

Judeo-Arabic Versions of *Toledot Yeshu*¹

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Toledot Yeshu: Introduction

The *Toledot Yeshu* (henceforth TY) in its core form is a pejorative retelling of the story of Jesus' birth from the righteous couple Miriam and Yoḥanan,² his youth, his falling-out with the rabbis, and his execution. The composition is considered by some to be a polemical satire and a counter-historical parody of the Gospels; others characterize it as a collection of folk motifs, deriving from a variety of motivations, some polemical and some narrative.³ While TY is not a systematic Jewish refutation of Christianity or Christian doctrine, in a style which was extensively cultivated among Jews in a slightly later period, it is a work directed against that religion, with polemical intent, and can be classified as a polemical text.⁴ For this reason, *Toledot Yeshu* can be considered

- 1 A version of this paper was delivered at a workshop held at Princeton University on November 15–17, 2009, and organized by Dr. Yaacov Deutsch, Prof. Peter Schaefer and Mr. Michael Meerson. I am grateful to the organizers for the invitation to speak there. I thank Dr. Yaacov Deutsch for numerous conversations on the subject of this article. I thank Prof. Daniel J. Lasker, Mr. Michael Berger and Ms. Krisztina Szilágyi for their comments on earlier drafts of this article.
- 2 At times the name of Miriam's husband is given as Yosef; see note 66.
- 3 Discussion of this issue can be found in D. Biale, "Counter-History and Jewish Polemics Against Christianity: The Sefer Toldot Yeshu and the Sefer Zerubavel," *Jewish Social Studies* 6, no. 1 (1999), pp. 130–145.
- 4 For a contrasting view, see D. J. Lasker, *Jewish philosophical polemics against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (New York 1977), pp. 21–22. Lasker does refer to TY as "a polemic in the form of history" there. Compare the four distinct genres of Christian composition in Syriac and Arabic all classified by Sidney Griffith as "apology": S. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton 2007), pp. 76–77.

one of the first works composed by Jews as an independent and freestanding anti-Christian composition.

Many aspects of the origin of TY remain unclear. Estimates of TY's date of composition vary widely, ranging from as early as the third century CE until the seventh century CE or even later.⁵ The original language of composition is assumed to be Aramaic. Aramaic fragments of TY have been discovered in Cairo Genizah collections, and recent evaluations establish their language as a mixture of Targumic and Jewish Babylonian Aramaic.⁶ Further evidence for an Aramaic origin is provided by traces of translation from Aramaic in the earliest Hebrew fragments of the composition (dating from the eleventh and twelfth centuries).⁷ TY in Judeo-Arabic is attested in manuscript fragments dating as early as the eleventh or twelfth century. These Judeo-Arabic versions lack any evidence of translation from Aramaic, and seem more likely to have been translated from Hebrew.

TY was a protean text, and evolved new versions from its earliest Aramaic attestations. Riccardo Di Segni, in his *Vangelo del ghetto*, identified three major versions, which he labeled according to the name of the ruler said to have presided over Jesus' trial. The "Pilate" version is attested in the earliest

- 5 Maximalists who hold that the composition existed as early as the third century include William Horbury; see W. Horbury, *A Critical Examination of the Toledoth Yeshu*, (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1971). Samuel Krauss dated the composition to the fifth century (S. Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* [Berlin 1902], pp. 246–247). Minimalists who date the composition to the seventh century or later note that the earliest reference to TY is found in the ninth-century account of Agobard, bishop of Lyons (d. 840). See for example Y. Deutsch, *Toledot Yeshu* (M.A. Thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem 1998) [Hebrew], pp. 28–29. In a lecture on November 17, 2009, at the abovementioned workshop, Prof. Michael Sokoloff noted that on the basis of linguistic analysis, it appears that TY was composed in Jewish Babylonia around the middle of the first millennium.
- 6 This statement represents conclusions presented by Sokoloff, based on linguistic considerations; see the previous note. To the best of my knowledge, no paleographical or codicological estimates of the dates of these fragments have been proposed.
- 7 See Y. Deutsch, "New Evidence of Early Versions of *Toledot Yeshu*," *Tarbiz* 69 (2000) [Hebrew], pp. 177–197, esp. p. 179.

Aramaic fragments as well as in Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic versions; the “Helene” version is attested from the 12th century in Judeo-Arabic and from at least the 13th century in Hebrew; and the “Herod” or “Huldrich” version is attested in Hebrew from 1705, the date of its publication by Johannes Huldrich.⁸ In recent years, a nearly complete rendering of the “Pilate” version in Hebrew translation was discovered in the collections of the Russian National Library; one important result of this discovery was the completion of the missing beginning of the composition in that version.⁹ The existence of these distinct versions adds an additional layer of complexity to the composition, for it is far from clear when and how later versions developed. TY in its various versions is attested in a variety of further languages, including Judeo-Persian, Latin, French and Yiddish.¹⁰

I will present here a discussion of the possible origins of TY in Judeo-Arabic, as well as a summary of the description and contents of eighteen Judeo-Arabic manuscript fragments found in a number of important collections of Judeo-Arabic manuscripts, many of them originating in the medieval Jewish community of Cairo. Following this I will provide a brief linguistic overview of the fragments. Finally, I will discuss the historical relevance of the composition in its Judeo-Arabic form, and will focus on a number of characteristics unique to these Judeo-Arabic versions.

TY in Judeo-Arabic is significant for a number of reasons. Manuscript evidence indicates that the work was popular among Jews of Islamic lands, and this popularity adds an important chapter to the state of interreligious polemic in the Muslim and Arabic-speaking environment. This polemic against Christianity is a bold one in the Islamic environment. While many motifs were

8 See R. Di Segni, *Il vangelo del ghetto*, (Rome 1985), pp. 29–41; Deutsch (n. 7 above), p. 178.

9 This version, found in MS Russian National Library Evr. I:274, is described and published together with earlier Aramaic fragments in Deutsch (n. 7 above).

10 See Di Segni (n. 8 above), pp. 225–231. See also note 88.

shared between Jews and Muslims in their polemic against Christianity,¹¹ the case of TY is different. Composers and editors, copyists, readers and listeners of TY dared to put forth coarse insults against Jesus and Mary, two figures highly respected in the Islamic tradition as prophet and recipient of God's grace, respectively.¹² Such ad *hominem* attacks against two figures extolled in the Qur'ān are alien to Muslim literature and theology, and would likely have been considered objectionable by Muslims.¹³ The popularity of TY among Jews living in Islamic lands also raises the question of the motivation for such polemics in a setting of Muslim governance, and thus, an environment in which religious pressure would have been exerted principally by Muslims and not by Christians. Finally, the Judeo-Arabic fragments of TY are significant for the understanding of the historical facts of the composition itself. For example, Judeo-Arabic fragments of the "Helene" version of TY date as early as the twelfth century, and may predate the earliest known Hebrew manuscripts of this version. In addition, the Judeo-Arabic fragments contribute to our understanding of the distribution and availability of TY in different Jewish communities and to the ongoing attempts to unravel the puzzle of the development of the many different versions of the composition.

11 On this topic see H. Lazarus-Yafeh, "More on the Judeo-Christian Polemic and its Muslim Sources," *Peanim* 61 (1994), pp. 49–56.

12 See, for example Qur'ān 19:1–34; 5:109–110. Qur'ān 4:171 sets out the limitations on the Muslim affirmation of Mary and Jesus. The tenth-century polemic of the Baghdādī Karaite Ya'qūb al-Qirqisānī refuting the Muslim view of Jesus succinctly encapsulates the differences between the Jewish and Muslim views: see the sections of *Anwār* mentioned in note 27.

13 That said, I am not aware of any Muslim works that demonstrate awareness of this particular Jewish polemic against Christianity, with its insulting portrayal of Mary and Jesus. Awareness of a negative view of Mary in general may be suggested in the theme of suspicion of her attributed to the Jews explicitly in Qur'ān 4:156, and attributed to Mary's kin in 19:27–28.

Composition in Judeo-Arabic and the Appearance of Judeo-Arabic TY

The period between the sixth and ninth centuries was one of linguistic transition for many Jewish communities in the Middle East, in which Arabic slowly and steadily replaced Hebrew and Aramaic as the language used by Jews for communication and for study. It seems that there were numerous Arabic-speaking Jewish communities in the Middle East even prior to the Islamic conquests, in the Arabian Peninsula as well as in certain areas of Syria and Iraq.¹⁴ Conversions to Judaism on the part of native Arabic speakers, members of Arab tribes from the region, also contributed to the increasing inroads made by Arabic into the Jewish population of the Arabian Peninsula.¹⁵

The Islamic conquests of the seventh century brought Arabic into many new areas, as a language of everyday speech as well as of administration, by the turn of the century. Jews across the Middle East and North Africa began increasingly to use Arabic not only as a language of everyday communication in the market, in written correspondence or in the household, but also as a means for intellectual discussion.¹⁶ Arabic became the language of science

14 On the Arabization of these areas in general, see R. G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (London 2003), especially pp. 236–247. On Arabization among Christians during this pre-Islamic period, see also Griffith (n. 4 above), p. 50. Haggai Ben-Shammai, in the context of his discussion of the incorporation in early Islamic sources of rabbinic material in Arabic, suggests that many traditional Jewish sources had been rendered in Arabic by such Arabized Jewish communities prior to the rise of Islam. See H. Ben-Shammai, “Observations on the Beginnings of Judaeo-Arabic Civilization,” in *Border Crossings: Interreligious interaction and the exchange of ideas in the Islamic Middle Ages* (working title), eds. D. Freidenreich and M. Goldstein (forthcoming).

