

Yeshu ha-Notsri as the actual founder of Christianity

Rene Salm

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Part 1

Introduction

Christian origins, Yeshu ha-Notsri

Readers who have followed my writings over the last decade or so are aware—from the book *NazarethGate* (final chapter) and on this website—of my thesis that Yeshu ha-Notsri was the historical founder of Christianity (e.g., see [here](#)). Yeshu lived in the early decades of the first century BCE (not CE!), thus exactly one century before the putative Jesus of Nazareth. Unlike Jesus of Nazareth, however, Yeshu is a prophet known to non-Christian literary records dating back to antiquity. That datum is critical, for the same cannot be said for Jesus of Nazareth. Over the last century, Jesus mythicists have scientifically shown that early attestations for the man from Nazareth are, *without exception*, either Christian forgeries or late Christian interpolations. The most thorough demolition of those false literary ‘witnesses’ is doubtless Hermann Detering’s book [Falsche Zeugen](#) (“False Witnesses,” German, Alibri, 2011). But several works in English reach the same conclusion, including several by Robert M. Price as also Frank Zindler’s, [The Jesus the Jews Never Knew](#) (AAP, 2003).

None of the above authors, however, ventures to discuss Yeshu ha-Notsri. Scientifically, this is actually quite surprising, for the name Yeshu ha-Notsri exactly translates “Jesus the Nazarene.” And we even know of a Jewish prophet, Yeshu ha-Notsri, in history. That Yeshu appears in both the Mishna and the Talmud as an early disciple of [Joshua ben Perachiah](#), who was the head of the Sanhedrin in early 1 BCE and the most powerful religious figure in Israel after the High Priest. Yeshu fled to Alexandria, Egypt, together with ben Perachiah and a number of other rabbinic v.i.p.’s during the infamous pogrom of

Alexander Janneus against the Pharisees, chronicled by Josephus (Ant. 13.372-83; Wars 1.90-98) and by rabbinical writings.

The Jewish records infer that Yeshu ha-Notsri was a well-placed Pharisee by upbringing, education, and heritage. For a discussion of the passages regarding Yeshu in the Talmud, see *NazarethGate* 419-427. Alternately, you may wait a couple of weeks and I will be mirroring those critical pages in subsequent posts in this series.

That Jewish records suggest Yeshu was a well-placed Pharisee may strike readers as a summary disqualification for him being the founder of Christianity. After all, the Jesus of the gospels is implacably opposed to the Pharisees—he is hardly a Pharisee himself! History, however, is ever full of surprises, and the problem evaporates when we learn that the historical Yeshu abandoned his Pharisaic heritage and subsequently became an inveterate *enemy* of the Pharisees, his one-time faction.

It is fashionable in scholarly circles today to portray Jesus as a Jew through-and-through. When stripped of their (secondary) narrative frames and ancillary accoutrements, however, the sayings and parables attributed to Jesus in the New Testament are quite un-Jewish—they endorse poverty, asceticism, encratism, abandonment of family, love of enemies, and the search for something better than what materiality and this life can provide. All these things are quite foreign to Judaism—at least, to the Judaism enshrined in the Old Testament. Surprisingly, however, all these elements are entirely at home in Buddhism.

Most astonishingly, it should not be overlooked that Jesus, like the Buddha, was a *wandering mendicant prophet*. The fundamental similarities in lifestyle between the two religious figures are truly striking.

I will explore the known details of Yeshu ha-Notsri's remarkable life and religious career in future posts. Here, however, I summarize by saying that while in Egyptian exile he abandoned his Pharisaic heritage and evidently embraced a radically un-Jewish philosophy, impelling Perachiah to excommunicate Yeshu for apostasy. What was that philosophy? I strongly suspect that while in Alexandria the founder of Christianity encountered Buddhism, a form of gnosticism, and was converted. Refusing to be intimidated, after his conversion/excommunication Yeshu evidently returned to Palestine and taught his new religion/philosophy with great success among the common people. That religion was arguably a form of Buddhism adapted to Jewish sensibilities, imagery, and language. Yet, Yeshu's very successful activity caused both astonishment and fear among the Jewish establishment. He was arrested by the Sanhedrin, tried for heresy and apostasy, stoned to death, and his body hung on a tree for passers-by to see. That, in a nutshell, is a summary of Yeshu's meteoric and extraordinary religious career.

Obviously, there are many striking parallels between the ministry of Yeshu ha-Nostri and that of Jesus of Nazareth: both were prophets living around the turn of the era, both opposed the "Pharisees and scribes," both were tried and found guilty by the Jewish establishment, both were sentenced to death, and both were crucified/hung up on a tree. And, of course, the names of the two prophets are identical: *Iesou Nazarene* is certainly a Greek adaptation of the Hebrew *Yeshu ha-Notsri* (see next post for proof of this).

NazarethGate

The long final chapter of my second book, [*NazarethGate*](#) (American Atheist Press, 2015) is unquestioningly the most detailed resumé to date of the case for Yeshu ha-Notsri as founder of Christianity. Entitled "In Search of the Rejected Seer," the chapter extends to seventy-five

pages. In it one will find a variety of arguments and details supporting my thesis, most especially pages 419-27. Here I do not intend to review all the surprising and forgotten historical details revealed in the book. I limit myself merely to the chapter's highlights, proceeding section by section:

(a) **Controlling the story** (pp. 402-06)—The traditional view of Christian origins, so widespread today as for the last fifteen hundred years, is itself based *solely* on Christian records. There is no external control. As it turns out (see above), those records were forged and fabricated long after the turn of the era by Christians themselves, in order to promote the false views of Jesus of Nazareth as set forth in the New Testament.

(b) **Pre-Christian gnosticism** (pp. 406-08)—Generally ignored, the fairly universal religion of the Levant in pre-Christian times was a religion centering on hard-to-find gnosis. That ubiquitous religion is widely attested in cuneiform records of the Bronze and Iron Ages, from Sumer to Anatolia. In that pre-Christian gnostic religion, water is a widespread symbol for gnosis. Enki (literally "Lord of the World") was a Sumerian water deity known for his wisdom. Enki's home was in the watery deep (the "Abzu"), and Gilgamesh seeks the plant of immortality also deep underwater (Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablet XI). Solomon's Temple had a great basin of water, a relic of the older religion (1 Kg 7:23-26 and 2 Chron 4:2-5). Only acquaintance with the Bronze-Iron Age religion of watery gnosis allows one to understand the prehistory of baptism, as well as truly puzzling passages in the Bible, such as the one in which **David curiously yearns for the water from Bethlehem** (2 Sam 23:13-17). Bethlehem itself was the mythical gateway to gnosis and the beyond—but all this rich proto-gnostic imagery and symbolism has long been lost. And that is no coincidence—it has been systematically and deliberately obliterated by Christianity.

(c) **Jesus of Nazareth was unknown to "Paul"** (pp. 408-11)—This is still contested by mainstream Christianity, but it is quite evident that Paul knew only a spiritual Jesus, an all-encompassing, invisible, saving, and divine entity that is available to all and at any time. Paul also knows nothing—or next to nothing—of the career of Jesus of Nazareth.

(d) **A human being** (pp. 412-17)—While Paul's Jesus is spiritual, certain epistles attributed to Paul seem to refer to the fusion of divine and human elements in a single person of history, one who was "anointed," who "suffered," and who was spiritually elevated to the status of High Priest in heaven. The Epistle to the Hebrews refers to "**in the days of his flesh**" (5:7), and many epistles have allusions to a prophet in the flesh (a full list of passages with discussion is in the book).

(e) **Docetism** (pp. 417-18)—The above theological perspective (what I call **Stage II Christology**), that is, the fusion of divine spirit + human body, is today mischaracterized as "docetism" (from Gk. *dokein*, "to seem"). As commonly defined, docetists denied that Jesus had a fleshly body. However, this is a mischaracterization because Christians in the first century CE (Jesus of Nazareth had not yet been invented) denied only that the divine saving spirit had no body—it was immaterial (above, point [c]). However, that spiritual entity came down and *indwelled* a body here on earth—and it can do so for any number of people and at any time. This perspective is key to unlocking so many New Testament epistles attributed to Paul. In short, docetists *did* say that Jesus had no body, but only because they defined 'Jesus' uniquely as the immaterial, *spiritual* aspect of a saved person.

(f) **"Clues to a lost teacher"** (pp. 419-71)—In the 50+ pages of *NazarethGate* under this title I present the evidence that a prophet of the early first century BCE, by the name of Yeshu ha-Notsri (probably itself a title/given name) was the true founder of Christianity. I discuss Yeshu in Jewish writings (pp. 419-28), the invention of the Christian Jesus in II CE, and many enigmatic figures that may, in some ways, be

merely echoes of Yeshu as reflected by different first century groups of followers (James the Just, Simon Magus, John the Baptist, Dositheus, etc). I close the chapter with a brief discussion of Qumran and its probable links to the original Jesus, Yeshu ha-Notsri.

