Judas Iscariot: Revealer of the Hidden Truth*

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Tristram Shandy, in Laurence Sterne's famous novel by that name, dwells upon the reasons of his father, Walter Shandy, in giving him his name. First, he elaborates on his father's theory of names: "His opinion, in this matter, was, That there was a strange kind of magic bias, which good or bad names, as he called them, irresistibly impressed upon our characters and conduct."[1] To sustain this argument he brings as an example the name Judas:

> Your son! – your dear son, – from whose sweet and open temper you have so much to expect. – Your BILLY, Sir! – would you, for the world, have called him JUDAS? (…) – Would you, Sir, if a Jew of a godfather had proposed the name for your child, and offered you his purse along with it, would you have consented to such a desecration of him? (…) – If I know your temper right, Sir, – you are incapable of it; – you would have trampled upon the offer; – you would have thrown the temptation at the tempter's head with abhorrence. Your greatness of mind in this action, which I admire, with that generous contempt of money, which you shew me in the whole transaction, is really noble; – and what renders it more so, is the principle of it; – the workings of a parent's love upon the truth and conviction of this very hypothesis, namely, That was your son called Judas – the sordid and treacherous idea, so inseparable from the name, would have accompanied him through life like his shadow, and, in the end, made a miser and a rascal of him, in spite, Sir, of your example.[2]

A somewhat similar claim was put forward lately, though for different reasons, by the noted Israeli author, Abraham B. Yehoshua. In an article published in the newspaper *Ha'aretz*, Yehoshua issued a call to forego the description of Israel as "the Jewish state." In his opinion, the name "Israel" is the proper name of the country and of the people who reside in it. According to Yehoshua, since the time of the Bible and throughout the age of the Exile, the word "Jew" has carried a negative connotation, because it evokes "the memory of Judas Iscariot."[3]

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* A shorter Hebrew version of the last part of this article (the figure of Judas in the Golden Legend) was published by us in 2005: "Oedipus in Christian Garb: The Legend of Judah Iscarioth in the Golden Legend," *Zmanim* 91 (2005): 12–21.

[1] Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (ed. Graham Petrie; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 77.

[2] Sterne, ibid., 78.

[3] *Ha'aretz*, 10 June 2009.

Yehoshua's claim is a striking example of how images travel from one camp to the other. Astonishingly, in his statement, Yehoshua internalizes the Christian position, whose origins are to be found in the New Testament, according to which Judah, the name of Judas Iscariot, arouses associations with the Jew, a traitor, with one who greedily pursues wealth, with Satan.

Judas' figure does, indeed, loom large in Christian imagination, and, in view of its implications, there is little wonder that it reverberated in Jewish culture as well.[4] In what follows, we shall examine the image of Judas Iscariot in three literary works, one Jewish and two Christian. *Sefer Toledot Yeshu* will be at the center of our discussion; to this we shall add the *Legend of the Finding of the True Cross* and the "apocryphal" biography of Judas in the Golden Legend. Our claim is that, despite the dispute between Jews and Christians regarding the ethical qualities of Judas, a broad agreement exists regarding many facets of his personality, behavior, and his central role in the story of Jesus. This agreement is based upon an evidently unchallenged axiom, according to which the man Judas represents the Jewish people, and his behavior represents the Jewish attitude to Christians and to their savior. As in the New Testament, so too in these texts, Judas is presented as a subversive figure, who acts clandestinely in order to destroy Christianity and to save Judaism or, on the contrary, to destroy Judaism and to save Christianity – all depending upon the identity of the text.

Who is Judas Iscariot in Christian eyes? If every great drama revolves around the titanic struggle between good and evil, then in the Christian drama Judas plays the role of evil – and not just mundane evil, but the worst possible evil, diametrically opposed to Jesus, who represents the absolute good. Judas' evil is, indeed, great. As one of the twelve disciples, he was among those who were particularly close to Jesus, but he betrayed Jesus for the sake of a handful of coins, turning him over to the Jews who were pursuing him, then tortured him and precipitated his crucifixion by the Romans. Judas thus represents the Jews, as indicated by his name. According to the Christian tradition, Qeriyot (from which derives the name, "Iscariot," *Ish-Qeriyot*, "the man from Qeriyot") is the city in Judaea mentioned in Jehoshua 15:24. If so, Judas was the only one among Jesus' disciples to come from Judaea rather than from the Galilee. The Galilee was the cradle of the faithful, while Judaea was home to the Jews and traitors.[5]

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[4] For a recent survey on Judas Iscariot's role in the Christian anti-Jewish imagination see: Jeremy Cohen, *Christ Killers: The Jews and the Passion from the Bible to the Big Screen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 255–61. Interest in Judas figure increased lately, following the publicized discovery of the Gospel of Judas. See inter alia, Bart D. Ehrman, *The Lost Gospel of Judas Iscariot: A New Look at Betrayer and Betrayed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Nevertheless, it seems that this text that raised much interest in academic circles, is not destined to change the long accepted, traditional image of Judas as the arch-traitor of Christian culture.

[5] Hieronymus, *In Matheum* 10.4 (CCSL 77; eds. D. Hurst and M. Adriaen; Turnhout: Brepols, 1969), 64.

Another theory explains that the name Iscariot implies that Judas was a member of the Sicarii.[6] This theory, however, is problematic chronologically.

Judas' great sin was his betrayal of Jesus. The lowest level in Dante's *Inferno* is named Iudecca, after Judas Iscariot, in which all those who betrayed their masters are punished. Lucifer, the archetype of all betrayers, who is placed in the center of this level, is also punished there. All the rivers of guilt flow towards him. Lucifer has three mouths, in each one of which an arch-traitor is ground in his teeth: Judas Iscariot, Brutus, and Cassius. Judas is stuck in the central mouth, as the worst of these three traitors; indeed, he is the worst of all the sinners in Hell.[7]

The Christian Gospels do not elaborate upon the story of Judas. The information about him is spread among several different books, and the details are not always consistent with one another. Nevertheless it is possible to put them together from the following story: Judas was one of the twelve disciples, whom Jesus appointed as a kind of treasurer, who held the collective money-purse (in Christian art the purse is one of his known attributes). This task enabled Judas to deceive the others and steal from them, and even act in a miserly manner in using the money to serve Jesus. In the final analysis, as he betrayed trust regarding money so he betrayed trust in general. Tempted by Satan, Judas committed the greatest sin of all – he betrayed his master. He turned to the high priest, offered to turn Jesus over to him, and in return received thirty coins. That evening, Judas participated in the Last Supper together with the other disciples, and Jesus, who knew what was going to happen, gave Judas bread dipped in wine, saying that the one who would receive the bread would betray him, even asking that he hasten the deed. Judas left the table to meet the priests, while Jesus went with his disciples to Gethsemane, where he prayed. His disciples fell asleep. Soon Judas returned with the entourage of the high priest and kissed Jesus, thereby identifying him and turning him in. Jesus was arrested, tried, tortured and executed. After Judas saw that Jesus had been convicted, he regretted his betrayal, threw the money down in the Temple, and hung himself. With the money the priests bought a field for burying strangers, which they called "the field of blood" (Aramaic: *hakel dama*). According to the account in Acts (1:15–26), it was Judas who bought the field with the money he received for the betrayal and then, "falling headlong, he burst open in the middle, and all his bowels gushed out." After Judas' death, Matthias was chosen in his place and joined the disciples.

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[6] Robert Eisenman, *James. The Brother of Jesus* (New York: Penguin, 1998), 516, 811–16.

[7] Dante, *Inferno*, 39. See Sylvia Tomasch, "Judecca, Dante's Satan and the dis-placed Jew," in *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages* (eds. Sylvia Tomasch and Sealy Gilles; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 247–67.