15 See H.Z. Hirschberg, *Israel in Arabia* (Tel Aviv 1946) [Hebrew], pp. 166–169.

16 For a description of this development, see J. Blau, *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic: a Study of the Origins of Neo-Arabic and Middle Arabic*, 3rd ed. (Jerusalem 1999), pp. 19–25, and the literature cited there. See also D. E. Sklare, *Samuel ben Hofni Gaon and His Cultural World: Texts and Studies* (Leiden 1996), pp. 37–67, 99–141. The extensive Arabization of Jews already by the eighth century is evident from the early Judeo-Arabic texts published by Joshua Blau and Simon Hopkins; see for example J. Blau and S. Hopkins, “Judaeo-Arabic Papyri — Collected, Edited, Translated

in its broadest sense. Significantly, the earliest attested written Arabic Bible translations prepared by Jews date to the ninth century and possibly even earlier.¹⁷ Jews began to compose in Arabic as well: the adoption of Arabic spurred the development of many new genres, attested in Judeo-Arabic beginning in the ninth century.¹⁸

One new genre was freestanding polemical treatises. While earlier Jewish scholarship, particularly rabbinic literature, had long addressed Jesus and Christianity in a variety of ways, both direct and indirect, the earliest attested independent polemical compositions in Judeo-Arabic are a product of the ninth century.¹⁹ Polemics were both written and oral, and adherents of the various

and Analysed,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 (1987), pp. 87–160. The authors suggest an even earlier eighth-century dating for such texts in Blau, *Emergence*, pp. 241–243. On Christian Arabization during the early Islamic centuries see S. H. Griffith, “Greek into Arabic: Life and Letters in the Monasteries of Palestine in the Ninth Century; the Example of the *Summa Theologiae Arabica*,” *Byzantion* 56 (1986), pp. 117–138, esp. pp. 119–120; M. Levy-Rubin, *The Patriarchate of Jerusalem after the Arab Conquest* (Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1994) [Hebrew], pp. 290–303 (on the Levant).

- 17 See J. Blau, “On a Fragment of the Oldest Judaeo-Arabic Bible Translation Extant,” in *Genizah Research After Ninety Years*, eds. J. Blau and S. Reif (Cambridge 1992), pp. 31–39. The existence of such translations was a source of unease for the more traditionally-minded rabbinic authorities, who feared the possibility that they would replace the reading of the canonical Aramaic *Targum Onkelos* in the public synagogue setting. See *Teshuvot Rav Natronai Bar Hilai Gaon*, ed. R. Brody, (Jerusalem 1994), pp. 152–154; H. Ben-Shammai, “New and old: Saadya’s two introductions to his translation of the Pentateuch,” *Tarbiz* 69, no. 2 (2000), pp. 199–210, esp. p. 205 n. 35.
- 18 See for example R. Drory, *The Emergence of Jewish-Arabic Literary Contacts at the Beginning of the Tenth Century* (Tel Aviv 1988) [Hebrew]. Granted, it was only in the tenth century, with the leadership of Sa’adya Gaon, that such Arabic composition received full approval in religious spheres; see R. Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture* (New Haven 1998), pp. 235–248.
- 19 Numerous studies discuss the many and varied ways in which Jews responded to Christianity prior to the Islamic period. Regarding references to Jesus and to Christianity, see most recently P. Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton 2007). Discussion of explicit rabbinic responses to Christianity, focusing on the *birkat ha-minnim*, is found in S. T. Katz, “The Rabbinic Response to Christianity,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism. Vol. 4: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*, ed. S. T. Katz (Cambridge 2006), pp. 259–298. For consideration

religions of the Islamic empire communicated in Arabic and were familiar with each others' arguments.²⁰ The earliest polemics, like TY, were anonymous.²¹ TY itself, having long fulfilled a polemical need, was likely familiar to Jewish communities in its Aramaic and possibly its Hebrew versions. Given the ninth-century flourishing of Arabic and Judeo-Arabic letters, including polemical composition, it is possible that TY in Judeo-Arabic made its appearance during the ninth century, as one of the Aramaic and Hebrew works translated by and for Arabic-speaking Jews.²² Manuscript evidence confirms the existence of Judeo-Arabic TY only from the eleventh century, but the work may have existed earlier. One reason for considering this possibility is the nature of Jewish scholarly culture prior to the tenth century, which was primarily oral and which prized orality.²³ Given this state of affairs, a text intended for a popular audience,

of rabbinic discussions which are tacit responses to Christianity, see for example I. J. Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. B. Harshav and J. Chipman (Berkeley 2006), esp. pp. 26–27; A. F. Segal, *Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* (Cambridge 1986), pp. 147–181; A. Tropper, *Wisdom, Politics, and Historiography: Tractate Avot in the Context of the Graeco-Roman Near East* (Oxford 2004), pp. 208–240. Jack T. Sanders considers both literary and material remains in evaluating the first one hundred years of Jewish-Christian relations; see J. T. Sanders, *Schismatics, Sectarians, Dissidents, Deviants: The First One Hundred Years of Jewish-Christian Relations* (Valley Forge, PA 1993). On ninth-century polemics in Judeo-Arabic, see notes 25 and 26 as well as the discussion below.

20 Interreligious polemic between and among numerous groups flourished in the ninth century, spurred by the common language of Arabic and the relative freedom of debate during the 'Abbāsid period. The literature is vast, and I restrict my discussion here to the Jewish-Christian sphere.

21 As, for example, *Qiṣṣat mujādalat al-usqf*; see note 25.

22 For a similar suggestion see K. Szilágyi, "Christian Books in Jewish Libraries: Fragments of Christian Arabic Writings from the Cairo Genizah," *Ginzei Qedem* 2 (2006), pp. 107*–162*, esp. p. 112*. Translations from Hebrew to Arabic were common during this period, and translation from Aramaic to Arabic is also attested. For example, on translations of the Aramaic works of 'Anan ben David into Arabic, apparently during this period, see H. Ben-Shammai, "Between Ananites and Karaites: Observations on Early Medieval Jewish Sectarianism," *Studies in Muslim-Jewish Relations* 1 (1993), pp. 19–29.

23 See for example Brody (n. 18 above), pp. 156–161; N. Danzig, "From Oral Talmud to

such as TY, was even more likely to be oral, and Judeo-Arabic TY could have initially circulated in oral form. Another reason is the vicissitudes of manuscript survival. Even what was recorded in writing during this early period did not always survive, and for a variety of reasons, manuscripts dating to the tenth and eleventh century are quite rare.²⁴ Tenth-century copies of TY, if they existed, may simply not have survived.

Judeo-Arabic TY, like *Qiṣṣat mujādalat al-usquf*, “The account of the priest’s disputation,” is an example of a relatively popular-level polemic against Christianity and against Jesus, although to be sure, in contrast to TY, *Qiṣṣa* can be classified as a treatise and includes a certain degree of critique of doctrine, absent in the former.²⁵ Such polemics contrasted with another type of polemic composed during the early Islamic period: sophisticated doctrinal critiques of Christianity by Jews, which often shared elements with critiques of Christianity by scholars of other religions. The ninth-century Dāwūd al-Muqammaṣ composed a number of such works serving as refutations of Christian doctrine;²⁶ in the tenth century both Sa‘adya Ga’on and Qirqisānī

Written Talmud: On the Methods of Transmission of the Babylonian Talmud and its Study in the Middle Ages,” *Bar-Ilan* 30–31 (2006) [Hebrew], pp. 49–117. Danzig focuses on the Talmud but sees it as a test case emblematic of a more generalized transition.

24 See the charts of dated manuscripts and discussion in M. Beit-Arié, *The Makings of the Medieval Hebrew Book: Studies in Palaeography and Codicology* (Jerusalem 1993), pp. 46–49. On numerous factors that influenced manuscript survival in medieval times see C. Sirat, *Hebrew Manuscripts of the Middle Ages*, trans. N. de Lange (Cambridge 2002), pp. 234–257.

25 On *Qiṣṣa*, see D. J. Lasker and S. Stroumsa, *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest: Qiṣṣat Mujadalat al-Usquf and Sefer Nestor Ha-Komer*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem 1996). The fact that *Qiṣṣa* and TY are among the most frequently-encountered anti-Christian texts in the Cairo Genizah further attests that both can be categorized as “popular-level” (see Szilágyi [n. 22 above], p. 111*).