Part 2

The witness of ibn Daud

Christian origins, Yeshu ha-Notsri

The historical works of the Jews state that this Joshua b. Perachiah was the teacher of Jesus the Nazarene [ישו הנצרי]. If this is so, it follows that he lived in the time of King Janneus. However, the historical works of the gentiles state that he was born in the days of Herod and crucified in the days of his son Archelaus. Now this is a significant difference of opinion, for there is a discrepancy between them of more than 110 years... [The gentile historians] argue this point so vehemently in order to prove that the Temple and kingdom of Israel endured for but a short while after his crucifixion. However, we have it as an authentic tradition from the Mishna and the Talmud, which did not distort anything, that R. Joshua b. Perachiah fled to Egypt in the days of Alexander, that is, Janneus, and with him fled Jesus the Nazarene. We also have it as an authentic tradition that he was born in the fourth year of the reign of King Alexander, which was the year 263 after the building of the Second Temple, and the fifty-first year of the reign of the Hasmonean dynasty. In the year 299 after the building of the Temple, he was apprehended at the age of thirty-six in the third year of the reign of Aristobulus the son of Janneus. (Ibn Daud, *The Book of Tradition*, II.95–114, pp. 20–21)

Abraham ibn Daud of Toledo was a Jewish scholar living in Moorish dominated Spain. He was born about 1110 CE and died—some would say a martyr—about 1180. Though he was a past-master of Hebrew, Arabic was his mother tongue. We know very little of Ibn Daud's life, but his scholarship survives in two influential works:

- *The Book of Tradition* (Hebrew, *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*, 1161 CE), a historical chronicle from the creation of the world by Yahweh to his day.
- *The Sublime Faith* (Arabic, *Al-'aqida l-Rafiya*, 1168 CE), a philosophical work.

The Book of Tradition is in three parts: (a) the historical treatise (primarily a history of rabbinic tradition); (b) an excursus on the rulers of Rome; and (c) an abridgment of the **Josippon**. In all his writings Ibn

Daud “was most concerned with defending and validating orthodox Jewish dogma and practice” (Cohen, xxix).

All the passages I will be citing regarding Jesus the Nazarene/Yeshu ha-Notsri are from the first part of Ibn Daud’s *Book of Tradition*. The English translation (as well as the Hebrew original) can be found in Gerson Cohen, *The Book of Tradition by Abraham ibn Daud* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1967).

Some critical implications of the above citation

Ibn Daud’s citation at the top of this page is unequivocal that Jesus the Nazarene lived in the time of **Alexander Janneus** (r. 103–76 BCE). This is, of course, explosive information that goes against tradition, as Ibn Daud was well aware.

In the above citation I have bracketed the Hebrew for “Jesus the Nazarene.” In fact, that is not precisely what Ibn Daud wrote, but what the editor, Gerson Cohen, translates. When one consults the Hebrew original (in the same edition, Hebrew section p. 15, lines 64–65) we find that Ibn Daud actually wrote ישו הנצרי—which transliterates as “Yeshu ha-N[o]tsri” (or conceivably, “Yeshu ha-N[a]tsri,” because the vowel between the nun and tsade is not written in unpointed Hebrew). In other words, Cohen is using “Jesus the Nazarene” as a convention, perhaps because that moniker is familiar to all. We should be clear, however: Ibn Daud is not actually writing about “Jesus the Nazarene.” He is writing about a man called *Yeshu ha-Notsri* who lived in the time of Janneus.

Thus, readers would be wrong to suppose that Ibn Daud knows two different people: Yeshu ha-Notsri and Jesus the Nazarene. He clearly has only one person in mind, shown by the fact that Ibn Daud claims that Yeshu ha-Notsri lived in the time of King Janneus, and that the Christians falsely dated him to the time of Herod. This proves that for Ibn Daud *there was no Jesus of Nazareth in the time of Herod*. There

was only Yeshu ha-Notsri, who lived in the first decades of I BCE. This is the first critical implication of the above passage.

From this, it is clear that, for Ibn Daud—a Jewish scholar writing in the Hebrew language—the name for the invented Christian prophet from Nazareth is the same as the name of the prophet in the time of Janneus. This fact may appear trite, but it is important to grasp, for the moniker “Jesus the Nazarene” in all languages linguistically signals the Hebrew “Yeshu ha-Notsri.” Let me repeat that, for it is a ground-shaking revelation: the moniker “Jesus the Nazarene” in all languages linguistically signals the Hebrew “Yeshu ha-Notsri.” This, of course, will have important implications for the Markan evangelist’s use of Gk. *Iesou Nazarene*. That name, when retrojected into Hebrew, refers to none other than “Yeshu ha-Notsri.” We shall see that the same can be said for the Mishna and Talmud—they know “Yeshu ha-Notsri.” Furthermore, they also date Yeshu to the time of King Janneus. Thus, there is no reason to suppose that the “Yeshu ha-Notsri” of ancient rabbinical writings refers to Jesus of Nazareth in the time of Herod. Rather, as Daud points out, it refers to a prophet who lived in the time of King Janneus, about one century earlier. This is a second critical implication.

Ibn Daud was exquisitely acquainted with the Mishna and the Talmud. Those ancient writings mention Yeshu ha-Notsri a number of times. Yeshu/Jesus was a renegade prophet in the time of King Janneus, someone who repudiated his heritage and was excommunicated by Joshua b. Perachiah. The rabbinical writings know only that prophet. They know nothing of the Christian “*Jesus of Nazareth*” (the toponym “Nazareth” does not appear even once in the Mishna or Talmud). I will be exploring the relevant passages in subsequent posts. Incidentally, these rabbinical collections are highly critical of the prophet Yeshu/Jesus in the time of Janneus. They often resort to euphemisms and

hidden names to refer to him (on this, see R. Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash*, 1903).

Yeshu, Perachiah, and Janneus

Thus, the relevant passages in the Mishna and Talmud conform to what Ibn Daud asserts about Yeshu/Jesus: he lived in the time of Alexander Janneus and he was associated with the important Pharisee Joshua ben Perachiah. This is powerful confirmation that Ibn Daud was not simply going rogue. Joshua ben Perachiah is well known to history. He was *Nasi*, that is, head of the Sanhedrin, arguably the most powerful religious figure in Israel (the High Priest notwithstanding). The position of *nasi* was created in 191 BCE when the Sanhedrin lost confidence in the ability of the High Priest to serve as its head. The Romans recognized the *nasi* as Patriarch of the Jews and required all Jews to pay him a tax for the upkeep of his office. Perachiah (*nasi*) and his colleague Nittai of Arbela (*Av Beit Din*, second in command of the Great Sanhedrin) were one of the five pairs (*zugot*) of scholars who received and transmitted Jewish tradition in Second Temple times.

Janneus feared the Pharisees and their growing power. As Josephus recounts, the king was actually at war with the Pharisees and was, at one point, in grave danger of losing his kingship. However, through a strategic blunder, the Pharisaic side lost its advantage. When Janneus regained power, he had 800 Pharisees crucified in front of their wives and children while he looked on consorting with his concubines. This was in 86 BCE (see *NazarethGate* 420).

During the Jannean disturbance, Perachiah fled to Alexandria along with a number of important Pharisees. Among the refugees was Jesus, known to history as **Yeshu ha-Notsri**.

Ensuing posts will flesh out what we can piece together of the astonishing career of this 'early' Jesus the Nazarene. We note that Ibn Daud ascribes a lifespan of 36 years to the prophet: he was born in

100 BCE (“the fourth year of the reign of King Alexander”), and he was apprehended in 64 BCE (“at the age of thirty-six in the third year of the reign of **Aristobulus** the son of Janneus”). However, there is much more we can learn about his astonishing career from the rabbinical records.

Part 3

The strange witness of Epiphanius

Christian origins, Yeshu ha-Notsri

For at Christ's arrival the rulers in succession from Judah came to an end. Until his time the rulers were anointed priests, but after his birth in Bethlehem of Judea the order ended and changed with Alexander, a ruler of priestly and kingly stock. After Alexander this heritage from the time of Salina—also known as Alexandra—died out under King Herod and the Roman Emperor Augustus. (Epiphanius, *Panarion* 29.3.3, Williams edition.)

Scholars have ever found this passage inexplicable. Epiphanius wrote his *Panarion* about 375 CE, and it is entirely bizarre that the bishop of Salamis in Cyprus would date Jesus to the time of Alexander Janneus. Epiphanius writes that *after* Jesus' "birth in Bethlehem of Judea the order ended and changed with Alexander." Clearly, Alexander Janneus (r. 103-76 BCE) is intended, for that name is followed in the citation by Janneus' successor Selina ("Salome"), "also known as Alexandra" (r. 76-67 BCE), and both *precede* the era of Herod and Augustus. Furthermore, Janneus was the last anointed priest to rule. His successor and wife, Salome Alexandra appointed **Hyrcanus II** as High Priest, and henceforth the High Priesthood and the crown were separate—as the Pharisees had always wished.