Sefer Toledot Yeshu

In *Sefer Toledot Yeshu,* Judas Iscariot plays a far more central role than he does in the New Testament. This Jewish text reworks the facts related in the New Testament: its dispute is not about the facts, but rather about their interpretation. Our reading of the work is based upon two theoretical approaches. The first is a historical approach, based in large part on Amos Funkenstein's famous definition of the genre of "counter-history."[8] *Toledot Yeshu* clearly belongs to this genre; indeed, Funkenstein himself used it as an example to characterize the genre. The second is a literary approach, building on the work of Frank Kermode, who sees the various versions of the Gospels as a midrashic attempt to reinterpret the tradition that stands before them – and this, not by interpretation of the text, but by the addition of various elements to the plot that create a different story.[9] Following this approach, we consider *Toledot Yeshu* also a midrash and as such as an open-ended text that has different versions and is subject to various additions and deletions. Similar to the New Testament itself, *Toledot Yeshu* is a text of an exegetical nature but, unlike the Gospels, where alongside the story of Jesus' life we find parables, sermons, ethical aphorisms and prophecies, *Toledot Yeshu* expresses its viewpoint by means of narrative alone, using various devices such as thickening of the plot, additions, and changes according to the creative imagination of the various narrators.

Like the Gospels, *Toledot Yeshu* weaves within its plot verses from the Bible which serve as "testimonies" (*testimonia*). Their function is to refute the New Testament claim that the Old Testament had already anticipated the biography of Jesus. *Toledot Yeshu* makes satiric use of these selfsame verses, exposing the distorted use made by the Gospels.

Kermode takes note of the fact that Judas Iscariot is the figure who moves the Passion story forward in the New Testament.[10] Judas is "a case of a character being possessed by his narrative role." The story is moved forward by his betrayal of Jesus; indeed, Judas becomes the very embodiment of treachery.[11] The act of betrayal thus acquires a human image, whose life and actions have a narrative of their own. Unlike the New Testament, which creates a story out of an abstract idea, in *Toledot Yeshu* the story already exists, and the function of the narrator is to change its course and meaning and to turn it upside down.

In addition to the New Testament, *Sefer Toledot Yeshu,* in its various versions, engages in dialogue with earlier versions of Jewish legends and stories about

[8] Amos Funkenstein, "History, Counterhistory and Narrative," *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 32–49.

[9] Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*: *On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 75–99.

[10] Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, 84.

[11] Kermode, ibid., 94.

Jesus found in the Talmud, and makes use of them. We assume that each of the extant versions of *Toledot Yeshu* confronts and interprets Christian and Jewish texts, by making additions to the plot, reorganizing the narrative, and inserting new emphases, and so on.

As noted, the place attributed to Judas in *Toledot Yeshu* is far greater than the one he is given in the Gospels, at least in terms of the number of words and verses. Unlike the villain that emerges towards the end of the New Testament drama in order to advance the story of the Crucifixion, in *Toledot Yeshu* he appears on the stage earlier in the narrative and disappears later (at least in some of the versions). Moreover, in *Toledot Yeshu*, Judas is the only active figure from the Jewish side among those participating. He alone saves the Jews with his own powers.[12]

Judas "stars" in three central scenes in *Toledot Yeshu*. In the first, he reveals the fact that Jesus is a deceiver who performs miracles by means of deceit, by his having stolen the Shem Hameforash – the holy name of God. No inverted mirror image of this scene appears in the New Testament. It copes with the miracles that Jesus performed, by whose means he acquired his followers. The background to this section comes from the law of the false prophet in Deuteronomy 13, which warns against believing in false prophets who perform miracles. With the Sages' consent, Judas decides to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and to imitate his dastardly acts. He enters the Holy of Holies, and he too steals the Shem Hameforash. A competition ensues between the two figures, in which each of them uses the Shem Hameforash to fly in the air, while attempting to make the other fall to the ground.[13] Judas contaminates Jesus by urinating or ejaculating semen on him – the various versions differ on this point – causing Jesus to fall to the ground.[14] This scene, with its homosexual overtones, may contain echoes of Judas' kiss in the New Testament.[15] Judas thereby removes the mask from Jesus' face, and heroically destroys his claim to be the Son of God. Judas' acts are justified by means of the verses in Deuteronomy 13:7–12: "If your brother, the son of your

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[12] Bernhard Dieckmann, *Judas als Sündenbock: Eine verhängnisvolle Geschichte von Angst und Vergeltung* (München: Kösel, 1991), 126.

[13] This scene has its roots in the Christian Apocrypha, in stories such as Simon magus' flying in the air. See Acta Petri (Acts of Peter) in *New Testament Apocrypha*. Edited by Wilhelm Schneemelcher, et al. (London: Lutterworth, 1963, 1965. 2nd edition: Cambridge: James Clarke; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991, 1992), 290.

[14] This scene goes hand in hand with Christian descriptions of Jews transgression of normative codes of physical conduct, especially through spitting. According to Anthony Bale, "the spitting Jew may have an intertext in late medieval images of the 'judas kiss'; Judas's kissing was certainly discussed in terms of defilement of Christ's body …": Anthony Bale, *The Jew in the Medieval Book: English Antisemitisms, 1350–1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 152. Susan Gubar elaborates on oral and anal motives in Judas image, describing him as "leaky Judas." Susan Gubar, *Judas: A Biography* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009), ch. 3 (esp. pp. 107–10).

[15] On the homosexual motive see Gubar, ibid., 158–210.

mother … entices you secretly, saying: Let us go and serve other gods … you shall surely kill him." Jesus is thus exposed by Judas as an impostor and a false prophet. He is also described as "the son of your mother," following the words of Deuteronomy concerning the false prophet; this reference also relates, of course, to Jesus' depiction as a son without a father.

The second scene is that of Jesus' betrayal by Judas. Whereas, according to the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus came to Jerusalem only once, on which occasion he was crucified, according to the Gospel of John he had visited there in the past, and even aroused the hatred of the Sanhedrin, who sought to kill him. (John 5:16–18). According to this version, Jesus' return to the Galilee was essentially a flight from Jerusalem. This being the case, why did the Sanhedrin need Judas in order to identify Jesus? Wasn't he already known to them? The Gospel according to John gives no answer to this question, but in some versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, an explanation is offered. According to the Wagenseil version, after Judas exposed Jesus' deceit and Jesus is condemned to death, Jesus goes to the Jordan River and purifies himself anew, thus recovering the magical powers that Judas had taken from him. Wagenseil's version continues in a consistent manner to the next stage. If urinating or ejaculating semen do not help, it becomes necessary to deprive Jesus of his magical powers by taking the Shem Hameforash away from him by force. Here, Judas again volunteers to act on behalf of the Sages and secretly, in the dark of night, while Jesus is sleeping, tears the Shem Hameforash from his flesh.

Jesus, left with none of his magical powers, understands that the hour has come and his destiny has been sealed. He therefore decides to return to Jerusalem, the city from which he had fled. This time, however, he and his disciples arrive in disguise. The motif of the disguise does not appear in the New Testament, and it should be seen as a dramatic device intended to explain why Judas and his act of betrayal were needed in order to identify Jesus. The Jewish version thus invents a secret visit of Jesus and his disciples to Jerusalem – perhaps in order to steal again the Shem Hameforash. Judas continues to act on behalf of the Sages and identifies Jesus again; that which is portrayed in the New Testament as treachery is shown here as a heroic mission.

The course of the story in *Toledot Yeshu* matches only the Gospel of John. According to the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 3, Mark 1, Luke 3), Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist at the beginning of his activity, even before he performed miracles. In contrast, according to John, Jesus had previously visited Jerusalem, aroused the wrath of the Jews (2:13–25), and only thereafter was he baptized in the Jordan (3:22). Moreover, as we noted, according to John, the Jews already sought to kill Jesus after his first visit in Judaea (John 5:16–18; 7:1), a sequence that *Sefer Toledot Yeshu* follows.