26 The *‘Ishrūn Maqāla* is the most sophisticated of al-Muqammaṣ’s anti-Christian works, in which he presents a theology of Judaism including extensive responses to and refutations of Christianity. See the summary of the work in S. Stroumsa (ed.), *Dawud ibn Marwan al-Muqammis’s Twenty Chapters (‘Ishrūn Maqala)* [Études sur le judaïsme médiéval 13] (Leiden 1989), pp. 24–33. Muqammaṣ composed two other anti-Christian works: the *Radd*

composed treatises including sections of such refutation.²⁷ In contrast to such learned doctrinal critiques, TY is composed in narrative form, parodying well-known elements of the biography of the founder of Christianity by inversion, in a method that has been labeled “counter-history.”²⁸

It is interesting to note that this method of counter-history is paralleled in a Christian polemic against the founder of Islam, preserved in Christian texts in Syriac and Arabic, which inverts elements of a well-known Muslim account of a meeting between Muḥammad and a monk. According to the Muslim accounts, the monk affirms Muḥammad’s role as a prophet sent by God. The Christian polemical texts modify crucial details of the meeting, and present the claim that the religion preached by Muḥammad was actually the result of an extended period of study with the monk. At the end of this period, Muḥammad

‘alā al-naṣārā min ṭarīq al-qiyās, of which two fragments have been found in the Cairo Genizah, was a list of fifty questions, of both more and less sophisticated types (see S. Stroumsa, “Jewish Polemics against Islam and Christianity in the Light of Judaeo-Arabic Texts,” in *Judaeo-Arabic Studies; Proceedings of the Founding Conference of the Society for Judaeo-Arabic Studies*, ed. N. Golb (Amsterdam 1997), pp. 241–250, esp. p. 246; H. Hirschberg, “The Arabic Portion of the Cairo Genizah at Cambridge,” *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Old Series 15 (1903), pp. 688–689. The *Kitāb al-Ḍarā’a*, which has survived only in quotations by al-Qirḳisānī, is a summary of the history of Christianity and a critique of Paul of the type well-known in early Jewish-Christian polemic as well as in later Jewish and Muslim polemics against Christianity (see Stroumsa, “Jewish Polemics,” pp. 246–247).

27 See D. J. Lasker, “The Jewish Critique of Christianity under Islam,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 57 (1991), pp. 121–153; Lasker (n. 4 above), esp. pp. 51–63. See Ya’qūb al-Qirḳisānī, *Kitāb al-anwār wal-marāqib: code of Karaite law*, ed. L. Nemoy (New York 1939–43), vol. I chapter 8 (pp. 42–47); vol. III chapter 16 (pp. 301–307); Sa’adiyah Gaon, *Kitāb al-mukhtar fi al-amanat wal-i’riqadat*, ed. Y. Qafih, (Jerusalem 1970), esp. pp. 90–95. For an English translation of the former section of *Anwār* see L. Nemoy, “Al-Qirḳisani’s Account of the Jewish Sects and Christianity,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 7 (1930), pp. 317–397. The addressee of Sa’adya’s polemics is not always clear: see E. Schlossberg, “Saadya’s Attitude Toward Islam,” *Daat* 25 (1990) [Hebrew], pp. 21–51; D. J. Lasker, “Saadya Gaon on Christianity and Islam,” in *The Jews of Medieval Islam*, ed. D. Frank (Leiden 1995), pp. 165–177.

28 See A. Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*, (Berkeley 1993), pp. 36–40. See also note 3 above and the critique of these ideas in Biale (cited there).

composed the Qur'ān as a summary of these teachings in order to convey them to his kinsmen.²⁹ According to the Christian polemical rewriting of the account, Islam is nothing but an offshoot of Christianity. Similarly, late medieval Jewish chroniclers report a story about Muḥammad's formulation of his new religion with the help of a group of advisors including the Christian "Buḥayran" as well as a number of converts to Islam from Judaism, such as 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and Abū Bakr.³⁰

It is difficult to establish with certainty whether the Judeo-Arabic versions of TY developed from Hebrew or Aramaic versions. The syntax and usage in all of the fragments described here are standard Judeo-Arabic, and provide no indication that the Arabic is a translation of Hebrew or of Aramaic. One hint, though, is provided by the alternation of languages within the Judeo-Arabic fragments. The extensive use of Hebrew for key names and concepts, and the relatively infrequent use of Aramaic words, suggest that the source text was Hebrew, despite the lack of attestation of Hebrew manuscripts prior to the eleventh century.

Manuscripts — overview

The following describes fragments of TY found in the collections of the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg (henceforth RNL), in the Taylor-Schechter New Series of the Cambridge Genizah collections (henceforth T-S NS) and in the Elkan Nathan Adler collection of the Jewish Theological Seminary of

- 29 For texts and analysis see B. Roggema, "The Legend of Sergius Bahira: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Groningen, 2007). Roggema demonstrates convincingly that the Christian account should be understood as a response to the Muslim versions. Roggema also notes the parallel nature of TY and the Bahira Legend (pp. 34–36). See now B. Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahira: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam* (Leiden 2009).
- 30 This account is found in the *Seder Eliyahu Zuṭa* of Eliyahu Capsali (15th c.) as well as the *Sefer Divrei Yosef* of Yosef Sambari (17th c.). See S. Shtober, "A Jewish look at the beginning of Islam: The Version of Yosef Sambari, the Author of the 'Sefer Divrei Yosef'" [Hebrew], *Pe'amim* 61 (1994), pp. 83–108.

America (henceforth ENA). The results I present are preliminary, designed to provide an introduction to major issues relating to TY in Judeo-Arabic, and do not represent all or even most of the Judeo-Arabic TY fragments held in library manuscript collections around the world. Indeed, given that I discovered two early fragments of TY in a fairly superficial examination of the fragments labeled “polemic” in the ENA collection, it seems likely that a thorough examination of all of the fragments labeled as polemic or as stories about Jesus and other figures in such collections of Judeo-Arabic texts would produce more. I have also found nine additional copies of Judeo-Arabic TY included within collections of literary and liturgical material and catalogued in the Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts of the National Library of Israel, and I will discuss a number of these below.

I identified six new fragments of the manuscript in the collections of the RNL, which add to five already identified.³¹ Shvitiel and Niessen identified five Judeo-Arabic fragments of TY in the T-S New Series.³² I have also identified two fragments of TY in the ENA collection.

The versions of TY preserved in Judeo-Arabic manuscripts belong to the Pilate and the Helene types. Comparison of manuscript fragments containing parallel sections demonstrates variation among them. This variation seems to indicate the existence of independent lines of transmission even within the same

31 The five earlier identifications were made by the prolific Hebraist and Arabist Avraham Eliyahu Harkavy, who was employed at the Imperial Public Library as “extraordinary librarian” and later as “permanent librarian” between 1875 and his death in 1919, and carried out pioneering work in cataloguing the collection amassed by Abraham Firkovich (I thank Ms. Daria Vasyutinskaya for sharing with me her unpublished research on Harkavy). Harkavy’s identifications are publicly available in the catalog of the Institute for Hebrew Microfilmed Manuscripts at the National Library of Israel, and his cataloguing work is being continued by researchers at the Center for the Study of Judeo-Arabic Literature and Culture of the Ben-Zvi Institute in Jerusalem, Israel. A sixth identification of TY by Harkavy, registered in the library catalog (RNL Yevr.-Arab. I:276), is erroneous.

32 A. Shvitiel and F. Niessen, *Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collections: Taylor-Schechter New Series* (Cambridge 2006). Two fragments were erroneously identified as TY in the catalog and I will discuss them below.

version of the story, rather than the idiosyncrasies or additions of copyists, and is testimony to the fact that the composition was widely distributed in Jewish libraries of the period. I have not found evidence of the Huldreich version in Judeo-Arabic manuscripts, which supports the assumption that this version developed much later than the others. It may be an independent European development that never arrived in the Arabic-speaking world at all.

All of the fragments are in Eastern square or semicursive script. The work was likely popular among Karaites and Rabbanites alike, for a number of fragments are copied in script commonly considered “Karaite.” The majority of the manuscripts are fragmentary; only one, RNL Yevr.-Arab. I:3005, includes a nearly complete text. The oldest fragment of the Judeo-Arabic version likely dates to the late eleventh century, and the composition is attested in Judeo-Arabic manuscripts up until the twentieth century.³³ None of the Judeo-Arabic manuscript fragments located thus far includes a colophon or owner’s inscription, a situation that likely derives from the vagaries of fate as well as the controversial nature of the work. Nonetheless, many of the manuscripts demonstrate Egyptian dialectal features and likely originated in the Egyptian Jewish community during the Mamluk or Ottoman periods. A few early manuscripts, from the T-S NS and ENA collections, likely date to the Fatimid and Ayyubid periods.

In terms of content, the Judeo-Arabic versions largely represent the “Pilate” and “Helene” versions of TY as they are currently known.³⁴ In my discussion of the contents of the manuscripts below, I will refer to the numbering system in the summary of versions and plots used by Yaacov Deutsch, which differs to some extent from the division made by Di Segni.³⁵ I refer to the “Pilate”

33 I thank Dr. Edna Engel for her assistance in dating many of the manuscript fragments. The existence of twentieth-century manuscripts was revealed by a search in the catalogs of the Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts of the National Library of Israel; see below in the “Function” section of this article.