[ASIDE: Bishop Epiphanius must, of course, have been quite familiar with the canonical dating of Jesus to the time of the Herods—first Herod the Great, and then his son Herod Antipas. That information had been codified centuries before. Witness, for example, the following much earlier witnesses:

- Justin Martyr (fl. c. 150 CE) **knows the synoptic gospels** (but not

GJn), including their information regarding Herod (e.g. [Dial. with Trypho](#) chp. CIII);

– Tatian (fl. 160-75 CE) writes his [Diatessaron](#), already based upon the four canonical gospels, and including all the canonical passages regarding Herod, Pilate, etc.;

– Irenaeus of Lyon (late II CE) in his *Adversus Haereses* refers to and cites all four canonical gospels, including Herod, Pilate, Caiphas, and Annas (e.g. [here](#), XIX.7, etc.);

– Tertullian (c. 200 CE), writes *Contra Marcion*, which contains myriad passages from the Gospel of Luke, including mentions of Herod and Pilate (e.g. [here](#), XLII).

Thus, Epiphanius was certainly aware of the standard chronology of Jesus in the time of Herod. However, in the above citation, he must have 'let slip' an alternate chronology with which he was also familiar. That alternate chronology of Jesus living in the time of King Janneus was provably extant, for we have it also in the contemporary compilation of the Talmud (as we shall see in the next post). Epiphanius knew both Hebrew and Aramaic, and thus his familiarity with such an alternate chronology is eminently possible. That Epiphanius' above citation conforms precisely with the rabbinical chronology (and also with that of Ibn Daud, as we learned in the preceding post) proves that the alternate chronology of an 'earlier Jesus' was not only known to Jewish tradition but also had reached into Christendom. (FYI: G.R.S. Mead's old discussion of Epiphanius' colossal 'misdating' is [here](#).)

Those who are familiar with Epiphanius' writings will not be surprised that he would let slip a few sentences regarding an alternate, non-compatible chronology of Jesus. Though learned and erudite, Epiphanius had a penchant for sloppiness was also prone, in my opinion, to invent when he found it convenient. Readers of my first

book will recall that the bishop could not even remember the name of his protagonist in one long (and no doubt fanciful) account—he inexplicably calls him ‘Ellel’ in the first half of the story but ‘Judas’ in the second half (see *The Myth of Nazareth*, pp. 278 ff). In this case, Epiphanius gives the game away when he admits, “I guess he was called that” **i.e. Judas**. As I wrote in a footnote:

This indicates that the church father did not bother to look back a page or two to see what the boy’s name was (“Ellel” is last mentioned at 30.7.1). Such unconcern is characteristic of a man writing either far too quickly, too much, or who feels that no one is even going to read what he is writing. (*The Myth of Nazareth*, p. 281)

I also suspect that Epiphanius was a little too devoted to wine and often wrote when he was less than sober. It’s clear that he did not review, revise, or edit his prolix writings—and didn’t really care enough to do so.

In any case, we can be grateful that the church father let slip the few sentences cited above, for they attest to the existence of an astonishing alternate chronology for Jesus the Nazarene. We can be sure that Epiphanius did not invent that alternate chronology—after all, it contradicts the Christian canonical dating (this is the criterion of embarrassment), it conforms perfectly to Jewish records, and it also aligns with what the medieval writer Ibn Daud asserts—as we saw **in the preceding post**. As a result, we must take Epiphanius’ remarkable chronological oopsie as yet a further clue to a most revealing redating of Jesus.

Part 4

The ancient Jewish evidence

Christian origins, Yeshu ha-Notsri

Note: It is no coincidence that the Mishna and Talmud preserve most of the information we have about Yeshu ha-Notsri (**correctly translated** “Jesus the Nazarene”!), for the prophet’s entire life was intimately enmeshed with the Jewish religious establishment of the early first century BCE. He grew up a highly-educated Pharisee groomed for the Sanhedrin, but astonishingly repudiated his Jewish heritage as a young man in Egyptian exile in favor of a foreign (I would say ‘Buddhist’) form of gnosticism. Yeshu then returned to Israel and preached with alarming success, was excommunicated by the Sanhedrin, arrested, tried, and executed for apostasy according to rigorous stipulations of Jewish religious law. All of these elements are attested in Talmudic records.

As we have seen, the medieval Jewish scholar Ibn Daud drew upon Talmudic references for his information regarding Yeshu ha-Notsri. For his precise dating of Yeshu (100–64 BCE), however, he seems to have had access to materials that are now lost. How reliable those precise dates are is uncertain, for another tradition suggests that Yeshu/Jesus was about fifty years old when he was arrested (to be discussed in the next post).

This and subsequent posts in this thread are an update/revision of the section in my book *NazarethGate* entitled “Yeshu in Jewish writings” (pp. 419–27). These posts omit some tangential material as well as footnotes. In addition, I have here added more recent material and expanded on some points for clarification/further background.

The posts in this thread are the most complete reconstructed account to date (on the Web or in print) of the historical career of Yeshu ha-Notsri.

Yeshu in Jewish writings

The reader perhaps may say "But, if Jesus Christ was born in the first year of our era, and Yeshu was born ninety years before, how can they have been one and the same person?" To which we reply, that there is no proof of Jesus Christ having been born in the first year of our era, and many indications to the contrary. Christian chronology has been arbitrarily established. There was great uncertainty among the early Christians, who reckoned like all Roman subjects from the reign of the Caesars, not only as to the birth, but also as to the age of their savior. Irenaeus, the first Christian father who mentions the four gospels, maintains that Jesus was fifty years old at his death, and the chronology of Luke is absolutely inconsistent with Roman history, as well as being at variance with that of Matthew.

—G. W. Foote and J. Wheeler, *The Jewish Life of Christ: Being the Sepher Toldoth Yeshu*. (London: Progressive Publ. Co., 1885, "Preface.")

The most accessible clues pointing to a prophet behind Christianity who is not Jesus of Nazareth are found in rabbinic writings. The Mishna and Talmud preserve numerous (understandably antagonistic) references to the founder of Christianity. As Frank Zindler has shown, none of these preserve historical value regarding a Jesus of Nazareth. He writes that the "only clear references to the Jesus of Christianity" are those relating to a certain Yeshu ha-Notsri (Zindler 2003:248). But this Yeshu lived in the time of Alexander Janneus (early first century BCE) and obviously has nothing at all to do with the New Testament Jesus. In fact, we will see that Jewish writings are surprisingly uniform in dating "Jesus" to this earlier time.

The most remarkable passage may be Sanhedrin 107b (partly cited below). There we read of the Pharisaic head (nasi) of the Sanhedrin, Joshua ben Perachiah who, during an unsuccessful Pharisaic uprising against Janneus fled to Alexandria with a number of disciples. We

know that the uprising began in 94 BCE and lasted six years. It culminated in the infamous mass execution (by crucifixion) of 800 Pharisees by Janneus. The king then placed Sadducees in positions of power.

One of the pupils/protégés of Perachiah was Yeshu ha-Notsri. On the return trip to Israel Yeshu was excommunicated by Perachiah on the grounds of lasciviousness (for interpreting an equivocal remark in a sexual way). We can surmise that the return trip took place after the death of Janneus, when his wife and the Pharisee-friendly Salome Alexandra began her reign. There is very good reason Alexandra was friendly to the Pharisees: her own brother, Simon ben Shetach, was a leading Pharisee. He had been in hiding during the persecution but, on the death of Janneus, sent for Perachiah to return from Alexandria. A glorious few years ensued for the Pharisees—remembered by them as a golden age. On the death of Perachiah, Shetach became nasi.

The Talmud records the figurative but joyous words with which ben Shetach advised Perachiah to return to Jerusalem:

What of R. Jehoshua ben Perachiah? When Jannai the king killed our rabbis, R. Jehoshua ben Perachiah fled to Alexandria of Egypt. When there was peace, Shimon ben Shetach sent to him, "From me the city of holiness, to thee Alexandria of Egypt. My husband stays in thy midst and I sit forsaken." –b. Sanh. 107b.

The return of Perachiah to Jerusalem would have been c. 75 BCE. Thus, it would appear that Yeshu spent as many as twenty years in Alexandria (c. 94–c. 75 BCE).

As is well known, at the time Alexandria was the intellectual center of the western world. Not even Rome or Athens compared with it. The city was the crossroads of East and West, continually trading with faraway India and (by proxy) even with China. Buddhist monks had been in Alexandria since about 250 BCE, **when the Emperor Asoka sent them**, together no doubt with a goodly number of sutras written

on palm leaves. (Interestingly, Dositheus reputedly wrote on palm leaves—*NazarethGate*:454).

Asoka's religious mission to the West is memorialized in his rock edict no. 13. As for the king of Egypt who received Buddhist missionaries and their texts, he was the extravagant and cosmopolitan Ptolemy II Philadelphus (d. 246 BCE), known himself to have already sent embassies to Asoka in India. Philadelphus founded the Alexandria library and, according to legend, mandated that no ship could dock without bringing texts for its library.