The third scene in which Judas plays a central role is the story of Jesus' burial in Judas' garden. Here, too, a number of versions follow the Gospel of John, as

only in that account is Jesus buried in a garden (19:41–42). In order to prevent Jesus' followers from stealing the body and claiming that he had risen from the dead, Judas conceals his body and buries it beneath a water conduit in his garden. The Jewish narrator thus admits that Jesus' grave was found empty, but has his own explanation as to how this came about. The discovery of Jesus' body in Judas' garden is intended to refute the claim of the Resurrection. Here, too, Judas both conceals and reveals.

From all that has been said thus far, it is clear that the main purpose of *Toledot Yeshu* in general, and of the portrayal of the character of Judas in particular is, as Funkenstein put it, to present a counter-narrative to the Christian story. But alongside this central design, there exist other, secondary aims that are expressed in several scenes behind which there is no original Christian story.

The Burial

According to one of the versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, Judas buried Jesus in his garden, in a cesspool. This is a fulfillment of the words of the Talmud, "One who mocks the words of the Sages is judged in boiling excrement."[16] However, the Talmud speaks of a punishment imposed upon Jesus in the World to Come, whereas *Toledot Yeshu* speaks of his being shamed and insulted in this world. Judas is the one who actively fulfills the words of the Sages and does not wait for Heavenly punishment. Moreover, whereas the Talmud deals with Jesus and his punishment, *Toledot Yeshu* is concerned also with the actual place of burial. The site of Jesus' burial – the Holy Sepulcher – is the holiest place of Christianity, a site of adoration and pilgrimage. It is the Christian alternative to the Temple (in Jerusalem), and takes its place.[17] *Sefer Toledot Yeshu* mocks the cult of the holy place by transforming the Holy Sepulcher into a latrine.[18] In the Hebrew sources relating to the First Crusade, the redemption of the Holy Sepulcher is portrayed as the main goal of the Crusaders;[19] this version of *Toledot Yeshu* may thus reflect a Jewish answer to the Crusader enterprise, and may help to explain the appearance of this motif of the cesspool in Christian tales of the High Middle Ages.

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[16] Johannes Jacobus Huldricus, *Historia Jeschuae Nazareni* (Leiden: 1705), 88; *b. Gittin* 57a.

[17] Ora Limor, "Conversion of Space," in *Conversion: Practice and Perceptions* (eds. Miri Rubin and Ira Katzenelson; forthcoming).

[18] Interestingly, Muslims ascribed to the Holy Sepulchre the name: Kanisat Al-Qumamah – Church of Dung (a play on the name Kanisat Al-qiyamah – Church of Resurrection).

[19] Eva Haverkamp, ed., *Hebräische Berichte über die Judenverfolgungen während des ersten Kreuzzugs* (MGH, Hebräische Texte aus dem mittelalterlichen Deutschland, 1; Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2005), 561.

Much has been written about the cesspool as a place to humiliate, disgrace and profane the most sacred assets of the other religion.[20] In Christian imagination, the Jews throw icons to the latrine; they stab Hosts (thus reconstructing the crucifixion) and leave it in the cesspool in order to disgrace it, and they kill Christian children, throwing their saintly bodies to the privy. An example of the connection between disbelief and filth is brought forth also in the Christian widespread exemplum about a Jew who fell into a latrine on Saturday "but would not permit himself to be extracted out of reverence for his Shabbath." The Lord of the place "did not permit him to be extracted the following Sunday out of reverence for his Shabbath. And so the Jew dies."[21]

The burial of Jesus in a cesspool in *Toledot Yeshu* should be analyzed in the framework of the Talmudic motif on the one hand and the medieval Christian libels and anti-Jewish exempla on the other. In a more direct way it could also be a Jewish reaction to the description of Judas' loathsome death in acts: "and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle, and all his bowels gushed out."[22] As Anthony Bale writes, "the reciprocity of the narrative forces us to link Christian and Jew, speaking an identical language."[23]

The Curse

An example of the tendency to add narrative elements to create a new and richer story is found in the Huldreich version. This version was most probably created in a German-speaking environment, as Jesus is referred in the text as "Yesus" and it is related that the Jews of Worms advised the king not to kill Jesus. This anecdote coincides with a local tradition from Worms, according to which a Jewish community already existed there in the time of Jesus, so that the Jews of this city cannot be blamed for the Crucifixion. The medieval background likewise emerges from the Vienna version, whose origin seems to be Italian, as Judas is referred to as "Judas Scarioto." In this version it is stated that all the sages of the Gentiles "curse and revile Judas Iscarioto, and when they have a quarrel or

[20] Israel J. Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 196–97; Christoph Cluse, "'Fabula Ineptissima' Die Ritualmordlegende um Adam von Bristol nach der Handschrift London, British Library, Harley 957," *Aschkenaz* 5 (1995): 293–330; Bale, *The Jew in the Medieval Book*, 30–43.

[21] See Anthony Bale's illuminating analysis of "The Jew of Tewkesbury" exemplum: Bale, ibid., 23–53.

[22] Acts 1:18. See Gubar, *Judas*, 110–27; Annette Weber, "The Hanged Judas of Freiburg Cathedral: Sources and Interpretation," in *Imagining the Self, Imagining the Other: Visual Representations and Jewish-Christian Dynamics in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period* (ed. Eva Projmovic, Leiden: Brill, 2002), 165–88.

[23] Bale, *The Jew in the Medieval Book*, 33.

rivalry with one another they say: 'May it be done to you as Judas Iscariot did to Jesus.'"[24]

A legal curse directed against a person who violates a commitment, that his lot shall be like that of Dathan and Abiram, Gehazi and Judas Iscariot, was already widespread in late Antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages. In the *novella* of the Justinian Code, following the section of the obligations, a series of curses against one who makes a false oath is presented:

> But if I will not observe all these things, may I dwell henceforth under the awesome judgment of the Lord, the Great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ. And may my portion be together with Judas, and may I be struck with the leprosy of Gehazi, and with the dread of Cain, and may I be subject to the punishments written in the book …[25]

Curses that mention Judas as a trope for punishment were widespread in the Middle Ages. Judas' name was part of a judicial-magical sanction: Whoever violates his oath will suffer as Judas. Such a curse is mentioned in the Middle Ages, for example, in a legal document from 11th century Lucca:

> sit deme[rsus de altitudine celi in profundo inferni, sit socius cum] Iuda sch[ariotim qui prop]ter cupiditatem vendidit Dominus et Magistrum suum et cum diabolum qui in infernum ligatus est.[26]
>
> May you be thrust down from the heights of Heaven to the depths of Sheol; may you be a neighbor of Judas Iscariot who, because of his greed for wealth and money, sold his master and teacher, and is chained to Satan in Hell.

In the Christian curse, Judas is portrayed as a scoundrel who gets his just due. The author of *Toledot Yeshu* knows full well that, in the Christian curses, Judas is the one who is accursed as, according to his words, the Sages of the Gentiles "curse and revile Judas." However, when he invokes the language of the curse, he turns it upside down and says: "May it be done to you what Judas Iscariot did to Jesus." According to this text, Judas is the one who punishes and Jesus the one who bears the punishment – a position consistent with the overall tendency of the entire work to turn things around, making Judas the one who is blessed, and Jesus – the one who is accursed.

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[24] Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1902; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1977), 74.

[25] *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, vol. 3, nov. 8, tit.3. on Judas' curse see: Archer Taylor, "The Judas Curse," *AJP* 42 (1921): 234–52; On Judas' curses inscribed on tombstones in Southern Atica: Bradley McLean, "A Christian Epitaph: The Curse of Judas Iscariot," *OCP* 58 (1992): 241–244.