34 That is, as they are known in the versions represented in Deutsch (n. 7 above), p. 178 n. 3; Krauss (n. 5 above).

35 See Di Segni (n. 8 above), pp. 51–66; Deutsch (n. 5 above), pp. 8–17.

version in two forms, Pilate and Deutsch, in order to label sections contained in the additional texts published by the latter. One unique characteristic of the Judeo-Arabic versions is the addition of a polemical introductory section that survives in two manuscripts with similar but not identical texts.

Survey of linguistic issues:

The T-S NS and ENA manuscripts as a whole tend to Standard Judeo-Arabic Script (SJAS).³⁶ Their syntax and morphology exemplify features well-attested in high-register texts in Judeo-Arabic, including morphological characteristics such as the generalized lack of *alif fāṣila* and the conflation of Form I and Form IV verbs (for example, use of forms such as *uqīla*, “it is said”),³⁷ as well as the mingling of classical and dialectal syntax.³⁸

The majority of the Russian National Library manuscripts contrast to this characterization. They are, as a whole, later than the T-S NS and ENA fragments. Nearly all of them demonstrate *scriptio plena*, frequently characteristic of late (post-15th century) or popular manuscripts as well as of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century printed publications of Judeo-Arabic texts.³⁹ This *scriptio plena* is most frequent in vowel usage: in the RNL manuscripts, the u-vowel *damma* is frequently rendered as a full *waw* in verbs as well as in suffixed pronouns such as *-hu* and *-hum*. RNL Yevr.-Arab. I:1343 and RNL Yevr.-Arab. I:1345 include doublings of *waw* and *yod* when these letters are *matres lectiones*⁴⁰ as well as nonstandard spellings which interchange

36 For the use of this term, see Blau (n. 16 above), pp. 241–243.

37 See Blau (n. 16 above), p. 70; J. Blau, *A Grammar of Medieval Judeo-Arabic*, 2nd ed., (Jerusalem 1980) [Hebrew], pp. 75–77.

38 See Blau (n. 16 above), pp. 24–34, and references and addenda there.

39 Blau, *Grammar* (n. 37 above), pp. 20–23. *Scriptio plena* is characteristic of all of the RNL manuscripts except RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1033. To my knowledge, there are no fragments of the work in the pre-Saadyanic phonetic script known as EPJAS. I thank Prof. Simon Hopkins for his confirmation of this information.

40 See Blau, *Grammar* (n. 37 above), pp. 49–50.

tā and *ṭā*, and *sīn* and *ṣād*.⁴¹ At times this *scriptio plena* reflects non-classical pronunciations, such as the word for “man,” written *r.w.j.w.l* instead of the usual Judeo-Arabic spelling which mimics the classical Arabic spelling *r.j.l*.⁴²

The RNL manuscripts employ numerous colloquial usages, and for this reason can be categorized as “semi-standardized Middle Arabic” or “standardized neo-Arabic.”⁴³ This is most evident in verbs. One colloquial feature is the use of the *b-* prefix, which is a non-localized feature found in manuscripts from a variety of Arabic-speaking regions and derives from spoken Arabic usage as attested until today in Levantine dialects.⁴⁴ Other non-localized colloquial usages include expressions such as *ja’ la-‘enda* for “came to so-and-so.”⁴⁵

A significant number of the colloquial linguistic features of the RNL manuscripts suggest Egyptian origin. Historically speaking, this is not surprising, given that the majority of the manuscripts in the collection amassed by Abraham Firkovitch were acquired in Egypt.⁴⁶ Verb usage is one indication of this Egyptian origin: the manuscripts make extensive use of the form *nektebu* to indicate first-person plural, typical of manuscripts of Maghrebine/Egyptian origin.⁴⁷ Many of the fragments contain uniquely Egyptian lexemes, such as

41 On these phenomena, known as *tafkhīm* and *tarqīq*, see Blau, *Grammar* (n. 37 above), pp. 37–39; Blau (n. 16 above), p. 77.

42 As in RNL Yevr.-Arab. I:3005, 3r; RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1343, 1v.

43 As distinguished from the SJAS category cited above. See Blau (n. 16 above), p. 25, p. 239.

44 Blau (n. 16 above), p. 53, p. 65 n. 3. See also J. Blau, “The Reflection of Dialects in the Medieval Arabic of Jews,” *Tarbitz* 27 (1958–1959), pp. 83–92, esp. p. 91 n. 36.

45 As found extensively in RNL Yevr.-Arab. I:3005.

46 M. Ben-Sasson and Z. Elkin, “Abraham Firkovich and the Cairo Genizas in the Light of his Personal Archive,” *Peamim* 90 (2002) [Hebrew], pp. 51–95.

47 This feature is Maghrebine but even more so Cairene Egyptian. See Blau (n. 16 above), pp. 57–60, 250, and the literature noted there. See also B. H. Hary, *Translating Religion: Linguistic Analysis of Judeo-Arabic Sacred Texts from Egypt* (Leiden 2009), pp. 118–119, 135.

arāḥ(a) for “went”,⁴⁸ *bitā’* to indicate possession,⁴⁹ and *istaḥ’al* or *ifta’al*, “to fornicate with” (in describing the actions of Miriam’s neighbor).⁵⁰ Another Egyptian feature is the frequent use of the particles *di-* and *da-*, “this,” as well as their combination with the definite article as *dal/dil*.⁵¹ The significant use of the u-vowel, in place names such as Bughdād as the location of Yoḥanan’s flight, or words such as *mujrā* instead of the expected *majrā* and the example above of *r:w.j.w.l*, which reflects a non-standard pronunciation with initial u-vowel, is also indicative of Egyptian Arabic.⁵²

Judeo-Arabic texts generally include some degree of Hebrew and Aramaic vocabulary, which varies depending on authorial style, literary genre and audience.⁵³ The Judeo-Arabic versions of TY exemplify this characteristic. One use of Hebrew is found in fixed epithets: *al-ḥasīd*, “The Righteous Man,” to describe Mary’s husband and *al-rasha’*, “The Wicked Man,” to describe her neighbor. Others, also typical of standard Judeo-Arabic usage, describe Jewish theological concepts, such as *nidda*, “monthly menstrual period”; *mamzer*, “of illegitimate birth”; *bar nidda*, “son of the menstruant”; *al-ḥakham*, “the rabbi,” *bet ha-miqdash*, “the Temple,” and *shem ha-meforash/ al-shem ha-meforash*, “the Divine Name.”⁵⁴ Such Hebrew words are not translated into Judeo-Arabic, and they are normally adapted to Arabic structure as in the epithets above which employ the Arabic article with Hebrew lexemes. Other Hebrew lexemes are thoroughly Arabized in structure, as in the verb *inṭabal al-maṭbal*, to carry

48 This feature is typical of the Jewish Cairene Egyptian dialect, and is not related to the tendency noted above in which verb forms I and IV alternate in Judeo-Arabic. See J. Blau, *A Dictionary of Mediaeval Judaeo-Arabic Texts* (Jerusalem 2006), p. 263; Hary (n. 47 above), pp. 121, 135.

49 See M. Hinds and S. Badawi, *A Dictionary of Egyptian Arabic* (Beirut 1986), p. 51.

50 See Hinds and Badawi, pp. 663–664.

51 See Blau (n. 16 above), pp. 65–67.

52 On the use of u-vowels see Hary (n. 47 above), pp. 101–102, 134.

53 See Blau (n. 16 above), pp. 44–47, 133–166.

54 These examples are found in RNL Yevr.-Arab. I:3005.

out the ritual washing of *ṭevila*, or the adjective *ṭamia*, “impure” (feminine singular).⁵⁵ These usages are found in all manuscript versions of the composition.

One unique feature of the Judeo-Arabic versions is the intermittent translation of Hebrew words or concepts into Arabic or the addition of explanatory comments in Arabic. Such additions and explanations are not standardized throughout the manuscript fragments, and were likely added *ad hoc* in order to aid less educated Jewish readers who were unfamiliar with particular Hebrew terms. They may also have been a feature of oral narrative style, in which sentences and phrases are repeated in different wording.

For example, in describing the major feature of the introduction of *Toledot Yeshu*,⁵⁶ the fact that Miriam was in her menstrual period at the time of her neighbor’s aggression, nearly all manuscripts first use a mixture of Arabic and Hebrew: *wa-kānat miryam jozet yoḥanan fī al-nidda*, “And Miriam, Yoḥanan’s wife, was ‘in *nidda*’” but then add an Arabic phrase: *wa-hiya ba’ida ‘an jozha* “And she was separated from (lit. “distant from”) her husband.”⁵⁷ The Arabic phrase both clarifies and emphasizes the Hebrew statement. The Hebrew expression *ḥas ve-shalom*, “God forbid” is also translated as the Arabic phrase *ḥāshā wa-khalā*, meaning the same.⁵⁸

Another example relates to the rock in the Temple known in Hebrew as the *even ha-shetiyya*, which features in the Helene version of TY (Helene/3). One fragment of TY provides a Judeo-Arabic clarification of the rock: *ya’ni*

55 Both examples are found in RNL Yevr.-Arab. I:3005, 5r. On *inṭabal*, see Blau (n. 48 above), p. 395. The word *ṭamia* is written with an *alef* at the end instead of the *he* which would be expected of SJAS; this phenomenon is described in Blau, *Grammar* (n. 37 above), p. 44.