During his long Egyptian exile, if the young Yeshu ha-Notsri were of an inquiring mind—and indications suggest as much—he would have been exposed in Alexandria to the most vital and diverse intellectual currents of the age. An open, well-educated Jewish scholar in the great city would have been challenged to acquaint himself with the most far-reaching and provocative insights of the era.

The literary record attests that two decades in Alexandria witnessed a sea change in the young man's thought, for—according to the Talmud—he was excommunicated by his master upon their return to Israel. The above citation b. Sanh. 107b continues:

Rabbi Perachiah came, and found himself at a certain inn; they showed him great honor. He said, "How beautiful is this Acsania!" ["Acsania" denotes both inn and innkeeper. Perachiah used it in the first sense; the answering remark implies the second meaning, "hostess."] Yeshu said to him, "Rabbi, she has narrow eyes." R. Perachiah said, "Wretch, do you employ yourself thus?" He sent out four hundred trumpets and excommunicated him.

Yeshu came before him many times and said to him, "Receive me." But he would not notice him. One day when R. Perachiah was reciting the Shema, Yeshu came before him. R. Perachiah was minded to receive him and made a sign to him. But Yeshu thought that he repelled him. Yeshu went and hung up a brick and worshipped it.

R. Perachiah said to him, "Return." Yeshu replied, "Thus have I received from you, that every one who sins and causes the multitude to sin, they give him not the chance to repent."

And a teacher has said, "Yeshu ha-Notsri practiced magic and led astray and deceived Israel." [R. Herford, *Christianity in Talmud & Midrash*, p 51.]

The foregoing is the *locus classicus* dating Yeshu/Jesus to the time of Janneus. The passage takes it for granted that Yeshu lived in the time of Rabbi Perachiah, that Perachiah was Yeshu's teacher/mentor, and that the two had fled to Alexandria in Egypt (the latter from the first part of the passage at the top of this page). The crux of the passage has not to do with dating but with Yeshu's apostasy. For now, we note that a major change took place in Yeshu's thinking during his time in the Egyptian capital. The rabbinic records indicate that the change *led to his excommunication from Judaism*.

Part 5

The young prophet

Christian origins, Yeshu ha-Notsri

NOTE: In the preceding post we began to construct a biography of the early first century BCE prophet Yeshu ha-Notsri from Jewish rabbinical records. Though Jewish/Talmudic references to Yeshu are few, when viewed together they permit one to construct the outline of a radical, courageous, and successful prophet in Judea who was so hated and feared by the Jewish religious authorities that they arrested him, tried him for apostasy, and executed him.

Parallels with the later Jesus of Nazareth of the New Testament are obvious. Not only did Yeshu's biography certainly influence the canonical storyline, it may also surprise readers that the *names are identical*: Yeshu ha-Notsri translates directly to "Jesus the Nazarene," as I explain [here](#).

This post continues to mirror the content of pages 419-27 in my book *NazarethGate* (American Atheist Press, 2015) with, however, considerable added material.

As we saw in the immediately preceding post, Yeshu fled to Alexandria in Egypt with the Pharisaic leader Joshua ben Perachiah in order to escape the intense persecution of Pharisees by King Alexander Janneus. As a young disciple and associate of Perachiah, Yeshu was evidently an up-and-coming, well educated Pharisee being groomed for the Sanhedrin, the ruling religious body of Israel, of which Perachiah was the head (nasi). While in exile, however, Yeshu encountered 'foreign' influences (almost certainly Buddhism) and made a wholesale renunciation of his Jewish religious heritage. Upon learning of this, Perachiah excommunicated Yeshu for apostasy. This

event was so significant that it is recorded in the Talmud in several places. This post expands on what we know from those records, and what we can infer about the early years of Yeshu ha-Notsri.

The young Yeshu according to the 33 year timeline

Lk 3:23 reads: “Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age.” This information, together with a one to three year ministry for Jesus (some variation exists between the Synoptics and the Gospel of John) leads to the traditional lifespan of Jesus of Nazareth of about thirty-three years.

With time, the 33-year lifespan of Jesus became the majority position, reflected in most writings of the Church and inherited down through the centuries. A minority view has also existed that posits a roughly 50-year lifespan for Jesus, based on Jn 8:57, “The Jews therefore said unto him, You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” The church father Irenaeus of Lyon (c. 200 CE) **took this verse to mean that Jesus was approaching fifty years of age when he died:**

Now that the first stage of early life embraces thirty years, and that this extends onwards to the fortieth year, every one will admit; but from the fortieth and fiftieth year a man begins to decline towards old age, which our Lord possessed while He still fulfilled the office of a teacher... (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Chp. 5. Passage cited in full and discussed at Zindler 2003:127 f.)

It is interesting that Abraham Ibn Daud—the Jewish scholar of the twelfth century who proposed that the ‘real’ Jesus was Yeshu ha-Notsri in the time of King Janneus—gave this earlier Jesus/Yeshu a lifespan of thirty-four years (100–66 BCE), thus reinforcing the majority position. Ibn Daud’s witness is particularly strong because he in an independent source quite outside the stream of Christian writings.

When we superimpose a lifespan of 33–34 years on what we know about Yeshu ha-Notsri from rabbinical writings, a unique and

interesting timeline results. Before giving that timeline, let's review the most revealing citation from the Talmud regarding Yeshu:

What of R. Jehoshua ben Perachiah? When Jannai the king killed our rabbis, R. Jehoshua ben Perachiah fled to Alexandria of Egypt. When there was peace, Shimon ben Shetach sent to him, "From me the city of holiness, to thee Alexandria of Egypt. My husband stays in thy midst and I sit forsaken."

Rabbi Perachiah came, and found himself at a certain inn; they showed him great honor. He said, "How beautiful is this Acsania!" ["Acsania" denotes both inn and innkeeper. Perachiah used it in the first sense; the answering remark implies the second meaning, "hostess."] Yeshu said to him, "Rabbi, she has narrow eyes." R. Perachiah said, "Wretch, do you employ yourself thus?" He sent out four hundred trumpets and excommunicated him.

Yeshu came before him many times and said to him, "Receive me." But he would not notice him. One day when R. Perachiah was reciting the Shema, Yeshu came before him. R. Perachiah was minded to receive him and made a sign to him. But Yeshu thought that he repelled him. Yeshu went and hung up a brick and worshipped it.

R. Perachiah said to him, "Return." Yeshu replied, "Thus have I received from you, that every one who sins and causes the multitude to sin, they give him not the chance to repent."

And a teacher has said, "Yeshu ha-Notsri practiced magic and led astray and deceived Israel." [b. Sanhedrin 107b; R. Herford, *Christianity in Talmud & Midrash*, p 51.]

King Alexander Janneus, arch-enemy of the Pharisees, died in 76 BCE. This was likely the year of Perachiah's return to Israel, and hence probably also the year of Yeshu's excommunication for, according to the above rabbinical account, it was on the return trip to Israel from Egypt that Joshua b. Perachiah excommunicated Yeshu. We can doubt the immediate context of the excommunication—the entire scene at the inn appears contrived, and misunderstanding a single word is hardly cause for such a drastic, life-changing action as excommunication. But it is in keeping with the style of the Talmud, for the rabbis wrote cryptically and tersely for insiders, often in a sort of code. The real explanations were reserved for students at the

rabbinical colleges: Lydda (Lod, Lud), Jamnia, and Sepphoris in Palestine, and Pumbeditha in Babylonia.

Ibn Daud's chronology. According to the medieval Jewish scholar, Yeshu was born in 100 BCE [→ [here](#)]. Yeshu would thus have been twenty-four years old at the time of his excommunication from Judaism. If Ibn Daud was correct, one can provisionally construct the following very revealing timeline for Yeshu ha-Notsri:

Year BCE	Yeshu
100	born
94	Age 6 Pharisaic uprising against Jannaeus (civil war); Perachiah & inner circle (incl. Yeshu) flee to Egypt
88	Age 12 Janneus prevails in civil war and crucifies 800 pharisees (see P. Schäfer, Hst. of the Jews 2003:75)
76	Age 24 Janneus dies; Salome Alexandra becomes queen and champions the Pharisees; Perachiah and Yeshu return to Israel; on the way, Perachiah excommunicates Yeshu
76-66	Age 24-34 Yeshu teaches/preaches in Israel with great success
66	Age 34 Yeshu is arrested by the Sanhedrin, tried, stoned, and hung/crucified for apostasy

I caution the reader that the above is provisional. While it conforms to the lifespan of Jesus in the canonical gospels, the application of 34 years to Yeshu ha-Notsri actually depends *on a single passage* from a Jewish scholar writing more than a millennium after the events he is describing. Nevertheless, I can think of no reason for Ibn Daud to have invented his very precise lifespan of Yeshu. It seems more likely to me that he was drawing on sources now lost. Furthermore, as noted [in a prior post](#), Ibn Daud correctly anchors Yeshu's chronology to now-

verified datings for Janneus, Alexandra, and Aristobulus II. In other words, *historically, Ibn Daud's chronology checks out.*

Joshua (or Yehoshua) ben Perachiah was *nasi*, head of the Great Sanhedrin and arguably the most powerful man at the time in the Jewish religious establishment. Talmudic records remember him fondly as one of the *zugot* (pairs) who transmitted the Torah from Moses down to later Pharisees/rabbis in an unbroken chain. In other words, he was a very important man during his lifetime. Joshua ben Perachiah would have been one of the most sought after victims of King Janneus—had he stayed in Israel.