[26] We are grateful to Katrin Dort of Trier for this information. See another example: Auguste J. Bernard and Alexandre Bruel, eds., *Recueil des Chartes de l'abbaye de Cluny* (6 vols; Paris: Collection de documents inédits sur l'histoire de France, 1876–1903), 3, no. 1753, 20: "Et si ullus homo qui carta ista contradicere voluerit, … et otoritatem Patri et Filii et Spiritus Sanctus sit excommunicatus, et cum Datan et Abiron permanead in infernum, et cum Juda, traditore Domini, in infernum sit demergatus."

The Joke

Another example is the following story that is told in the Huldreich version. During the course of their journey to Jerusalem, Jesus, Peter and Judas look for a place to sleep. They come to an inn and wish to eat, but the inn-keeper has only one roast goose, which would be adequate for only one of the three figures. How shall they divide it? Jesus proposes that they go to sleep on an empty stomach, and the one who has the best dream will get the entire goose. In the middle of the night, Judas gets up and eats the goose. The next morning Peter relates his dream, in which he was sitting at the feet of the throne of God. Jesus says: my dream is better than yours, because I dreamt that I am the son of God and that you are sitting at my feet; therefore the goose is mine. Then Judas says: and I dreamt that I ate the goose.[27]

This joke relates ironically to the treacherous image of Judas in the New Testament, of a person who takes care of himself and behaves sneakily with Jesus. But unlike the New Testament text, the Jewish version portrays a figure with whom it is possible to identify, perhaps a figure one might even like; it joins the well-known genre of Jewish jokes about the clever rabbi who deceives the priest and thereby proves the superiority of Judaism over Christianity.[28]

The Pogrom

In another version, published by Samuel Krauss in *Revue des Études Juives*,[29] an independent passage is added to the story of the hiding of Jesus' body and its discovery by Judas. After the empty tomb was discovered, the Jews claim that the body had been stolen in order to invent the resurrection of Jesus. Queen Helena gives the Jews a reprieve of three days during which they are to present the body – and if not, she would kill them all, not leaving their slightest remnant. The plot develops as a story of salvation and deliverance, in which the danger

[27] Huldricus, *Historia Jeschuae*, 51.

[28] The story of the goose could be a far echo of the ancient legend about Judas and the cock that appears first in *Acta Pilati*: Judas returns home after betraying Jesus. His mother is devastated by his deed, claiming that he handed over the son of God and if he indeed will rise from the dead they all will suffer terrible punishment. Judas swears that the cock which is being roasted in the oven would rise more easily than Jesus. Immediately the half roasted cock flies out of the oven, grows back his feathers and cockscomb and heralds Jesus' resurrection. The same cock later cries trice at the negation of Peter. Seeing this, Judas goes out and kills himself. See Paull Franklin Baum, "The English Ballad of Judas Iscariot," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 31 n.s. 24 (1916): 181–89 (Baum believes the story to be of oriental origin); Paul Lehmann, "Judas Ischarioth in der lateinischen Legendenüberlieferung des Mittelalters," *Studi Medievali* n.s. 2 (1929): 289–346; Dieckmann, *Judas als Sündenbock*, 34–36.

[29] Samuel Krauss, "Une nouvelle recension hébraïque du Toldot Yeshu," *REJ* 103 (1938): 65–73.

passes at the latest possible moment. At the last moment, Judas hears about the edict and discovers the place where the body had been buried in his garden; it is tied by its hair to a donkey, dragged to the queen, and presented to her – a reverse picture from that of Jesus entering Jerusalem as the Messiah, riding on a donkey.[30] The victorious Judas also returns to his home riding on a donkey – again, a reversal of Jesus' triumphant entry to Jerusalem.

At this point, this version adds a detailed description of what can only be described as a pogrom perpetrated by the Jews against the Christians in Jerusalem, during the course of which "the Jews killed among the Christians several thousand people, including women and children." Following the pogrom "there did not remain from among the Christians even one from a city and two from a family," and Jerusalem remained empty of Christians. The description brings to mind the story of the Book of Esther, and especially the motif of the reversal, in which the Jews are transformed from potential victims into victors who take vengeance against their enemies. Undoubtedly, the narrator takes pleasure in this fantasy, which he adorns with numerous details that add to the picture and strengthen its expressive power.

What is the significance of this imaginary pogrom perpetrated by the Jews against the Christians, appearing in a medieval Jewish source? One may perhaps see the story as a distant reflection of the slaughter inflicted by the Jews against the Christians of Jerusalem in 614, upon its conquest by the Sassanian Persians.[31] This incident has occasionally received the attention of historians, almost always with a certain feeling of unease. According to what is told in Christian sources – and there alone – the Jews participated in the Persian campaign against the Byzantine Empire, and then presented the Christians of Jerusalem with the alternative of conversion to Judaism or death. The Christians preferred to die as martyrs; the number of those who were killed has been estimated from anywhere between 4,000 and 90,000 people. At the site of the slaughter – Mamila Pool – a mass grave was discovered in archaeological excavations conducted some time ago.[32]

However, the historical connection between the story of the pogrom in *Toledot Yeshu* and the Persian conquest of Jerusalem is rather dubious, and it seems more reasonable to assume that the story is no more than a product of the imagination. However, even fantasies speak history. One can see in this story testimony to a militant Jewish consciousness, whose wishes are remarkably similar to the acts of the Christian rioters against Jews, reflecting the wish to do to the Christians

[30] Luke 19: 29–39.

[31] Brannon M. Wheeler, "Imagining the Sasanian Capture of Jerusalem," *OCP* 57 (1991): 69–85; Averil Cameron, "The Jews in Seventh-Century Palestine," *SCI* 13 (1994): 75–93.

[32] Yoram Tsafrir, "The Topography and Archaeology of Jerusalem in the Byzantine Period," in *The History of Jerusalem: The Roman and Byzantine Periods (70–638)* (eds. Yoram Tsafrir and Shmuel Safrai, Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Istitute, 1999), 341.

what they had done to the Jews. As opposed to the myth of the passive victim that has gained wide acceptance in modern Jewish historiography, the Jews who wrote and read this text sought vengeance, if only of a virtual kind. This text is outstanding in its clearly non-apologetic nature, which fits well with the general tendency of this work to compete with the Christian story, without claiming self-justification and weakness. The pogrom against the Christians takes place after proving their error, and it brings the religious victory to its realization through the removal of the Christians from the Holy City.

The Legend of the Finding of the True Cross

In many versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, there appears the enigmatic figure of Queen Helena, who serves as a kind of mediator between the followers of Jesus and the Jews. At times, she is convinced by Jesus' miracles and believes in him, while at other times the Jews, led by Judas, have the upper hand. Who is this Helena? Is she Helena, queen of Adiabene, who converted to Judaism during the first century CE, not long after Jesus' crucifixion?[33] Or is she the mother of Constantine, whose highly publicized visit to Jerusalem was a landmark in the Christianization of the city? If so, how are we to understand the anachronism in this Jewish text?

The presence of Helena in *Sefer Toledot Yeshu* may be related to another well-known Christian legend, which likewise tells of a momentous discovery – the legend of the finding of the true Cross.[34] In the most famous version of this legend, a Jew named Judas discovers the location of the Cross. According to this legend, Helena came to Jerusalem in order to find the Cross. She gathered together all of its inhabitants, including the Jews living there and in its environs, and preached a Christian sermon to them in which she rebuked them for seeing darkness rather than light, and asking them to send her one thousand learned Jews. After she had preached to these thousand Jews in a similar manner, she demanded that she be presented with scholars who were truly learned in the Torah. This time, five hundred learned Jews were chosen, and she preached to them as well, and again asked to be presented a chosen group from among them. One of these Jews, named Judas, understood what the queen wanted. He explained to the other Jews that she wished to locate, with their help, the Cross

[33] Josephus Flavius, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20, 2–4.

