact, Huldricus' type is more violently anti-Christian than the other versions I have been able to consult.

As argued by David Biale, the "Sefer Toledot Yeshu" "might better be read as a satirical folktale that works by substitutions rather than inversions,"⁴¹ and "does not turn the son of God into the son of Satan, as we might expect from a counter-history, but rather into an audacious trickster operating within the rabbinic elite. The categories of folktale and satire do not contradict counter-history but they enlarge the term beyond mere polemic."⁴² The same interpretation, although expressed with other words or concepts, can be found in the writings of the main scholars that studied the "Toledot Yeshu": Riccardo Di Segni, Yosef Dan, Eli Yassif, Peter Schäfer, Michael Stanislawski (p. 81): the "Toledot Yeshu" can be seen as a "typical Volksbuch" (Eli Yassif), as Schäfer summarized it: "it has a well-defined hero, who, however, is not a victim but a villain; like the novella, it displays an unexpected turning point or Wendepunkt that drastically changes the protagonist's life [...]; it exhibits a novella-like interest in the erotic [...]"⁴³.

I agree with this analysis: in general, in the Yiddish versions, especially in the so-called group Helena – and Biale in fact bases his study on this tradition –, it is possible to see a sort of literarization of bias – still it is clear that the "Toledot Yeshu" developed from different materials circulating in Late Antiquity and is an expression of manifest and violent anti-Christian feeling. This main feature does not preclude other 'uses' of the text, which can be read as a novel. A parallel example could be the well-known legend of the Wandering Jew, which, for example, in the French versions printed in the *Bibliothèque bleue*, became a best-seller *ante litteram*,⁴⁴ and is known as a chap-book in other European languages as well. This is a good example of a Medieval legend with clear,

⁴¹ Biale: Counter-History and Jewish Polemics Against Christianity, p. 132 and p. 135.

⁴² Biale: Counter-History and Jewish Polemics Against Christianity, p. 136.

⁴³ See Schäfer, in his "Introduction" to: "Toledot Yeshu" (The Life Story of Jesus) Revisited, pp. 1–11, and in particular p. 6.

⁴⁴ See Andries, Lise; Bollème, Geneviève: La bibliothèque bleue. Littérature de colportage. Paris 2003, in particular pp. 204–225 and 929; and Schaffer, Aaron: The Ahasver-Volksbuch of 1602. In: The Wandering Jew. Essays in the Interpretation of a Christian Legend. Ed. by Galit Hasan-Rokem and Alan Dundes. Bloomington 1986, pp. 27–35 (this article already appeared in: Modern Philology, 17.10 [February 1920], pp. 596–604).

strong anti-Jewish content that became, in European literature, also a literary theme, entertaining reading matter.

In the case of the versions of the so-called ‘Herod’s group,’ the anti-Christian violence is instead dominant.⁴⁵ And yet, the impression after this first example of the Yiddish manuscript from the Günzburg’s collection is that, in Yiddish, this violence is in some way softened. As I tried to express elsewhere, this could reinforce the idea that this is a characteristic of the Yiddish renderings of Hebrew texts, in particular when they deal with Christian violence against the Jews and also verbal offences from the Jews against the Christians.⁴⁶

The relation of the Günzburg manuscript to the first surviving Hebrew version has not been yet explained, because there is too much that we do not know. Still, if the Yiddish witness is older, it awakens further questions about this specific work, and at the same time about the place of Yiddish in Ashkenazi culture.

I would therefore like to conclude with a general remark about the relationship of Hebrew and Yiddish in Ashkenaz in the Early Modern.⁴⁷ The dominant perspective among several historians is that Hebrew or, better, *Loshn-koym-desh*, as it is called in Yiddish, is the language of a high culture and Yiddish is the language of a ‘popular’ culture, a language on the margins, and this model has an impact on the way in which the transmission of texts has been interpreted. Often, the idea is that texts are mainly transmitted in Hebrew, and the Yiddish evidences are just a ‘marginal’ outcast; Yiddish is perceived as the expression of a ‘subculture’ or a culture on the margins. Sometimes, instead, what we learn is that Yiddish and Hebrew sources complement one another or work together alternatively in the transmission of content in Ashkenazi

⁴⁵ See Di Segni: Il Vangelo del Ghetto, p. 41.

⁴⁶ Rosenzweig, Claudia: *The Bovo d’Antona* by Elye Bokher. A Critical and Commented Edition. (forthcoming), section 2.3.5.4.2.3, and the bibliography quoted there.

⁴⁷ See Weinreich: *History of the Yiddish Language*; Turniansky, Chava: Polin. Unit 7. Language, Education and Knowledge among the European Jews. Tel Aviv 1984, pp. 81–87 [this chapter has been published as an article, in a slightly different version, in French (*Les langues juives dans le monde ashkénaze traditionnel*). In: *Mille ans de cultures ashkénazes*. Ed. by Jean Baumgarten, Rachel Ertel, Itzhok Niborski, Annette Wiewiorka. 1994, pp. 419–426), and in Italian (*Ebraico e yiddish nel mondo ashkenazita tradizionale*). In: *Il mio cuore è a oriente*. Studi di linguistica storica, filologia e cultura ebraica dedicati a Maria Luisa Mayer Modena. Ed. by Francesco Aspesi, Vermondo Brugnatelli, Anna Linda Callow, Claudia Rosenzweig. Quaderni di Acme, 101. Milano 2008, pp. 581–587]; Id.: *Yiddish and the Transmission of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe*. In: *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 15 (2008), pp. 5–18.

culture. In fact, I have come to see a *unique* Ashkenazi culture based *on both* *Loshn-koydesh* and Yiddish – and they are both ‘at the center’ –, in which Yiddish is the expression of both an elevated cultivated culture and a popular one; likewise in Hebrew, we can also find expressions of popular beliefs and practices. Officially, *Loshn-koydesh* has more prestige; in practice, they are both deeply interconnected and engaged in expressing and/or shaping the culture of Ashkenazi Jews.