Several interesting points emerge from Ibn Daud's 34-year chronology. First of all, Yeshu was but a boy when he went into exile. This must give us pause. Why would Perachiah take a mere boy into exile? There is only one possible answer: Yeshu belonged to an important Pharisaic family, important enough that he was part of the general exodus of Pharisees to Egypt under their leader, Joshua ben Perachiah. Yeshu was a blue-blood. Though but a boy, Yeshu was sufficiently promising and/or important that Perachiah protected him from the monstrous, merciless pogrom of King Janneus by including him in his retinue of Pharisaic exiles to Egypt.

As the heir of a powerful, well-placed Pharisaic family, Yeshu ha-Notsri (certainly not his real name, but an epithet later given him by his disciples and by history) would himself probably have been groomed for the **Sanhedrin**, the assembly consisting of judges who meted out justice and interpreted the law for all of Israel. The Sanhedrin administered justice according to the Word of God, the Torah, for the Pharisees (later to become the rabbis) were expert interpreters of Jewish scripture—and the Sanhedrin was their ultimate religious and civil council, with the ability to level penalties up to and including death.

Being groomed for the Sanhedrin, Yeshu would have been consummately schooled in what we would term 'Jewish religious scholastics,' that is, the Tanach (Torah, Prophets, and Writings) that make up Jewish scripture (the 'Old Testament'), as well as the minutiae of applied Jewish jurisprudence. It is quite astounding to realize that the founder of the Christian religion (for this is who we are really discussing) was actually an expert in Jewish religious scholastics. But is this not obvious, in any case, from the canonical gospels? After all, Jesus of Nazareth engages with "scribes and Pharisees" repeatedly—and he always bests them in argumentation. This suggests to me that the canonical gospels have faithfully reflected this aspect of Yeshu ha-Notsri. At the same time, his erudition places in great doubt that Jesus of Nazareth could have been raised in a backward hamlet in Lower Galilee, one that—had it existed at the turn of the era—would even have lacked a school.

According to Ibn Daud's chronology, Yeshu ha-Notsri spent no less than eighteen years in Egyptian exile in Alexandria. Not only is this a very long time, but it also represents the formative years of Yeshu ha-Notsri. Though born in Israel, the scion of an eminent Jewish family, *Yeshu was raised in the foreign culture of Egypt*. We should not suppose, however, that the young Yeshu was in a non-Jewish milieu. Far from it. Alexandria at the time had a vibrant Jewish community—the largest outside of the land of Israel. Nevertheless, his extended foreign sojourn is critical to understanding the development of Yeshu's subsequent career. Might it not also have influenced the canonical gospels, namely, Jesus of Nazareth's sojourn in Egypt as a boy (Mt 2:14)?

To leap forward in our story a little, it is an astonishment, an exquisite irony, that Yeshu—an intelligent, promising lad from a noble Jewish family, groomed for the Sanhedrin, the highest religious body in the land—would himself eventually become *the Sanhedrin's greatest*

victim, would be arrested for apostasy, tried, convicted, and murdered according to rigidly correct Jewish religious dicta.

And therein lies the real pathos of Yeshu's story. His resoluteness to speak truth to power, his tenacity, intelligence, profound grasp of life, and above all his willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice—these in combination produced astonishing results not only in his life, but also in world history.

In fact, his sacrifice ultimately produced *Christianity*.

Part 6

The flight to Alexandria

Christian origins, Yeshu ha-Notsri

Our rabbis teach, 'Ever let the left hand repel and the right hand invite, not like Elisha who repulsed Gehazi with both hands, and not like R. Yehoshua ben Perachiah who repulsed Yeshu ha-Notsri with both hands...

What of R. Jehoshua ben Perachiah? **When Jannai the king killed our rabbis, R. Jehoshua ben Perachiah and Yeshu fled to Alexandria of Egypt.** When there was peace, Shimon ben Shetach sent to him [i.e. Perachiah], "From me the city of holiness, to thee Alexandria of Egypt. My husband stays in thy midst and I sit forsaken."

Rabbi Perachiah came, and found himself at a certain inn; they showed him great honor. He said, "How beautiful is this Acsania!" ["Acsania" denotes both inn and innkeeper. Perachiah used it in the first sense; the answering remark implies the second meaning, "hostess."] Yeshu said to him, "Rabbi, she has narrow eyes." R. Perachiah said, "Wretch, do you employ yourself thus?" He sent out four hundred trumpets and excommunicated him.

Yeshu came before him many times and said to him, "Receive me." But he would not notice him. One day when R. Perachiah was reciting the Shema, Yeshu came before him. R. Perachiah was minded to receive him and made a sign to him. But Yeshu thought that he repelled him. Yeshu went and hung up a brick and worshipped it.

R. Perachiah said to him, "Return." Yeshu replied, "Thus have I received from you, that every one who sins and causes the multitude to sin, they give him not the chance to repent."

And a teacher has said, "Yeshu ha-Notsri practiced magic and led astray and deceived Israel." [b. Sanhedrin 107b; R. Herford, Christianity in Talmud & Midrash, p 51.]

The above passage is the locus classicus for the thesis that Yeshu ha-Notsri (**literally "Jesus the Nazarene"!**) lived in the time of King Alexander Janneus (r. 104–76 BCE). Several other Talmudic passages

point to the same dating. In fact, the Talmud does not know a founder of Christianity living in the time of the Herods! This should give us pause, for which would likely know Jewish history better: Greek records written by pagan Christians, or Hebrew records written by *Jews themselves*?

The above citation is chock full of information—including the role of Simon ben Shetach, the excommunication of Yeshu, and reasons for that excommunication. But here I want to focus on the words in red font. Those words tell us several things:

- (1) the rabbis dated Yeshu to the time of the great pogrom of King Janneus against the Pharisees;
- (2) the leader of the Pharisees and head (nasi) of the Sanhedrin, Joshua ben Perachiah, fled from Israel along with Yeshu ha-Notsri; and
- (3) Perachiah and Yeshu fled to Alexandria in Egypt. Let's very briefly look at each of these points in turn:

(1) **Dating Yeshu to the time of King Janneus.** We saw in [the preceding post](#) that the medieval Jewish scholar Ibn Daud considered Yeshu ha-Notsri to be the actual founder of Christianity. He dated Yeshu to the time of Janneus. He also maintained that 'Jesus of Nazareth in the time of the Herods' was purely a Christian invention. Furthermore, Ibn Daud offered information that precisely dates Yeshu's lifespan: 100-66 BCE. We don't know the source(s) that he used to arrive at that dating, but his dating does happen to match the traditional lifespan for Jesus given in the gospels: 33-34 years.

(2) **Yeshu ha-Notsri accompanies Perachiah into exile.** As head of the Sanhedrin, Joshua b. Perachiah was probably the most powerful religious figure in Israel. Though the Sanhedrin during the early first century BCE was not yet the 71-member body that it would later become, it already had important political, legislative, and judicial powers. Of course, such an important figure as Perachiah would not have fled into exile alone. No doubt he did so at the head of a

contingent of other important Pharisees who feared for their lives. The contingent would have included many other pharisaic members of the Sanhedrin, along with their families, relatives, and servants. The above citation tells us that Yeshu ha-Notsri was among them. Though it could have taken place later, the pharisaic flight into Egypt probably occurred at the beginning of the pogrom against the Pharisees, 94 BCE. According to Ibn Daud, Yeshu would have been only six years old at the time.

I have been able to determine Yeshu's ancestry and family affiliation. (The 'bastard son of the Roman soldier Panthera' is a late Jewish caricature and obviously hostile propaganda.) Yeshu ha-Notsri had been a protégé of Perachiah—a Pharisee of aristocratic family and a favored youth whom Perachiah had taken into exile. Yeshu was **himself very highly placed** in the "government" (malkuth, according to the Talmud): Yeshu was a grandson of the Hasmonean King John Hyrcanus I; Yeshu's father (Absalom) was a brother of Alexander Janneus; and Yeshu's sister (name unknown) would later marry King Judas Aristobulus II (r. 67-63 BCE), who sided with the Sadducees. Long ago, G.R.S. Mead also recognized the distinguished position of Yeshu:

According to this "tradition of the fathers," then, Yeshu was regarded as having been originally the pupil of one of the two most learned "Rabbis" of the time, nay, of the most learned, the "spouse" of Jerusalem; not only so, but Yeshu was apparently Joshua's favorite pupil. "See the result of disregarding this counsel of wisdom," said the Rabbis of later days; "there is the famous case of the great Joshua ben Perachiah who was too stern with his disciple Yeshu, and with what disastrous results!" (*Did Jesus Live 100 B.C.?*, 1903: pp. 141-42.)