[34] Jan Willem Drijvers, *Helena Augusta. The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of her Finding of the True Cross* (Leiden: Brill, 1992); Stephan Borgehammar, *How the Holy Cross was Found: From Event to Medieval Legend* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1991); Han J. W. Drijvers and Jan Willem Drijvers, eds., *The Finding of the True Cross: The Judas Kyriakos Legend in Syriac: Introduction, Text, and Translation* (CSCO 565, Subsidia 93, Louvain: In aedibus Peeters, 1997).

upon which Jesus had been crucified, and warned them that its discovery would be the end of Judaism. Judas, according to the legend, was a relative of Stephen, the first martyr, who believed in Jesus and was thus stoned by the Jews; Judas' ancestors had also believed in Jesus as the Messiah. The Jews prohibited Judas from revealing the place of the Cross, but when the queen threatened to kill all of them they turned him over to her. The queen demanded that Judas show her the site of Golgotha; when he replied that he did not know where it was he was thrown into an empty well where he was left to starve for a week. Exhausted by hunger and by fear of death, Judas revealed his secret. He went to the place and prayed to God that, if the Cross was indeed buried in the place to which he had pointed, then a fragrant odor should arise from it. Immediately, a thunder clap was heard and a wonderfully sweet and fragrant smell ascended from the place. Judas began to dig until he found three crosses: that of Jesus and of the two thieves who were crucified with him. At Judas' suggestion, the crosses were placed one after another upon the body of a young man who had just died. When the third cross was placed upon him, he rose from the dead, to the frustration of Satan, who now intervened in the story and scolded Judas: "By the hands of the first Judas I brought about treachery and caused the world to sin, while now I am pursued by the second Judas." In the wake of the discovery, Helena built a magnificent church at the site, expelled all the Jews from Judaea, and showered gifts upon Christian Jerusalem. Judas was baptized and, when the bishop of Jerusalem died, he was nominated bishop of the city and was renamed Kyriakos – "of the Lord." In the days of Julian the Apostate, Judas died as a martyr for his new faith.

As in *Sefer Toledot Yeshu*, this legend also features the pair Helena and Judas – Helena is the one who seeks, while Judas is the one who reveals. In *Toledot Yeshu*, Judas reveals the body of Jesus and then hides it in order to reveal it anew at the decisive moment, thereby refuting the Christian claim that he had been resurrected from the dead. In the *Legend of the Finding of the Cross,* Judas' function is to reveal to Helena the place of the grave and the Cross. In this Christian legend, it is Satan who draws an analogy between Judas Iscariot and Judas Kyriakos: whereas the first Judas was encouraged by Satan, the second Judas defeats him. In this way Judas who discovers the Cross redeems the sin of Judas who betrayed Christ. It is thus clear that the name Judas is not accidental, and that in both stories it has representative significance – he represents Judaism. Whatever may be the theological significance of the story of the finding of the Cross, it expressed an optimistic prospect as to the possibility of correcting the satanic acts of Judas Iscariot. Judas the Jew is the one who knows the truth, reveals it to Helena, converts to Christianity, and brings about the conversion of all the Jews. The transformation of the negative figure of Judas Iscariot to a positive one also underlies *Sefer Toledot Yeshu*. Similarly, it takes Judas Iscariot of the New Testament and proposes a positive alternative, changing him from an ally of Satan into a redeemer. In both stories, the truth is found in the hands

of Judas, as representative of the Jews. It is Judas who knows the location of the Cross in the Christian story and, in the Jewish story, knows the location of Jesus' body and his falsehood and deceptiveness. This image of him is consistent with a rooted Christian concept according to which, by virtue of their antiquity, the Jews possess arcane knowledge that they pass down from generation to generation; this knowledge is essential for confirming the fundamental principals of the Christian faith.[35] One expression of this approach may be found in the idea of the Hebrew Truth, the *Veritas Hebraica* – acceptance of the authority of the Hebrew version of the Bible as the authentic text.

This similarity of concepts and ideas may imply that *Toledot Yeshu* was familiar with the *Legend of the Finding of the Cross* and used several of its motifs in order to create a Jewish counter-narrative, just as it did with the New Testament. The assumption that *Toledot Yeshu* relies, in one way or another, upon the *Legend of the Finding of the Cross* also explains why, in addition to the discovery of the chicanery of Jesus, *Toledot Yeshu* attributes to Judas the discovery of Jesus' body as well. Whereas, in the New Testament, Judas plays no role in the story of the burial and resurrection, in the *Legend of the Finding of the Cross* he is the one who discovers the grave and the Cross.

The suggested connection between the two legends may explain the surprising presence of Queen Helena in several versions of *Toledot Yeshu*. The authors of *Toledot Yeshu* incorporated her name in an anachronistic manner, in order to counterpoise the Christian legend with another Jewish story about Judas, the revealer of the truth – only the truth that he reveals is not that of the Cross, but rather that of the false nature of the Christian religion as a whole.

The connection between these two legends was already noted by the author of one of the versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, preserved in a Vienna manuscript from the 18th century, in which a Jewish version of the legend of the finding of the Cross is brought.[36] In this version, the Jewish story confronts the famous Christian legend with a counter-version, which reverses its message. When Helena threatens the Jews with death if they do not reveal to her the location of the Cross, the Jewish Judas – referred to here as "R. Judah the Elder" – suggests to the Jews that they take three crosses and bury them. When the queen tortures Judas so that he will reveal the site of the Cross, he asks for three days to pray, and then points to the place where the three crosses had been hidden, as if it was revealed to him from Heaven. Using the power of the Shem Hameforash which he had learned previ-

[35] Ora Limor, "Christian Tradition – Jewish Authority," *Cathedra* 80 (1996): 31–62 (in Hebrew); Ora Limor, "Christian Sacred Space and the Jew," in *From Witness to Witchcraft. Jews and Judaism in Medieval Christian Thought* (ed. Jeremy Cohen, Wolfenbütteler Mittelalter-Studien 11; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996), 55–77; Andrew S. Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 14, 178–82.

[36] Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 141–143.

ously, Judah revives the dead person upon whom the cross had been placed – and thus everybody believes that this is the true Cross. When the Christians, who had supposedly seen the power of the Cross, decide to kill all the Jews, Judas offers to give his own life for his people and disguises himself as one of the disciples of Jesus. Here too, this anti-Christian legend preserves all the details of the Christian story, but gives them a new interpretation, reversing their significance. Judas, the hero of the Christian story, is also the hero of the Jewish legend – but not because he discovered the Cross and converted to Christianity, but because he outwitted the Christians and fooled them, and because he pretended to be a Christian and thereby saved the Jews. Ram Ben-Shalom has shown recently that the Legend of the Finding of the true Cross was known to Jews in the 15th century.[37] In view of the wide circulation of the legend in the Christian world, it is only reasonable that Jews will know of it and try to cope with it.

The Biography of Judas in the Golden Legend

In the Legend of the Finding of the True Cross, the figure of Judas undergoes a transformation: from a traitor who betrays his master, he becomes the one to discover the truth about his master. The assumption that Jewish existence in the Christian world is temporary and that the Jews will in the near future overcome their blindness and convert to Christianity is what underlies the Christian doctrine of tolerance towards them. However, this optimistic assumption gave way in the Middle Ages to a far more pessimistic stance, according to which the sin of the Jews is terminal and not subject to atonement.

An echo of the loss of Christian hope in the conversion of the Jews, and of the aggravation of Christian attitude to the Jews in general, is expressed in the third text presented here, which takes us into the twelfth and thirteenth century.[38]

The New Testament does not relate where Judas came from, who his parents were, or how it came about that he joined the circle of Jesus' disciples. As the biographies of heroes, even of negative ones, inevitably arouse great interest in human hearts, it is not surprising that such a biography found its way into the *Legenda Aurea* (The Golden Legend), a collection of stories of saints that was gathered and edited in the thirteenth century by Jacobus de Voragine, bishop of the city of Genoa and a Dominican monk.[39] The collection also includes the

[37] Ram Ben-Shalom, *Facing Christian Culture: Historical Conciousness and Images of the Past among the Jews of Spain and Southern France during the Middle Ages* (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2006 [in Hebrew]), 195–202.