56 According to the “Helene” version and according to the “Pilate” version with the additions published in Deutsch, “New Evidence.”

57 This phrase is found in RNL Yevr.-Arab. I:3005, 5r, as well as in RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1343, 1v. This usage does not seem to be a technical term in Judeo-Arabic, and the expression is repeated in at least one Hebrew version as well: *nivdelet mi-ba’la she-hi be-niddatah*, “separated from her husband because she was menstruating,” (MS Vindobona, as rendered in Krauss [n. 5 above], p. 64.).

58 RNL Yevr.-Arab. I:3005, 5r.

ḥajar al-sakhra (!), “that is, the rock on the Temple Mount.”⁵⁹ *Ṣakhra* is the word for “stone” that is applied specifically to the rock found on the Temple Mount, and *qubbat al-ṣakhra* is the Arabic name for the Dome of the Rock. The Arabic expression thus means literally “the rock of the rock,” and this additional comment is not a translation, but rather a rendering of the concept in terms familiar in the Arabic-Islamic sphere. One recension adds further information without translating the name of the stone into Arabic: *Wa-kān fī bayt al-maqdis ḥajar wa-ismuha even ha-shetiyya wa-hiya al-ḥajar alladhī ṣabba ‘alayha ya ‘qov avinu al-duhn*, “In the Temple there was a stone called ‘The Libation Stone,’ and it is the stone that Jacob anointed with oil.”⁶⁰

The interplay of Hebrew and Arabic is also evident in proper names. Many of the names in the composition are translated into Arabic, and these translations are not standard throughout the manuscript recensions. Again, this type of variation likely attests to the widespread nature of the composition among Jews in the Arabic-speaking world. The title of the female ruler in the Judeo-Arabic “Helene” versions varies: some manuscripts call her *malika*⁶¹ or “Helene *malika*,” others call her *sultāna*.⁶² RNL Yevr.-Arab. I:3005 labels her *malika* and adds that she is *jozet al-malik qaysar* (!) *fī balad qushtantina*, “the wife of King Caesar in the city of Constantinople.” The titles of the characters connected to the court in the “Pilate” versions also vary: One recension speaks of *Pilātūs al-qā'id* and his ruler *qaysar* (!) *al-malik*;⁶³ one of the scholars is *al-shaykh al-kabīr Mārīnus*. In another, the ruler’s name is

59 The spelling found here in Judeo-Arabic (in RNL Yevr.-Arab. I:3005, 6v) is an instance of *tarqīq*.

60 This sentence is found in T-S NS 298.57, 1v. I thank Prof. Gideon Bohak for generously sharing with me his readings of this manuscript fragment. An addition that is similar but not identical is found in RNL Yevr.-Arab. I:3005, cited above.

61 As in T-S NS 298.57 and T-S NS 164.26; in many of the manuscripts, the word is spelled with a final *alef* rather than *heh*; on this feature, which is common in both high- and low-register texts, see Blau, *Grammar* (n. 37 above), p. 44.

62 RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1993, 1v.

63 T-S NS 246.24, 1r.

Ṭabarīnus qaysar instead.⁶⁴ In one fragment, the ruler *Ṭabarīnus* has a *wazīr* named *Qorodus* (!) or *Horodus*.⁶⁵ In many of the Helene versions, the names of Miriam's husband and neighbor interchange.⁶⁶ This is not the case in the Judeo-Arabic manuscripts: three of the manuscript fragments described here include the early sections of the story in which these characters feature, and in all of them, Miriam's husband is Yoḥanan and her neighbour is Yosef Pandera.⁶⁷ Judah the Gardener's name varies between the versions. Certain usages seem imported directly from Aramaic, as in Yehuda *Bustanai* and Yehuda *al-Gannān* or Yehuda *Gannana*; other usages are Arabic, as in Yehuda *Khawlī*.⁶⁸

Manuscript details: Russian National Library⁶⁹

All of the manuscript versions of TY in the collections of the Russian National Library that I have identified thus far belong to the "Helene" type. Many of them date post-15th century, with orthography typical of late and popular manuscripts. Many of them employ colloquial Arabic verb forms and syntax, much of it in Egyptian dialect.

RNL Yevr.-Arab. I:3005

This manuscript was identified by Harkavy as TY.⁷⁰ It contains seven folios,

64 T-S NS 298.55.

65 RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1343; RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1345.

66 Deutsch (n. 5 above), p. 10, p. 45.

67 The fragments are: RNL Yevr.-Arab. I:3005, RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1343 and RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1345.

68 Respectively, T-S NS 246.24, T-S NS 298.55 and RNL Yevr.-Arab. I:3005. The word *khawlī* appears in standard Arabic dictionaries but is also discussed in Blau (n. 48 above), p. 200.

69 I gratefully acknowledge the help of Prof. Bruno Chiesa, who provided me with the shelfmarks of a number of unidentified Judeo-Arabic fragments on Christian themes in the collections of the RNL, and Dr. David Sklare, who provided me with the shelfmarks of unidentified fragments described in the Russian handlists as relating to Jesus or to polemic.

70 See also P. Fenton, *A Handlist of Judeo-Arabic Manuscripts in Leningrad* (Jerusalem 1991), p. 121.

with 24 to 28 lines per page of very small and cramped Eastern semicursive script. Large square letters are used intermittently for headings, and the graphic filler is an elongated final letter. The manuscript includes extensive use of Maghrebine/Egyptian plural forms and colloquial verb forms as well as *scriptio plena*, and likely dates to the 13th-14th century. It contains a nearly complete version of the Helene type: it begins with the story of Yoḥanan's wife Miriam and her neighbor Yosef, and lacks only the first page.

RNL Yevr.-Arab. I:3014

This manuscript was identified by Harkavy as TY. It contains one folio, with 17 lines per page of broad Eastern semicursive script. Jesus' name is written as a *notariqon* with dots over each letter. It includes extensive use of Maghrebine/Egyptian plural forms and colloquial verb forms as well as *scriptio plena*, and likely dates to the 13th-14th century. The manuscript contains a section from Helene/10.

RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:919

This manuscript was identified by Harkavy as TY.⁷¹ It contains four folios, with 15 to 19 lines per page of Eastern semicursive script, and with catchwords. It likely dates to the 15th century or later. The first page has the Hebrew letter *dalet* marking the signature. Jesus' name is written with one dash above the name. It includes extensive use of Maghrebine/Egyptian plural forms and colloquial usage as well as *scriptio plena*. Folio 1v is parallel to I:3005 folio 4v. It contains a section from Helene/11.

RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1033

This manuscript was catalogued by Harkavy as "Folktale" and was identified by Bruno Chiesa as TY. The manuscript contains one folio with 18–19 lines per page. It is written in Eastern semicursive script and can be dated to the

71 See also Fenton, p. 51.

12th or 13th century. Its orthography and usage are classical. The folio is quite damaged and parts of it are illegible. It contains a section from Helene/10.

RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1036

This shelfmark is a collection of *muqaddimāt*, theological and ethical homilies based on biblical verses and associated with particular pericopes.⁷² Bruno Chiesa identified a section of TY in folios 120–125. The folios have 17 lines per page and are a further section of the same manuscript as RNL Yevr.-Arab. I:3014 described above (Eastern semicursive script dating to the 13th or 14th century). Folio 123r is parallel to RNL Yevr.-Arab. I:3005, folio 3r. The fragment includes extensive use of Maghrebine/Egyptian plural forms and colloquial verb forms as well as *scriptio plena*. It contains a section from Helene/11.

RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1343

This manuscript was catalogued by Harkavy as “Folktale about Yoḥanan and his wife” and I have identified it as the beginning of TY. It contains one folio in a late yet conservative script, which may be Karaite, and dates later than the 13th century. The orthography is typical of late Judeo-Arabic manuscripts, and includes a large degree of *scriptio plena*. There is frequent replacement of *sīn* with *ṣād* as well as conflation of *tā* and *ṭā*.⁷³ The verso ends with long and extended lines and it is likely that the scribe was completing the missing first page of an already existing manuscript. The manuscript contains an introduction in Judeo-Arabic and the beginning of the Helene version (Helene/1).

72 Authors composed in this genre during the 14th-15th centuries, and their exact function and usage (whether in the synagogue or in the home) is unclear. *Muqaddimāt* may possibly be written renderings of sermons which were originally delivered orally. Little is known about this genre, and I thank Dr. David Sklare for this information.

73 This phenomenon of *tafkhīm* involves replacements such as *ṣultān* for *ṣultān* “ruler”, *ikhtāra* for *iktāra* “chose”.

RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1345

This manuscript was also catalogued by Harkavy as “Folktale about Yoḥanan and his wife” and I have identified it as the beginning of TY. It contains one folio with 24 lines per page and likely dates to the 15th century. One side has a faded and illegible inscription. The orthography includes some degree of *scriptio plena*. The manuscript contains an introduction similar to that of RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1343, but the versions exhibit many differences in orthography and vocabulary and are likely to be independent recensions. It also contains the beginning of the Helene version (Helene/1).

RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1993

This manuscript was likewise catalogued by Harkavy as “Folktale about Yoḥanan and his wife” and I have identified it as a fragment of TY. It contains one folio with 19 lines per page and dates to the 14th or 15th century. The orthography includes some use of *scriptio plena*; verbs display a degree of colloquial usage and Maghrebine/Egyptian plural forms. The manuscript contains themes from the beginning of the Helene version of the story, including Helene/2.

RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:2035

This manuscript was catalogued by Harkavy as “Folktale about Jesus” and I have identified it as a fragment of TY. It contains one folio in Eastern semicursive script dating to the 14th century or later, and may be of Karaite provenance.⁷⁴ The orthography includes significant *scriptio plena* and verb usage is frequently colloquial. The manuscript contains themes from the Helene version of the story, including Helene/5.

74 Due to the conservative nature of this kind of script, the manuscript dating is uncertain.

RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:2550

This manuscript was catalogued by Harkavy as an 18th century fragment of a “Homily on Jesus,” and I was able to confirm the suggestion of Bruno Chiesa and David Sklare that this manuscript contains one folio of *Toledot Yeshu*. The orthography includes a significant degree of *scriptio plena* and verb usage is frequently colloquial. The manuscript contains themes from the Helene version of the story, including Helene/9.

RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1092

This manuscript was catalogued as “Polemic against Christianity.” I have identified it as a fragment of TY containing a section from Helene/11. It contains one folio with 12 lines per page of Eastern semicursive script which can be dated to the 14th or 15th century. Its orthography and usage are classical. Its graphic filler is an elongated letter or alternatively the first letter of the next word, with a dot.

At least one manuscript in the Russian collections is mistakenly labeled as TY. MS. RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:276 is a fragment of *Qiṣṣat mujādalat al-usquf*, and can be added to the list compiled by Lasker and Stroumsa.⁷⁵

Manuscript details: Cambridge (Taylor-Schechter)

The Judeo-Arabic TY fragments in the Taylor-Schechter collections include sections of the “Pilate”/“Deutsch” and “Helene” versions. These manuscripts are for the most part older than the RNL fragments and many of them are in square and even monumental script. I have reviewed all of the manuscripts identified by Shvitiel and Niessen,⁷⁶ and include here a short description of each. This description is intended to complement the description already provided in the catalogue by providing manuscript date where possible as well

75 See Lasker and Stroumsa (n. 25 above), vol. I, pp. 40–48.

76 See note 32.

as identification of the specific content of each fragment and the version from which it derives.

T-S NS 164.26

13th–14th century Eastern semicursive script with classical orthography and usage, contains a section of Helene/5.

T-S NS 224.123

12th–13th century monumental square script with classical orthography and usage, contains sections from Pilate/1 and/or Deutsch/7.

T-S NS 246.24

12th-13th century Eastern semicursive script with classical orthography and usage, contains sections from Deutsch/7, 9–12.

T-S NS 298.55

Late 11th-early 12th century Eastern semicursive script with classical orthography and usage, contains sections from Deutsch/5–9.

T-S NS 298.57

12th century Eastern semicursive script, contains sections from Helene/2.

Two fragments identified as TY in the catalog, T-S NS 298.49 and T-S NS 298.58, do not seem to me to be fragments of this work.

Manuscript details: Elkan Nathan Adler (JTS)

I have identified two fragments of the composition in the Adler collection of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

ENA 3317.21

1 folio with 18 lines per page in square script from the second half of the

11th century or the 12th century. The orthography is entirely classical, and even includes the *alif fāṣila*. The fragment contains a section from Helene/5.

ENA NS 52.20

A collection of very small fragments in semicursive script from the 13th-14th century. These fragments appear to contain sections from Helene/9 or Pilate/5.

Miscellaneous fragments

A number of Judeo-Arabic fragments treat related themes but do not seem to be fragments of *Toledot Yeshu*. Some of them appear to be Judeo-Arabic translations of certain Talmudic stories about Jesus. For example, RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1604 is a Judeo-Arabic translation of the well-known Talmudic story relating the visit of Jesus and his master Joshua b. Peraḥya to an inn as found in BT Sanh. 107b. The Cambridge fragment T-S NS 298.49 contains descriptions of Jesus' miracles and his arrival in Jerusalem, as well as his execution and the theme of the ruler who calls for "whoever can offer an argument on his behalf, (to) come forward and speak" (*kol mi she-yodea' lo zekhut yavo' we-yelammed*).⁷⁷

Function of the Judeo-Arabic *Toledot Yeshu*

As demonstrated by the manuscript evidence described above, TY existed in numerous and independent manuscript versions in Judeo-Arabic, and was apparently a popular work among Jews in Arabic-speaking environments. This significant attestation aptly represents the continuing popularity during medieval times of Judeo-Arabic polemics written by Jews against Christianity. Such compositions are attested more frequently in Arabic and Judeo-Arabic

⁷⁷ This account can be found in an uncensored Babylonian Talmud manuscript of Yemenite origin, MS Jerusalem Yad Harav Herzog 1, Tractate Sanhedrin (parallel to 43a in the common printed editions). I thank Dr. Ezra Chwat for this reference.

manuscript collections than are polemical compositions written against Islam, and were clearly in demand by Jewish readers.⁷⁸

The significant attestation of anti-Christian polemics is surprising, given that few new works in this genre were composed in Judeo-Arabic after the tenth century. Furthermore, it would seem that anti-Muslim polemic was a more pressing need, required in order to combat pressures to convert on the part of Muslim governing bodies or the incentive to convert implicit in the allure of governmental positions.⁷⁹

The examination of particular details relating to the context of the Judeo-Arabic versions of TY can help explain its significant attestation in the Arabic-Islamic environment.

One fundamental and principal reason for the continued interest in polemics against Christianity in the Arabic-Islamic environment was that Christianity remained a rival religion and a doctrinal challenge to Judaism, a challenge that existed regardless of who held political power. This doctrinal challenge was likely intensified by the Arabization of both Jews and Christians under Islam, and the fact that both groups thrived intellectually during the early Islamic centuries. Christian theology and doctrine were alive and flourishing in Arabic as well as in other languages, and Christian Bible interpretation in particular presented a challenge to Jewish scholars and lay people alike.⁸⁰ Furthermore, under Islamic rule, Christians were a relatively safe target, and such polemics

78 See Szilágyi (n. 22 above), pp. 112–114.

79 For an example of the latter motivation see M. Cohen and S. Somekh, “In the Court of Ya’qūb Ibn Killis: A Fragment from the Cairo Genizah,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 80, no. 3/4 (1990), pp. 283–314. The former motivation was often moderated by the desire of Muslim rulers to maintain levels of income provided by the *jizya* poll tax paid by members of *dhimmi* religious communities.

80 There is now extensive scholarship on the prolific Arabic-language creation of Christian scholars during the Islamic period, especially during the ninth and tenth centuries. See most recently Griffith (n. 4 above); D. Thomas, *Early Muslim polemic against Christianity: Abu Isa al-Warraq’s “Against the Incarnation”* (New York 2002), pp. 3–20. Christian Bible interpretation likely played a role in spurring Jews to place renewed importance on scholarly genres related to Bible study in the ninth and tenth centuries.

could be composed and transmitted without fear of significant reprisal.⁸¹ It has also been suggested that Jews turned to polemical works in order to satisfy their curiosity about Christianity.⁸²

There are two additional factors that ensured the continued popularity of TY and which can explain its significant attestation in Judeo-Arabic. One factor is particular to Egypt, the likely origin of most of the fragments that I have located. The Christian presence in Egypt was strong: the Copts, as Christian Egyptians were known, had, according to tradition, adopted Christianity in the first century, and at the time of the Islamic conquest they were clearly a majority in the region.⁸³ The Copts were likely still numerous in the eleventh century and beyond, although no longer a majority, and thus Christians were clearly a significant part of the population in Egypt.

Furthermore, Christians held significant political power even under Muslim rule. Conflict between Jews and Christians living in Egypt was motivated in part by their parallel positions as protected populations, “People of the Book”, and their ensuing competition for the favor of the ruling Muslims: while the majority of government officials were Muslims, Jews and Christians were disproportionately represented in governmental circles.⁸⁴ This competition seems to have been most prominent during Fatimid and Ayyubid rule — a period well-represented in the manuscript fragments of TY described above. Conflict between Coptic officials and the Jewish Egyptian population was a fixed feature of the period.⁸⁵ Such negative feelings towards Christians in Egypt could have

81 That said, the danger factor was not necessarily a decisive one regarding the composition of polemics, for Jews polemicized against Christianity even in Europe, where reprisal was indeed a significant threat.