Because he accompanied Perachiah into exile, Yeshu would necessarily have come from a reputable and prestigious Jewish family. The Mishnah tractate Sanhedrin (IV:2) states that the Sanhedrin was to be recruited from the following sources: Priests (Kohanim), Levites (Levi'im), and ordinary Jews who were members of those families

having a pure lineage such that their daughters were allowed to marry priests. Yeshu, being a Hasmonean, was a Levite eligible for the High Priesthood. The Catholics of a later century would make their invented savior, Jesus of Nazareth, come from the tribe of Judah. This was so that Jesus could be the “messiah son of David” as foretold in scripture. (It is also why Jesus had to be born in Bethlehem of Judah.)

(3) **The exiles flee to Alexandria in Egypt.** One readily understands why Perachiah, his retinue of the Sanhedrin, as well as other important Jews (including the young Yeshu) would have fled to Alexandria to escape King Janneus’ pogrom against the Pharisees. The Jewish districts of Alexandria were like a slice of Jewish territory on foreign soil. In fact, Alexandria possessed the largest Jewish population outside of the Holy Land. Emil Shürer wrote long ago:

The Ptolemies assigned [the Jews] a separate section, two of the five districts of the city, to enable them to keep their laws pure of indigenous cultic influences. The Alexandrian Jews enjoyed a greater degree of political independence than elsewhere. While the Jewish population elsewhere throughout the later Roman Empire frequently formed private societies for religious purposes, or organized corporations of ethnic groups like the Egyptian and Phoenician merchants in the large commercial centers, those of Alexandria constituted an independent political community, side by side with that of the other ethnic groups. (“Alexandria,” *Jewish Encyclopedia*)

As we’ll see in the next post, the choice of Alexandria as place of exile had momentous consequences on the young Pharisee, Yeshu ha-Notsri.

Part 7

Not of the world

Buddhism, The first century, Yeshu ha-Notsri

Talmudic records relate, as we have seen, that the nasi Joshua ben Perachiah excommunicated Yeshu ha-Notsri (literally, “Jesus the Nazarene”) on their way back from exile in Alexandria, Egypt, probably in 76 BCE, the year that the anti-Pharisee King Janneus died and his pro-Pharisee wife Salome Alexandra ascended to the throne. If we combine Ibn Daud’s chronology with what we learn from Talmudic passages, it appears that Yeshu was twenty-four years old at the time.

Yeshu would not have been able to return to Israel with impunity. After all, excommunication is not merely a ban from pharisaism—it is the final, complete, and irrevocable expulsion from Judaism. For a young man raised in the entourage of the Sanhedrin (his association with Perachiah is attested by the Talmud in several places), and himself possibly destined for membership in that elite body of Jewish aristocracy, the excommunicated Yeshu would henceforth have been considered an enemy by all his former friends. His fall from grace must have been colossal.

Whatever we might discover in future about Yeshu’s formation, ancestry, and religious education, this much is clear: after his excommunication he was no longer a Jew. That is, in fact, the meaning of ‘excommunication.’ The head of the Sanhedrin and arguably the highest Jewish religious authority in Israel had destroyed Yeshu’s reputation and removed the young man from his religion and from the culture of his birth and ancestry. Yeshu was now a pariah not only in his homeland, but no doubt also in the Jewish enclave of Alexandria where he grew up.

But what was Yeshu's homeland? After all, he lived in *Egypt* from the age of six until the age of twenty-four. Was, then, his homeland Israel? Was it Egypt? Was it some combination of the two cultures? Or perhaps, was it neither Israel nor Egypt, but some lofty extra-terrestrial realm recorded, for example, in certain passages of the canonical gospels:

"My kingdom is not of this world... My kingdom is not from here." (Jn 18:36)

It may well be that the excommunication pushed Yeshu to the extreme view reflected in this saying. The utterance complements other sayings credited to Jesus, forming a body of material that clearly points in a dualist direction, disparaging materiality, the creation, and what man presumes to accomplish here below. The above saying basically asserts: 'The world is valueless. Do not waste any effort over it or engaging with it.' (Cf. "The flesh profiteth nothing," Jn 6:63, etc.)

However, it is unlikely that the excommunication produced extreme views such as the above. More likely is the opposite: that the extreme views produced the excommunication, and that Yeshu's separation from Judaism already existed in spirit and was only formalized by the excommunication. Now, if such an all-encompassing, emphatically anti-social and even anti-Jewish view as the above figured in the excommunication, then Yeshu must have encountered it in Alexandria, where he was in exile from age six to at least age twenty-four.

We may cast about all we wish for where the young exile would have contacted such a thoroughly un-Jewish and also un-Hellenistic view as the above. If we do so, only one solution will appear: Buddhism. The foregoing citation is strikingly Buddhist, as the following (of many possible examples) show:

"Truly, there is an unborn, unoriginated, uncreated, unformed. If there were not this unborn, unoriginated, uncreated, unformed,

escape from the world of the born, the originated, the created, the formed, would not be possible." (*Udana* 8.3)

"I say to you, brethren, that unless you reach the end of the world, you will in no wise put an end to suffering." (*Anguttara Nikaya* 9.4.7)

Of course, the view that real value exists only in an extramundane realm is anathema to Judaism, which holds that materiality, as the creation of God, is fundamentally "good" (Gen 1:31 etc). This is our first sign of a deep and fundamental revolution in Yeshu's thinking, one that must have occurred while he was still in Egypt—an inner revolution that ultimately contributed to his excommunication from Judaism.

For a young man steeped in the minutiae of pharisaic legalism, such a fundamentally un-Jewish view as the preceding could not be formed overnight. It is the view neither of a boy nor even of an adolescent. It is the view of an adult who has thought through the deepest problems of existence and has arrived at a personal synthesis. Evidently, Yeshu's thinking while in Egypt developed in an ultra-heretical direction, a direction actually quite well known in Alexandria in Yeshu's day. It was Buddhism, a religion that emphasizes the existence of an extramundane realm of true value. In support of this thesis, below is a more fulsome selection of parallels between Buddhism and Christianity relating to the the theme "Not of the world," drawn from my ebook ***Buddhist and Christian Parallels***:

8. Not of the World

- B1 "Truly, there is an Unborn, Unoriginated, Uncreated, Unformed.¹ If there were not this Unborn, Unoriginated, Uncreated, Unformed, escape from the world of the born, the originated, the created, the formed, would not be possible."
Ud 8.3
- B2 Sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and tangibles,²
Yea, all impressions and ideas³ thereof—
These are the direful bait that draws the world,
Therein the world lies infatuated.
If they go beyond all this, leave it behind,
The Buddha's followers with mind aware
Pass beyond the range of the devil's might.
Like the glorious sun do they shine
Filling the world with light.
S 1.4.17
- B3 This body vile, this brittle, crumbling
thing, touches me only with distress and
shame.
S 1.5.4
- B4 These two gifts there are,
The carnal and the spiritual.
Of these two gifts, brethren,
The spiritual is pre-eminent.
It. 3.5.9
- B5 "Now, suppose one were to say, 'I will
walk until I reach the end of the world.'
Brethren, were one to live even a hundred
years and walk for a hundred years, one
would die before reaching the end of the
world. Why? Because the end of the world is
not reached, not seen, not known, through
such journeying.
"Yet I say to you, brethren, that unless
you reach the end of the world, you will in no
wise put an end to suffering."
A 9.4.7
- C1 "My kingdom is not of this world. If my
kingdom were of this world, my followers
would be fighting to keep me from being
handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my
kingdom is not from here."
Jn 18:36
- C2 "The kingdom of God is not coming with
things that can be observed; nor will they say,
'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact,
the kingdom of God is within you."
Lk 17:20b-21
- C3 "It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is
useless. The words that I have spoken to you
are spirit and life."
Jn 6:63
- C4 "If any want to become my followers, let
them deny themselves and take up their cross
and follow me. For those who want to save
their life will lose it, and those who lose their
life for my sake, and for the sake of the
gospel, will save it. For what does it profit
them to gain the whole world and forfeit their
life? Indeed, what can they give in return for
their life?"
Mk 8:34b-37
- C5 Jesus said, "Give to Caesar the things that
are the Caesar's, and give to God the things
that are God's."
Mk 12:17
- C6 "A slave cannot serve two masters; for a
slave will either hate the one and love the
other, or be devoted to the one and despise
the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."
Lk 16:13
- C7 The Pharisees, who were lovers of money,
heard all this, and they scoffed at him.
So he said to them, "You are those who
justify yourselves before men, but God
knows your hearts; for what is exalted among
men is an abomination in the sight of God."
Lk 16:14-15
- C8 "God is spirit, and those who worship him
must worship him in spirit and truth."
Jn 4:24

¹ A fundamental statement in Buddhist metaphysics.² All that proceeds from the five external senses.³ The mind is the sixth sense in Buddhist psychology.