[38] On the image of Judas in the Christian Middle Ages see Dieckmann, *Judas als Sündenbock*; Peter Dinzelbacher, *Judastraditionen* (Vienna: Selbstverlag des Österreichischen Museums für Volkskunde, 1977).

[39] Jacobus a Voragine, *Legenda Aurea* (ed. Th. Graesse, Dresden and Leipzig: 1846), 183–86; English translation: Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*

Legend of the Finding of the Cross. Judas was, of course, not a Christian saint, and his story is brought in the book as an aside, in connection with the story of Matthias, the disciple who was chosen to join the other eleven in place of Judas. The origins of the legend are unknown. The editor himself, who refers to it as "apocryphal," casts doubt upon its validity, leaving the reader with the choice as to whether or not to accept its authenticity. Indeed, at the last moment his doubts become stronger and he proposes rejecting it.[40] Nevertheless, he himself overcame his doubts, and included the story in his collection, thereby leading to its wide dissemination in the medieval Christian world.

According to the legend, Judas was born in Jerusalem to his father, Reuben (or Simeon) from the tribe of Dan, and to his mother, Cyborea. Before he was born, his mother had a dream that she would give birth to a son who would destroy his people. In order to prevent the realization of this dream, his parents abandoned him. They placed him in a basket in the sea, and the waves of the sea carried him off to an island known as Iscariot. The queen of the island, who was childless, discovered the basket with the child in it and adopted him as her own son. Thereafter, the queen had a child of her own, and enmity developed between the two boys. Judas was in the habit of tormenting the true son and, when it became known in public that he was a foundling, killed his "brother." He then fled to Jerusalem, where he became Pontius Pilate's right-hand man. One day, Pilate desired an apple he saw in a garden beneath his palace and sent Judas to bring it. A quarrel broke out between Judas and the owner of the garden, who happened to be Reuben, Judas father, and Judas killed Reuben without realizing that the latter was his father. Pilate gave Judas all of Reuben's property, including his wife, Cyborea, whom Judas married. After discovering his true identity, Judas sought atonement for his sins from Jesus and joined Jesus' disciples.

From here on the legend follows the New Testament stories, with a few variants: Jesus made Judas his disciple and chose him as apostle. Judas became a favorite of him to such an extent that he became his purse-bearer. Judas held the purse and used to steal from the alms donated to Jesus. Angered by the fact that the ointment of the value of three hundreds pence was bestowed upon Jesus and was not sold, he betrayed his master for thirty pieces of silver, each of them worth ten pence. Another explanation is that Judas used to take a tenth part of all monies entrusted to his care and thus sold Jesus for the profit which would have come to him had the ointment been sold. Then he regretted his deed, gave back

(trans. William Granger Ryan; 2 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 1:166–71. On the Golden Legend, see Sherry L. Reames, *Legenda Aurea: A Reexamination of its Paradoxical History* (Madison, Wisc: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); on Judas' legend, see "Judaslegende," *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon* 4 (1983), 882–87; Migne, *Dictionnaire des Legendes du Christianisme* (Paris: 1855, reprint: Brepols, 1989), 714–726; Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 104–25; Gubar, *Judas*, 141–57.

[40] Jacobus De Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 1:168.

the money and hung himself from a tree "and burst asunder in the middle, and all his bowels gushed out." Thus, the legend brings together both New Testament versions concerning the form of his death – the hanging[41] and the gushing-out of his bowels.[42] The narrator adds an explanation to this horrible death: "Thus his mouth was spared defilement since nothing came out through it, for it would have been incongruous that a mouth that had touched the glorious lips of Christ should be so foully soiled. It also was fitting that the bowels that had conceived the betrayal should burst and spill out, and that the throat from which had emerged the voice of the traitor should be strangled by a rope. Moreover, Judas perished in the air, so that the one who had offended the angels in heaven and men on earth was kept out of the region belonging to angels and to men, and was left in the air, in the company of demons."[43]

The Golden Legend was very popular throughout Europe during the High and Late Middle Ages. About a thousand Latin manuscripts of it have survived and it was also translated to the various spoken languages. The Judas legend has also come down to us in dozens of other Latin manuscripts unrelated to the Golden Legend. Beginning in the thirteenth century vernacular versions started to be circulated alongside the Latin ones. It was known all over Western Europe and survived also in Greek and in East European languages.[44] In England, the legend continued to be published until 1828, and was especially popular in the eighteenth century.[45] True, one does not find it in theological or exegetical literature. Nevertheless, we may assume that it was used in sermons in the churches, and its negative influence may only be imagined.[46] If Judas was, as is implied by his name, the archetype of the Jew, then his negative qualities represent the qualities of the Jews as a whole.[47]

The roots of the "apocryphal" parts of the legend can be sought for in the story of Oedipus, and it also echoes the stories of Cain and Abel, of the birth of Moses, and the Christian legend of the Antichrist. A literary analysis of the legend will take the reader along exciting paths of popular literature, psychoanalysis, and the

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[41] Matt 27:5.

[42] Acts 1:18.

[43] Jacobus De Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 1:168–69.

[44] Paull Franklin Baum, "The Mediaeval Legend of Judas Iscariot," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 31 n.s. 24 (1916) (reprinted 2008): 481–632; Lehmann, "Judas Ischarioth." According to Lehmann, the earliest version of the legend comes from twelfth century France (p. 312); Richard Axton, "Interpretations of Judas in Middle English Literature," in *Religion in the Poetry and Drama of the Late Middle Ages in England* (eds. Piero Boitani and Anna Torti, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 179–97.

[45] Baum, "The Mediaeval Legend of Judas Iscariot," 571.

[46] See Weber, "The Hanged Judas of Freiburg Cathedral." Weber believes that the figure of the hanged Judas in the west tympanum of Freiburg cathedral was inspired by the Judas legend.

[47] Kim Paffenroth, *Judas: Images of the Lost Disciple* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 33–57; Mary Flowers Braswell, "Chaucer's Palimpsest: Judas Iscariot and the Pardoner's Tale," *The Chaucer Review* 29 (1995): 303–10.

study of religions. The "biography" of Judas is one example of incest stories that started to appear in written texts in increasing numbers from the twelfth century on. According to Elizabeth Archibald, "this was not merely because of the growing audience for Latin and vernacular narrative fiction in this period, though of course the 'rise of romance'… must have been a contributing factor. Incest was a very topical subject in the twelfth century because of the Church's attempt to define marriage in precise legal terms … There was also a new emphasis in this period on the importance of contrition, inner consciousness of guilt and repentance, and also on the value of confession …"[48]

Yet, a comparison with other incest legends only accentuates the negative message of the Judas' legend. Like Judas, Oedipus also committed terrible sins, because of the decree of fate, but precisely for that reason, he enjoys the observer's sympathy. He suffers despite having done no (deliberate) wrong; he is imprisoned in the chains of a fate imposed upon him from birth.[49] Such is not the case of Judas who, after sinning repeatedly, is given the opportunity to atone for his sins and to repent – but who then augments his sin by committing the greatest sin of all, the betrayal of Jesus. As a matter of fact, Judas betrays everyone – his father, his mother, his master, his people.[50] In Kermode's words: "Betrayal becomes Judas."[51]

A comparison between the legend of Judas and another legend from the Middle Ages, built of similar materials, only exacerbates the uniqueness of Judas as the arch-sinner. This legend, set down in writing in the Late 12th or beginning of 13th century by the German poet Hartmann von Aue, tells the story of Gregorius I ("The Great," who served as pope in the years 590–604), who was born as the result of incest between a brother and sister, the children of a king.[52] The infant, who was born in secret, was placed in a chest on the river together with a tablet disclosing his origins. A fishermen saved him and raised him, and the

[48] Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, 106.