82 See S. Stroumsa, “On the Usefulness of Faulty Manuscripts for Understanding Polemical Literature,” *Peanim* 75 (1998), pp. 97–100.

83 See for example the population estimate cited in the article “*Ḳibṭ*” by A. S. Atiya, in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 5 (Leiden 1995), p. 90.

84 N. A. Stillman, “The non-Muslim communities: the Jewish community,” in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, ed. M. W. Daly (Cambridge 1998), pp. 198–210, esp. p. 206.

85 M. Cohen, *Jewish self-government in medieval Egypt: the origins of the office of head of the Jews, ca. 1065–1126* (Princeton 1980), pp. 52–53; E. Ashtor, *History of the Jews of*

encouraged the transmission of anti-Christian works including TY. That is to say, contemporaneous political realities intensified an enmity originating in the fundamental doctrinal challenge discussed above.

The relationship between the Jewish and Christian communities in Egypt during the Mamluk period is less clear. During this time, governmental toleration for both the Jewish and the Christian populations was on the wane.⁸⁶ The increase in anti-Christian sentiment among Muslims was a reaction to Coptic power and wealth as well as to the suspicion that these resident Middle Eastern Christians were serving as surreptitious accomplices to the Mongols and to Crusaders arriving from the west. Such anti-Christian sentiment among the Muslim rulers at times spilled over into actions against the Jewish community.⁸⁷ Christians no longer held powerful — and provocative — governmental positions during the Mamluk period, but Jewish enmity toward them continued, and Jews continued to indulge in the reading of TY. This continued interest in TY during the Mamluk and Ottoman periods was in part an inheritance of the past political as well as the ongoing doctrinal conflicts described above, but also derived from a second element specifically relevant to TY in Judeo-Arabic — its literary function in the Arabic-speaking environment.

As polemics go, TY was eminently readable. Many other polemics, of the more intellectual doctrinal variety mentioned above, were complex and confusing to the average reader, since they were frequently written in the technique of the theological school known as the *kalām*. Such polemics were

Egypt and Syria under the Mamluk Sultanate, 3 vols., (Jerusalem 1944–1951) [Hebrew], vol. I, p. 347. A specific example of this conflict is the account of the interreligious *majlis* in the court of the Fatimid caliph al-Mu‘izz, with its theme of jealousy between Christian and Jewish leaders and an ensuing public disputation. On this, see M. R. Cohen and S. Somekh, “Interreligious Majalis in Early Fatimid Egypt,” in *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, eds. H. Lazarus-Yafeh et al. (Wiesbaden 1999), pp. 128–136; S. Y. Labib, “Abraham, Saint,” in *The Coptic Encyclopedia* (New York 1989), vol. 1, pp. 10–11.

86 Stillman (n. 84 above), pp. 208–210.

87 Ashtor (n. 85 above), pp. 337–340; R. Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages: The Early Mamluk Sultanate, 1250–1382* (London and Carbondale 1986), pp. 98–99, 109–114.

relatively inaccessible to the majority of the population who were not scholars or intellectuals. TY is written on a popular level and was understandable and likely even amusing, regardless of whether or not readers were familiar with the details of Jesus' biography in their original form.

Yet over and above its readability, TY's popularity in the Arabic-speaking context likely derived from an additional factor. Manuscript evidence suggests that the Judeo-Arabic version of TY functioned as a folktale.⁸⁸ Judeo-Arabic TY is included in numerous post-sixteenth-century manuscripts, often identified simply as *qovets*, "collection," together with numerous well-known folk narratives in Judeo-Arabic. For example, a sixteenth or seventeenth century manuscript (British Library Or. 10435; Gaster 1328) includes a collection of such Judeo-Arabic folk narratives, including TY along with well-known favorites such as *Ma'ase Avraham ve-Nimrod*, *Divrei Ha-yammim le-Moshe*, and *Ma'ase Zerubavel ve-Ester*.⁸⁹ Nineteenth-century versions of the work in Judeo-Arabic are well-attested. A nineteenth-century pamphlet from Yemen (Jewish National and University Library MS Heb. 28° 5187) includes Judeo-Arabic TY along with popular Bible sermons and various midrashim, folk narratives, poems and a popular guide to astrology. Another nineteenth-century manuscript (Jewish National and University Library MS Heb. 8° 3397, completed in the year 1810) is a pamphlet of 89 pages, which includes Judeo-Arabic TY along with folk narratives such as *Peṭirat Moshe Rabennu*, the

88 David Biale has suggested this classification for the Hebrew versions of TY, in Biale (note 3 above). Eli Yassif also implicitly classifies TY as such by including a short discussion in E. Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning* (Jerusalem 1994), p. 306. However, in the European context in which the Hebrew versions circulated, this classification would not have had the practical implications of the Arabic-speaking context. The Persian context seems to have been similar to the Arabic one. According to Fischel, TY was not only a polemical work but also a 'Wunderschrift', a story about miracles, and hence Jewish interest in the work also derived from "Lust am Fabulieren", the joy of telling stories. See W. J. Fischel, "Eine jüdisch-persische "Toldoth Jeschu"-Handschrift," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 78, no. 3 (1934), pp. 343–350.

89 See discussion of these tales in Yassif (n. 88 above), p. 52 and p. 83, respectively.

Alphabet of Ben-Sira, a midrash on Moses and assorted riddles.⁹⁰ Finally, Judeo-Arabic TY was frequently appended to the Yemenite prayerbook, the *Tiklāl*, together with other folk narratives such as *Peṭirat Moshe Rabenu and Eldad ha-Danī*, as well as texts with religious-liturgical functions such as *Tafsīr al-‘ashar kalimāt*.⁹¹

The popular and dialectal linguistic features noted above strengthen the suggestion that Judeo-Arabic TY functioned in popular and public contexts as a folk narrative, for these features are also significantly attested in this genre of Judeo-Arabic work, as preserved in manuscripts in the collections of the Russian National Library.⁹²

This genre classification would have had clear practical significance in the Arabic-speaking world. Folk narratives in Arabic were performed publicly.⁹³ Classifying TY as folklore would mean that it was an amusing story that was not only read for pleasure, but also performed in public contexts, like other Arabic tales as well as the many other Judeo-Arabic works of this genre held in the collections of the RNL.⁹⁴ Classification as folklore would not negate the

90 Another similar example is MS Tel Aviv, Ha-Levi 14.

91 Examples can be found in the nineteenth-century MS Jerusalem, Krupp 1990 / Mehlman 15 and MS Jewish National and University Library Heb. 4° 949 (dated to 1707). Dr. Uri Melammed informs me that the section including such stories (usually called *quṣṣāt* by Yemenite Jews) is a standard feature of the *Tiklāl* in both the *baladī* and *shāmī* traditions, and that Yemenite Jews frequently modified the language of the story in order to render the Egyptian or standard Judeo-Arabic linguistic features understandable to speakers of their dialect.

92 This observation is made on the basis of my own perusal of such folktales in these collections. I thank the Center for the Study of Judaeo-Arabic Culture and Literature of the Ben-Zvi Institute for providing me with access to materials relating to Judeo-Arabic folktales that have been collected as part of their cataloguing project of the Judeo-Arabic collections of the Russian National Library.

93 On folktales in the Arabic-speaking world during medieval times and their performance, see H. T. Norris, "Fables and legends," in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Abbasid Belles Lettres*, eds. J. Ashtiany et al. (Cambridge 1990), pp. 136–145; R. Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (London 2005), pp. 103–119.

94 There is little scholarship on folktales in Judeo-Arabic. Rachel Hasson is preparing her doctoral dissertation at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on this genre in the Judeo-Arabic

polemical value of the narrative — indeed, many folktales include significant polemical intent. However, the function of TY in dramatic and public contexts could further explain continued Jewish interest in the work even in contexts where the polemical impulse played less of a role.⁹⁵

Features of the Judeo-Arabic manuscripts

I will conclude with discussion of a characteristic likely unique to the Judeo-Arabic versions of TY. Two of the Judeo-Arabic manuscript fragments, dated to the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, include an introduction preceding the narrative.⁹⁶ The fragments consist of one folio each, and contain the entire brief introduction. This feature is not attested in the Hebrew versions of TY or in the versions in other languages.⁹⁷

Introductions were a fixed feature of Arabic composition from the ninth century onward, and were adopted by Jews who composed in Arabic. Modern

collections of the Russian National Library, and notes that the significant attestation of manuscripts of folktales found in these collections suggests that such stories were performed publicly in Jewish communities in the Arabic-speaking world. One isolated reference to Judeo-Arabic folktales can be found in S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, 5 vols. (Berkeley 1967–1993), vol. III, p. 358. The Jewish convert to Islam Samaw'al al-Maghribi notes that his early reading as a youth included fables and heroic narratives; see M. Perlmann, "Samau'al Al-Maghribi, Ifham al-Yahud (Silencing the Jews)," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 32 (1964), pp. 5–136: Arabic text, pp. 98–99; English, pp. 77–78. For one of the few studies of a Judeo-Arabic folktale, see H. Palva, "A 17th–18th Century Manuscript in Spoken Egyptian Arabic: Part one: Text and translation," *Le Muséon* 120, no. 3–4 (2007), pp. 395–433.