Finally, mention can be made of a short Buddhist saying in the famous collection known as the Dhammapada. It reads:

"Few reach the further shore. Most run up and down this shore."
([Dhammapada](#) 85)

As any Buddhist will avow, the “further shore” is nirvana, and “this shore” is the world. The analogy implies a river or body of water, and the further shore is ‘the other side,’ the existential *beyond*. Incidentally, a Christian gnostic sect in antiquity was known as the **Peratae**, “those who cross over.” As is well known, in the Gospel of Mark Jesus often goes to ‘the other side’ (*eis to peran*)—a favorite phrase of the evangelist—and we must wonder whether the evangelist was writing metaphorically and/or allegorically.

Could there be a connection between Buddhism and the Gospel of Mark? Along with myself, the late **Hermann Detering indeed thought so.**

Part 8

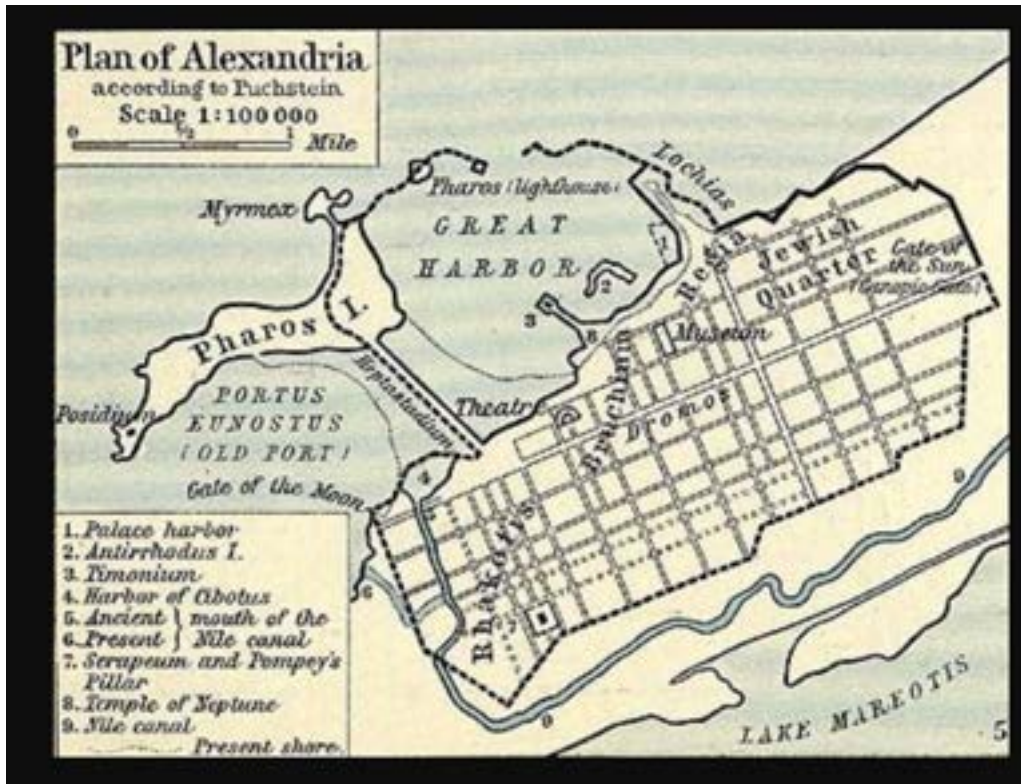
Buddhism in Alexandria

Buddhism, Christian origins, Yeshu ha-Notsri

The cosmopolitan metropolis

Unless he was living under a rock, Yeshu would certainly have encountered Buddhism in Alexandria. We know that the Indian emperor Ashoka sent Buddhist missionaries to the cosmopolitan city about 250 BCE (**Rock Edict 13**), this in response to a request from the curious and extravagant Pharaoh Ptolemy II Philadelphus. No doubt the Indian missionaries had copies of Buddhist sutras for the Alexandria library, which Philadelphus founded. Legend has it that Philadelphus allowed no ship to dock at the harbor of Alexandria unless its cargo included new acquisitions for the library.

The Alexandria library, however, was only part of the even more consequential **Museion** which, analogous to a modern university, brought together some of the best scholars of the Hellenistic world. Arguably, the Museion was the greatest institution of learning in antiquity. More than 1,000 scholars lived there at any given time. Staff members and scholars were salaried by the Museion and paid no taxes. They also received free meals, free room and board, and free servants.



Alexandria in antiquity. Note the Museion adjacent to the Jewish Quarter at the upper right.

The Museion’s scholars conducted scientific research, published, lectured, and collected as much literature as possible from the known world. In addition to Greek works, foreign texts were translated from Assyrian, Persian, Hebrew, Indian languages, and other sources. The edited versions of the Greek literary canon that we know today, from Homer and Hesiod forward, exist in editions that were collated and corrected by the scholars assembled in the Museion at Alexandria. It is also known that the **Septuagint** was translated in Alexandria from Hebrew into Greek in the middle of III BCE by Jewish scholars, at the request of Ptolemy II Philadelphus and probably at the Museion.

Not without interest for our study is that the Museion was located in, or immediately next to, the Jewish quarter in northeast Alexandria (see map)—only a short walk from where Yeshu certainly resided during his formative years in exile.

We are in the process of slowly, incrementally, and inexorably recreating—here for the first time—the long ignored and suppressed biography of the founder of Christianity. Understandably, Judaism ignored that biography. In its eyes, Yeshu ha-Notsri was merely a misguided and troublesome apostate. Hence, Jewish records make only a few tangential references to Yeshu, with the rare explicit account such as occurs at **b. Sanh. 107b**.

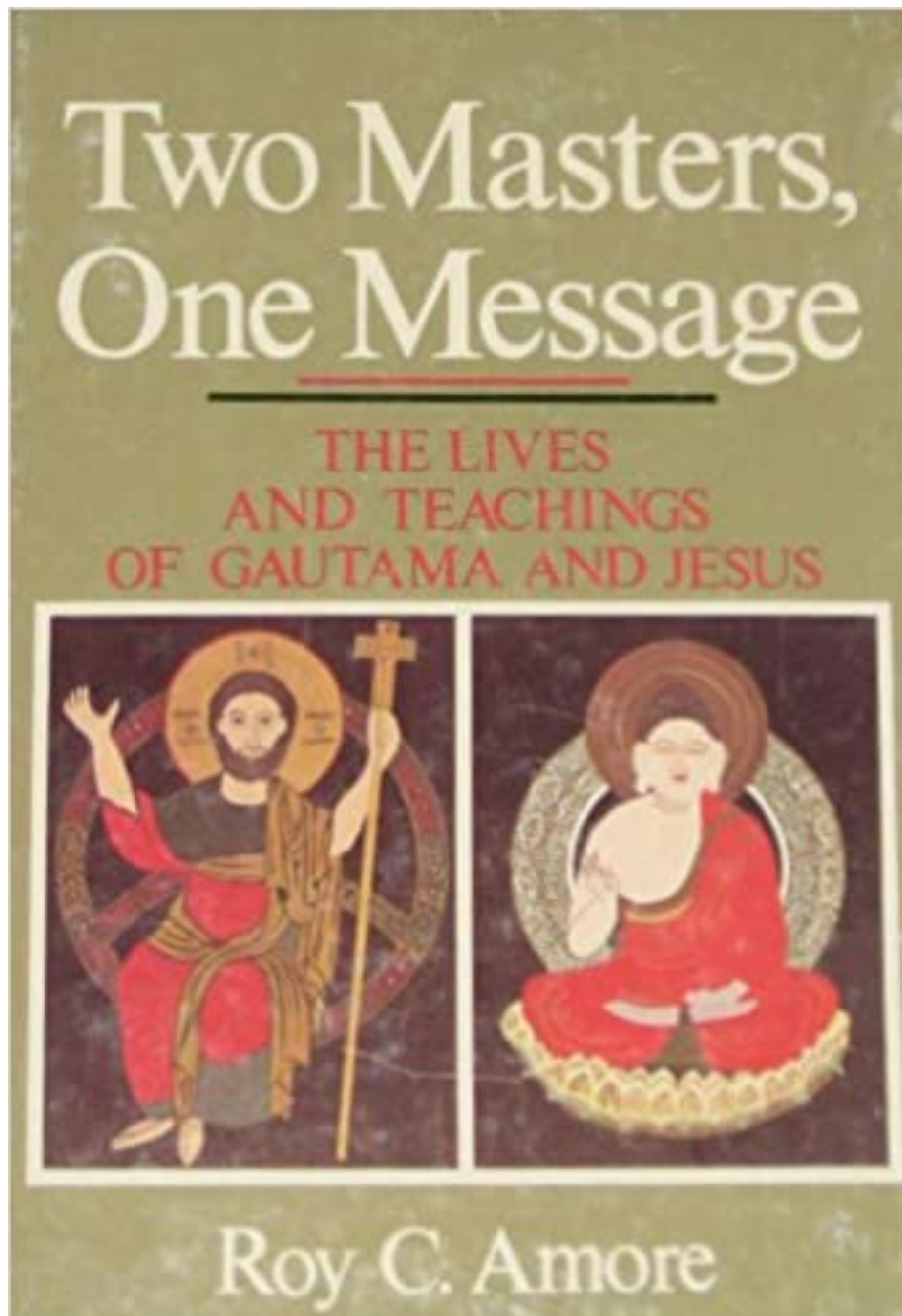
Christianity, however, suppressed the biography of Yeshu with its full force and from the very beginning of the canonical tradition. *Why? Because the biography of Yeshu ha-Notsri gives the lie to the biography of Jesus of Nazareth.* As a result, it is my suspicion that many documents were destroyed, passages expunged, and texts altered through the centuries that might lead away from Jesus of Nazareth to Yeshu ha-Notsri. Given the manifest Christian penchant for destroying documents (and even heretics) through the ages, this is far from an idle conspiracy theory.