[49] Thomas Hahn, "The Medieval Oedipus," *Comparative Literature* 32 (1980): 225–37; Lowell Edmunds, "Oedipus in the Middle Ages," *Antike und Abendland* 22 (1976):140–55; Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints* (trans. Donald Attwater; Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 1998), 63.

[50] Judas was guilty for fratricide, parricide, and incest, but his gravest sin was betrayal. Hahn reminds us that in the Middle Ages the feudal ideals turned betrayal the most abhorrent sin of all (Hahn, "The Medieval Oedipus"). As Archibald writes, in Judas' legend, incest and parricide "were clearly added to show what an incorrigible villain Judas was." His deeds are "extreme transgressions of the fifth, sixth, and seventh commandments" (Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, 108–9).

[51] Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, 85

[52] Hartmann von Aue, *Gregorius*, (ed., Hermann Paul, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1984); English translation: Hartmann von Aue, *Gregorius: A Medieval Oedipus Legend* (trans. Edwin H. Zeydel; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955). The story is also included in *Gesta Romanorum* (eds. and trans. Charles Swan and Wynnard Hooper; London, 1891), 141–54. To the same family of stories belong also the legends of Saint Andreas of Crete and of Saint Albanus. See Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, 119–23.

abbot of the local monastery baptized him and gave him his name – Gregorius. After his origin became known, Gregorius decided to go off and wander about in the world. He arrived at a kingdom of whose queen had been placed under siege by a certain duke whom she refused to marry. Gregorius defeated the duke, married the queen, but continued to be tormented over the terrible secret of his birth. The queen, curious about his unhappiness, discovered the tablet, and it thus became clear to her that she was the mother of her own husband. Gregorius then went into exile. He came to a hut of a wicked fisherman and asked him to chain him to a stone in the sea and throw the key into the sea. Thus he lived over the course of many years. After seventeen years the pope died, and two cardinals, who saw in a dream the intended heir, set out to look for him. They arrived at the fisherman's hut and were invited to dine with him. During the course of the meal they discovered the key in the belly of a fish, which was understood as a sign from heaven that Gregorius's sin had been forgiven. He was then released from his chains, crowned as pope and became an admired spiritual leader. Upon his death he was canonized as saint.

Like Judas, Gregorius also sinned by committing incest with his mother, but he repented and his sin was forgiven. He even became a saint of the church, purified through the power of his atonement. Judas also attempted to atone for his sins, but even after these sins were forgiven he continued to sin. Evidently, sin was imprinted within him. While in the Gregorius legend "the characters retain their nobility and the reader's sympathy throughout,"[53] Judas loses both.

What exacerbated Judas' sin in particular was the fact that he committed suicide rather than seeking forgiveness. According to Christian teaching, there is no sin for which one cannot receive atonement, but one must believe in God's kindness and forgiveness and in His ability to atone for sin. Judas did not believe but instead hung himself – and this was the greatest of all his sins. Friedrich Ohly, who in his book *The Damned and the Elect: Guilt in Western Culture*[54] deals with psychology of self damnation, writes that Judas, unlike Gregorius, "fell far away from God because he did not trust in the grace that follows on repentance."[55] He despaired and was unable to ask for forgiveness and to believe in it. "The real question is not how one gets into guilt but how one gets out of it," writes Ohly.[56] This is the difference between the saintly sinner (Gregorius) and the damned sinner (Judas). The historical implications of this difference are brought up by George Steiner in his foreword to the English

[53] Archibald, ibid., 118–19.

[54] Friedrich Ohly, *The Damned and the Elect: Guilt in Western Culture* (trans. Linda Archibald; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1–34; from the German, *Der Verfluchte und der Erwählte: vom Leben mit der Schuld* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1976).

[55] Ohly, ibid., 31. Indeed, In the Gregorius legend Gregorius warns his mother not to abandon herself to despair (verses 2698–702): "Despair not of God's ends / You shall still find salvation / I've read of consolation / That God will true repentance heed / As penance for each evil deed."

[56] Ohly, ibid., 5.

edition of Ohly's book: "It is ironic that DR Friedrich Ohly's work itself lies under a certain shadow. Nowhere does he bring himself to touch on the obvious central crux that, of the disciples, only Judas is, by his very name, defined as a Jew … It is countless Jewish men, women and children who suffered ostracism and martyrdom in the black light of Judas' fate as it has been proclaimed and imaged by Christianity …"[57]

And, indeed, the appearance of the legend in Europe in the twelfth century and its broad dissemination is further testimony to the aggravation in the Christian attitude towards the Jews at that time. The negative image of the Jews became now a satanic one. The Jews were understood to be sinners and scoundrels by their very nature, without any possible hope of correction. Even if they did repent, like Judas, and even converted to Christianity, nothing could change their sinful nature. All that is left is for Christians to be wary of them and to expel them from their midst.

Students of literature, and particularly of folk literature in past generations, have dealt with this legend, documented its dissemination, and attempted to understand its sources.[58] The legend also caught the attention of psychologists, who dealt with its psychoanalytic significance.[59] In 1986, again in a psychoanalytic journal, the medieval scholar Alain Boureau analyzed the significance of the legend for medieval society in the context of feudal laws of inheritance, the cult of veneration of the Virgin, and anti-Semitism.[60] Surprisingly, the story barely engaged in the interest of scholars who dealt with Jewish-Christian relations, a subject that since World War II has occupied an important place in research, both within the framework of the question of the sources of anti-Semitism, and in the context of recent tendencies towards rapprochement between the two religions.[61]

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[57] Steiner in Ohly, ibid., xiii–xiv. Steiner goes on saying: "Half a century after Auschwitz, it seems as if German scholarship is still lamed when it draws near the unspeakable; a condition which gives to this essay on 'life and guilt' constraining pathos."

[58] Baum, "The Mediaeval Legend of Judas Iscariot"; V. Istrin, "Die griechische Version der Judas-Legende," *Archiv für Slavische Philologie* 20 (1898): 605–19; Lehmann, "Judas Ischarioth"; Axton, "Interpretations of Judas."

[59] Norman Reider, "Medieval Oedipal Legends about Judas," *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 29 (1960): 515–27; Sidney Tarachow, "Judas, the Beloved Executioner," *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 29 (1960): 528–54; Mordechai Rotenberg, "The Oedipal Conflict and the Isaac Solution," in: Mordechai Rotenberg, *Re-Biographing and Deviance: Psychotherapeutic Narrativism and the Midrash* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987), 93–110.

[60] Alain Boureau, "L'inceste de Judas: Essai sur la genèse de la haine antisémite au XII^{e} siècle," *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse* 33 (1986): 25–41.

[61] A clear exception is the book recently published by Jonathan A. Silk, *Riven by Lust: Incest and Schism in Indian Buddhist Legend and Historiography* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009). The author, who is a scholar of Buddhism, arrived at similar conclusions as ours. He stresses the anti-Jewish character of the Judas legend and puts it rightly in historical context, as an expression of the deterioration in the Jewish position in the High Middle Ages. An earlier exception is Hyam Maccoby's short treatment of the Legend in his book *Judas Iscariot and the Myth of Jewish Evil* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 101–7.