95 Comparison is instructive here. This second consideration cannot explain the continued interest during this period in other anti-Christian polemical texts such as *Qiṣṣat mujādalat al-usqif*, and, notably, the fact that Jews began to include TY in collections of folk narratives caused TY to become significantly more widespread than *Qiṣṣa*, as attested up until the twentieth century.

96 RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1343 and RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1345.

97 The Judeo-Persian version of TY begins with a short "motto" composed of biblical verses, distinct from the type of introduction discussed here. See Fischel (n. 88 above), p. 346.

scholarship on the introduction in Arabic and Judeo-Arabic has focused on theological, philosophical and scientific works.⁹⁸

Folktales often began with introductions as well. Such introductions can be found in tales preserved in manuscripts⁹⁹ as well as in the numerous printed versions used in Arabic-speaking Jewish communities up to the present.¹⁰⁰ Yet in most instances, the introduction is an element distinct from the tale itself, and is not linked to it in any particular way. The TY introduction is unique. It is composed in the fixed introductory style typical of Arabic compositions from the ninth century onward, yet combines this style with Jewish textual tradition in order to create a clever transition into the familiar opening of TY.

The introduction begins with a *tahmūd*, a section in praise of God. As is common in such introductions in Judeo-Arabic, the praise of God focuses on a theme related to the composition introduced — in this case, God’s power to reward the righteous and to punish the misguided or wicked. Following the initial *tahmūd*, the identities of the righteous and the wicked are specified: God preserves the *awliyā’*, those close to him, from the wicked, “who are the heretical Christian people” (*alladhī (!) hum qawm al-naṣārā al-kāfirīn*). As part of this protection, states the introduction, God sent “the cursed Jesus” (*al-man‘ūl*¹⁰¹ (!) *yashu’/yasu’*) to the Christians, and he was responsible for leading them astray, and causing them to worship “wood and idols” (*al-khashab*

98 On the Arabic introduction, see the article “Mukaddima” by P. Freimark, in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Leiden 1995), pp. 495–496; A. Chraïbi, “L’émergence du genre muqaddima dans la littérature arabe,” in *Entrer en matière: les prologues*, eds. J. D. Dubois and B. Roussel (Paris 1998). On the Judeo-Arabic genre of introductions see S. Stroumsa, “A Literary Genre as an Historical Document: On Saadia’s Introductions to his Bible Commentaries,” in “A Word Fitly Spoken”: *Studies in Qur’an and Bible Exegesis, Presented to Haggai Ben-Shammai*, ed. M. Bar-Asher, et al. (Jerusalem 2007) [Hebrew], pp. 193–204; M. Goldstein, ““Arabic Composition 101” and the Early Development of Judeo-Arabic Bible Exegesis,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* (forthcoming Fall 2010).

99 I thank Rachel Hasson for this information based on her manuscript research.

100 For one example of many, see *Sefer Qiṣṣat Ester*, ed. J. al-Shamsāny (Baghdad 1892).

101 This inversion of letters of *mal’ūn*, “cursed,” is typical of spoken Arabic dialects but I have not found any discussion of the linguistic phenomenon.

wal-aṣnām). The introduction concludes with the observation that the Jews attempted to return Jesus to the correct theological path, without success.

This observation provides a transition to the familiar TY plot. Indeed, the Jews tried their best to bring Jesus back into the fold; however, they failed and disaster ensued. The transition is provided by a familiar midrash from BT Megilla 10b: “In our sources (*‘endana*), every place where it is written ‘and it came to pass’ (*wayyehi*) portends great adversity, as it is said ‘And it came to pass in the days of Tiberius Caesar...(wayyehi bi-yemei Ṭabarīnus qaysor (!))’”.¹⁰² The midrash is rendered in Judeo-Arabic, and instead of the usual biblical verses that follow it, we find the beginning of TY, in Hebrew! Here, a classical rabbinic text provides a key element that modulates between the Arabic-styled introduction and the account of TY.

After the Hebrew phrase the story continues in Judeo-Arabic. The quotation of the first few words of the composition in Hebrew likely indicates familiarity with a Hebrew original, and this quotation may even have been a fixed feature of the Judeo-Arabic versions of TY. This strengthens the suggestion that the Judeo-Arabic versions were translated from a Hebrew source.

Appendix: Text of the introduction

The following is the text of the introduction found in RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1345, 1r and paralleled in RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1343. I have transcribed diacritical markings as found in the original manuscript. The fragment includes a significant degree of *scriptio plena* and semi-standardized Middle Arabic.

תבאוך אלה אלאה ישראל כאלק אלסמאואת ואלאראצ'י בקודרתהי ועטמתהי וואהלך אלגבאברה אלכאפרין ואכתר פי אלאחבאב אלצאלחין רב אלארבאב מסבב אלאסבאב ומועתק אלארקבא ומסייר אלסחאב סולטאן אלסלאטין אלטאיק אלמין אלק אלמבין כאסר אלמושרכין וקאמי אלכאפרין ומוהלך אלט'אלמין ומביד אלטאלחין וואפג' אלאוליא ואלצאלחין אלדי כלץ בני ישראל מן אלפראענא אלדי הום קום אלנצארה אלכאפרין אלדי

102 This midrash is paralleled in Ruth Rabbah 1:7; Lev. Rabbah 11:7; Num. Rabbah 13:5; Esther Rabbah 1:11.

אעטאהום אלמנעול ישוע הנצרי ולמהום וראה פי אלכופר אלשדיד בגהלו אלעטים ואתלף קאעדתהם באלשורה אלמלעונוא ועבדהום אלכשב ואלאצנאם ואהלכה אללה ס'ת' פי אקל מן אלאיאם עלאשאן כופרו ותוגיו וקאסו מנהו ישראל שדאיד כתיר ואראדו אנהם ירגעוה ולא רגע לאן ענדנא כל מוצ'ע אלדי פיה ויהי יט'הר לנא ען שדאיד כתיר מתל מא קאל ויהי בימי טברינוס קיסור הורודוס וזירו פי דיך אלאיאם וכאן טהר רגל מן נסל דוד המלך על' ה' וכאן אסמהו יוחנן וכאן להו אמראה חסנת אלמנצ'ר ואסמהא מרים וכאן גוזהא כאיף מן אללה וכאן מן תלאמיד רבי שמעון בן שטח ע'אס' כאן להו גאר רשע ואסמהו יוסף פנדירא ואלרשע כאן מפסוד קאוי וכאן דאמיא' עינו מא ישילהא מן אלנסא וחט עינו עלא גוזת יוחנן אלמדכור וכאן פי חודש ניסן פי בעד כרוג פסח וכאן דלך אלחסידי יקום ללישיבות פי אלליל פקאם לילה מן אלליאלי לאגל מא יקום ללישיבה והו ביגלק אלבאב.

Translation:

Praised be God, the God of Israel, creator of the heavens and the earth with his power and greatness, [who]¹⁰³ destroyed the infidel tyrants and showed preference to the beloved righteous. Master of masters, motivator of all heavenly forces, liberator of the bound, mover of clouds, ruler of rulers, the all-powerful and the staunch, the clear truth, the destroyer of the polytheists and humbler of the infidels and destroyer of the oppressors and exterminator of the wicked. Protector of those close to him and the righteous, who saved the children of Israel from the Pharaohs, who are the Christian infidel people, and who gave them the cursed Jesus the Nazarene, and who caused them to follow his severe blasphemy¹⁰⁴ in his great ignorance, and caused their leaders to perish by means of cursed counsel and caused them to worship wood and idols, and God, the blessed and exalted, caused him to perish within a short time because of his blasphemy and overstepping of bounds. And Israel suffered great difficulties on his account and they tried to return him [to the correct path], but they could not, because in our sources, every place where it is written *wayyehi* indicates great difficulties, as it is said, "In the time (*wayyehi bi-yemei*) of Tiberias Caesar [and] his minister Herod," in those days there was a man of the line of King

103 The original reads "and" as if the previous phrase had been *alladhī khalaqa*, "who created" instead of *khāliq*, "creator." I translate in accordance with the intent of the parallel phrases.

104 Lit. "gathered them behind him in severe blasphemy."

David, of blessed memory, and his name was Yoḥanan, and he had a beautiful wife whose name was Miriam. Her husband was a God-fearing man, and was one of the students of Rabbi Shim'on ben Shataḥ, of blessed memory. He had a wicked neighbor named Yosef Pandera, and that wicked man was quite dishonorable, and he was always looking at the women. He coveted the wife of that Yoḥanan, and it was the month of Nisan immediately after the beginning of the Passover, and that righteous man (Yoḥanan) would rise to go to the *yeshiva* at night. So one night he arose to go the *yeshiva*, locking the door...