Modern scholarship of Jewish-Christian encounters follows in the footsteps of former Jewish writing. Indeed, the total silence of Jewish sources with regard to this story is quite surprising. If the Jews knew what Christians were telling about Judas – and it is difficult to imagine that they were not familiar with a juicy, colorful and widespread story as this – why did they not see fit to deny the story, to cast doubt as to its reliability, or at least to point out its absurdities? The Jews' ignoring of this story may be seen as a deliberate strategy, whose significance one is left to ponder. It is consistent with the feeble Jewish reaction towards accusations and libels widespread in the Christian world from the twelfth century on – particularly the ritual murder, the blood libel and libels of the desecration of the Host, as well as poisoning of wells and other acts of treachery. The Jewish responses to all these accusations were few and weak and do not reflect much intellectual interest.[62]

The absence of a Jewish response to the figure of Judas Iscariot as presented in the Golden Legend is in striking contrast to the colorful response of *Toledot Yeshu* to the New Testament figure of Judas, and should be understood in terms of the exacerbation in relations of the Christian majority to the Jewish minority during the High Middle Ages. Evidence of the existence of internal Jewish censorship and fear of exposing anti-Christian expressions in public can already be found at the beginning of the twelfth century, but a striking change took place in the thirteenth century with the strengthening of Christian pressure on Jews, Christian criticism of Jewish literature and the proliferation of a Satanic image of the Jew. It would seem that Jews lost any interest in confronting such images and did not believe there is a way to refute them. Whereas, in the New Testament, Judas Iscariot is presented as a human figure, treacherous and avaricious as he may be, in the Golden Legend he is depicted as pathologically distorted, a depiction that leaves no place for an answer, much like the tales of ritual murder or the accusations of ritual desecration of the Host.

Hence, in place of the open and frank discussion found in Late Antiquity, when various versions of the life of Jesus and of Judas developed (the period during which the apocryphal Christian stories concerning them were themselves born), the High Middle Ages developed a strangling and depressing atmosphere which allowed no place for alternative narratives. Rather than a competition among narratives, we now find a denial of the other and of his narrative, and feelings of frustration as to the very possibility of changing the position of the other side. It would seem that Jews now preferred to ignore the Christian neighbor rather than to answer him. Indeed, some versions of *Toledot Yeshu* continued to be circulated among Jews even at the end of the Middle Ages and into the begin-

[62] Israel J. Yuval, "'They Tell Lies: You Ate the Man': Jewish Reactions to Ritual Murder Accusations," *Religious Violence Between Christians and Jews* (ed. Anna Sapir Abulafia, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2002), 86–106.

ning of the modern period, and it seems quite likely that at least some of them were created during this period. They thereby preserved a genre that was born in the distant past and dealt with ancient story, but was unable to provide an answer to the new narratives that prevailed now in Christian culture, representing the Jew as ally to the Satan – sinful from birth, desecrating the body of Christ, and requiring the blood of Christian children.

When Christians in medieval Europe listened to the abhorrent story about Judas the arch-traitor, the betrayer of the son of God, Jews of the same countries listened clandestinely to the story of *Toledot Yeshu*, in which Judas is the hero and savior. The same Judas thus assumed two radically opposed images, and his character expressed in a concise manner the deep chasm that opened up between believers of the two religions.

Epilogue: Judah, Jew, and Israel

These two opposed stories, as well as the story about Judas who discovered the Cross in the legend of Helena, assume their full significance in view of the identification between the individual hero who carries the name Judas, and the Jewish collectivity.[63] A quick look at the sources shows that the term "Jew" (Yehudi, Yehudim; Iudeus, Iudei) was widespread in Jewish literature throughout the Second Temple period.[64] In tannaitic and amoraic literature, however, we note a significant change – the term "Jew" is hardly encountered at all, in its place we find "Israel." While "Jew" is mentioned only once in the Mishnah, "Israel" appears hundreds of times. Moreover, in those isolated cases when "Jew" is mentioned in Talmudic literature, it is almost always in a derogatory way and put in the mouths of non-Jews. A similar process occurs with regard to the name of the land. The term "the Land of Israel" is rarely found in biblical and Second Temple literature, the land being referred to by the names of its various regions – Judaea and Galilee – whereas in Mishnaic literature it is referred to almost exclusively as *Eretz Yisrael*. These developments acquire their full significance when compared to Christian literature, which uses almost solely the term Jew (and not Israel) for the Jewish people.

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[63] See Dieckmann: "Die mittelalterliche Tendenz, Personen typologisch zu deuten, führte dazu, Judas als Typ, als Inbegriff des jüdischen Volkes zu betrachten. Ansätze dazu gibt es schon in der Alten Kirche, etwa bei Augustinus und Hilarius von Poitiers" (Dieckmann, *Judas als Sündenbock*, 69).

[64] Graham Harvey, *The True Israel. Uses of the Names Jew, Hebrew and Israel in Ancient Jewish and Early Christian Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); David Goodblatt, *Elements of Ancient Jewish Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Martin Goodman, "Romans, Jews and Christians on the Names of the Jews," in *The Other in Second Temple Judaism: Essays in Honor of John J. Collins* (eds. Daniel C. Harlow, Karina Martin Hogan and Joel S. Kaminsky; Grand Rapids, forthcoming).

In medieval Jewish literature, the term "Jew" gradually came to assume a somewhat more central role. In Ashkenazic sources, "Jew" is often used, especially in the Responsa literature, which deals with concrete cases and occurrences. The same holds true for *Sefer Hasidim*, which brings daily anecdotes and exempla. However, its use seems to be limited to defining the ethnic identity of the contemporary individual or group, whereas "Israel" remains the definition used for the religious, mythic and historical identity. Proof of this can be found in Jewish liturgical literature – the *Siddur*, the *Mahzorim* for the various holidays, and the *piyyut* – in which the term "Israel" is used exclusively to refer to the Jewish people. In his *Mishne Tora*, Maimonides uses the term "Israel" more than 2000 times, whereas "Jew" is mentioned only six times. The book of *Zohar* mentions "Israel" 5700 times and "Jew" only 20 times.

Why did Jews refrain from using the term Jew, which was widely used by their Christian neighbors? We can think of several answers to this question:

The first is that what we have here is an internal Jewish development – still in need of explanation – that has nothing to do with the Christian world. Jews preferred the term Israel for their own internal reasons and the Christian label did not bother them at all.[65]

On the other hand, another answer could be that the Jews felt the need to refrain from using the term Jew because of its negative connotations. The name Israel thus served for them both as a declaration of their identity as the true Israel and as a means of eliminating the negative connotations that Christianity affixed to all Jews because of Judas Iscariot.

If so, then it would seem that Jews had two ways of tackling the negative Christian portrayal of Judas. One is the route taken by *Toledot Yeshu*, which adopts the Christian standpoint, but in an inverted manner: In all versions of that work, Judas Iscariot is the explicit representative of the Jewish people and its leadership: he is both hero and leader. This is a bold attempt to reverse the negative image of Judas by turning the picture portrayed in the New Testament upside down. The second way was to refrain from using the name Judas altogether. This was the solution adopted by the Sages, as well as by many, although not all, medieval writers and some modern ones as well.

Thus the circle is closed. What a contemporary Israeli author (Abraham B. Yehoshua) felt about the term "Jews" was also felt in Late Antiquity and the

[65] Eyal Ben Eliyahu, "Judea and Israel: The Territorial Dimension of National Identity," *Zion* 72 (2010): 127–151 (in Hebrew). According to Ben Eliyahu, the alteration in name from Judah to Israel during the tannaitic period derived from the moving of the religious and political center of the Jews in the land of Israel from Judaea to the Galilee. Israel J. Yuval is of the opinion that the change in the name of the land is related to a change in the sense of self-identity and the desire to propose an alternative geographical definition to the Roman name, "Palestinian Syria," following the Bar-Kokhba rebellion. See "The Myth of the Jewish Exile from the Land of Israel," *Common Knowledge* 12 (2006): 16–33. This tendency was weakened in amoraic literature, in which the term "Jew" is again used alongside "Israel," albeit in a much lower intensity.

Middle Ages by many Jews, for whom the term "Israel" represented their mythical, liturgical and historical identity. The term "Jew" remained risky, because it could easily be used derogatively by those who identified it with Judas Iscariot.