In light of many fundamental parallels between the teachings attributed to Jesus and those attributed to the Buddha, it is also my conviction that Yeshu ha-Notsri became aware of Buddhism while in Alexandria, became fascinated by it, and eventually became one of its converts. This is the only adequate explanation, to my mind, that satisfies all the facts: Yeshu's astonishing rejection of a promising future in Judaism, his excommunication, and the Buddhist nature of his eventual teachings.

It is important to note that the Buddhist way to salvation is through personal effort leading to gnosis/understanding/'enlightenment.' Though not customarily viewed this way, Buddhism is the quintessential gnostic religion. In Buddhism, gnosis saves.

In the preceding post I examined a major theme common to both Buddhism and Christianity: that true value is 'not of the world.' We know this theme from a number of canonical sayings placed in the

mouth of Jesus of Nazareth, and also from numerous Buddhist passages. I furnished a number of relevant parallels from both traditions in the prior post. Of course, those parallels are not identical in wording, for they come from two teachers living in different epochs and different cultures. Nevertheless, the parallels lead to the same general conclusion—that this transient world of matter is but a decoy, and that true life and true value lies in the unseen realm of the spirit free from the seductions of matter. It was further noted that this radically un-Jewish view would have taken time to develop, and that Yeshu would have initially contacted such a view during his long exile in Alexandria as a young man. That possibility is strengthened as we continue to examine the future teachings of the prophet, memorialized not only in the canonical gospels under the moniker 'Jesus of Nazareth,' but also in the rich gnostic and apocryphal literature that has long been marginalized by Christianity and considered heresy.



Both canonical and non-canonical Christian literatures offer numerous points in common between Buddhism and Christianity, as a number of scholars have noted in the past (see, e.g., Roy Amore's [Two Masters, One Message](#), 1978). We have already examined one such element in common— 'Not of the world.' We now look at a second element fundamental to both religions.

Renunciation

Self denial—usually referred to as renunciation in the Buddhist context—is also an important emphasis of Jesus/Yeshu in the canonical gospels. Renunciation can take many forms, including voluntary poverty, chastity, non-violence, and homelessness. Each of these is well represented in both Buddhist and Christian texts. One of the Christian passages cited in the preceding post (C4) is Mk 8:34–37:

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?”

If we remove obviously secondary elements—for example, a teacher would not exhort his disciples to “take up their cross and follow” him before he himself had been crucified—and place the saying in the second person, we read:

“Deny yourselves. For if you want to save your life you will lose it, and if you lose your life you will save it. For what does it profit you to gain the whole world and forfeit your life? Indeed, what can you give in return for your life?”

Here Jesus/Yeshu is exhorting his followers to self denial, a major theme in Buddhism. The Buddha himself set the ideal example, for he reputedly abandoned status (royalty), riches, and even family (he was married and had a son at the time) in order to find enlightenment/gnosis. In fact, one readily finds all three of these subthemes related to renunciation in the canonical words attributed to Jesus:

- abandoning status (Lk 14:10-11)
- abandoning riches (Mk 10:24-25; Mt 19:21; Lk 18:22; 12:33-34)
- abandoning family (Mt 10:37-39).

If my overall thesis is correct, then Yeshu ha-Notsri became acquainted with the Buddhist theme of renunciation in the early part of the first century BCE, during his long exile in Alexandria and before his excommunication from Judaism at the age of twenty-four. Arguably, renunciation is second only to the doctrine of karma in Buddhism ('you reap what you sow'). And both doctrines—karma and renunciation—are profusely attested in the gospel sayings of 'Jesus.'

B1. Except by renouncing and forsaking all,
No safety can I see for living beings.
— Samyutta Nikaya 1.2.17

B2. "Visahka, those who have a hundred
beloved things have a hundred sorrows,
Those who have ninety beloved things
have ninety sorrows,
Those who have ten beloved things,
have ten sorrows...
And those who have no beloved thing
have no sorrow at all.
They are sorrowless and compassionate.
Truly, they are serene.
— Udana 8.8

B3. Those who renounce the world
Their hearts averted from all sensuous joys
Cut this mighty bond in two
Downward dragging, subtle, had to loose.
— Samyutta Nikaya 1.3.10

B4. Put away anger and abandon the self,
Transcend all bonds to mind and body!
Then, totally unhampered,
Sorrow will torment you no more.

Things, though pleasant, are not the goal
Pleasure itself is the allure.
Things remain in the world
The wise remove desire for them.
— Samyutta Nikaya 1.1.3

B5. "I have nothing to do with exaltation,
nor does it have anything to do with me.
Whoever cannot obtain the joy of
renunciation at will, freely, and readily,
whoever cannot obtain the joy of seclusion,
the joy of enlightenment, as I can,
let that person wallow in that dung-like joy,
that mud-clod of joy,
that joy gotten of gains, favors, and flattery."
— Anguttara Nikaya 6.4.12

C1. "And everyone who has left houses or
brothers or sisters or father or mother or
children or lands... will receive a
hundredfold and inherit eternal life.

"And many that are first will be last, and
the last first." Mt 19:29-30

C2. "If any want to become my followers,
let them deny themselves and take up their
cross and follow me. For those who want to
save their life will lose it, and those who
lose their life... will save it. For what will it
profit them to gain the whole world and
forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give
in return for their life?"

Mk 8:34-37

C3. "Sell your possessions and give alms.
Make purses for yourselves that do not wear
out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where
no thief comes near and no moth destroys."

Lk 12:33

C4. "Children, how hard it is to enter the
kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to
go through the eye of a needle than for
someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of
God."
Mk 10 24b-25

C5. "If your hand cause you to stumble, cut
it off; it is better for you to enter life
maimed than with two hands to go to hell, to
the unquenchable fire. And if your foot
causes you to stumble cut it off; it is better
for you to enter life lame than to have two
feet and to be thrown into hell. And if your
eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is
better for you to enter life with one eye than
with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where
the worm dies not and the fire is never
quenched."
Mk 9:43-48

Part 9

The hidden path

Christian origins, Yeshu ha-Notsri

The scenario we are witnessing, via these posts, is a hidden path. It can only be found by piecing together disparate clues scattered in both rabbinic and Christian records. Despite thousands of scholars in the field of early Christian studies who are teaching in universities, who are researching, and who are regularly publishing, not a single one has dealt with the (sometimes obvious) clues that imperatively need to come before general attention. Indeed, few scholars have even seen the clues, and none has connected the dots—much less combined them in a coherent way. Doubtless, the principal reason is that—in order to take Yeshu ha-Notsri seriously as the founder of Christianity—*one must first doubt the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth* (on this, see further below). In the West we live in a Christian culture and, as readers are well aware, very few scholars are willing to openly entertain the game-changing doubt that Jesus of Nazareth did not exist. As a result, the Christian mainstream cannot even get on first base as regards the historically seminal role of Yeshu ha-Notsri.

Another reason Yeshu ha-Notsri has evaded scrutiny for so many centuries is because scholarship is, and has been, balkanized. Christian texts and rabbinic records belong to two different worlds. Hardly any scholars are familiar with both domains.

Furthermore, the comparison (or equivalence) between Jesus of Nazareth and Yeshu ha-Notsri is like the comparison between Hercules and a midget. This is the result of many centuries of Christian propaganda—on the one hand building up a fiction (Jesus of Nazareth) into a Hercules, and on the other hand tearing down a spiritual

Hercules (Yeshu ha-Notsri) to a midget. The result is that, after two millennia of literary history, Jesus of Nazareth is the headliner in one world of texts and Yeshu ha-Notsri is only an inconvenient footnote in the other. The idea that the headliner and the footnote are in fact linked defies all appearances. But appearances can be deceiving!

One incontrovertible fact does link the two figures together, and it is so obvious that it *should* be common knowledge: Jesus the Nazarene and Yeshu ha-Notsri *have the same name in Hebrew texts from antiquity through the Middle Ages*. This is a dead giveaway, and it should have attracted attention long ago. We have seen how the medieval Jewish scholar Ibn Daud referred to the prophet from Nazareth (whom he considered invented) as “Yeshu ha-Notsri” (ישו הנצרי). Of course, he also referred to the prophet in the time of King Janneus (whom he considered historical) as “Yeshu ha-Notsri.” To Ibn Daud, there was only one Yeshu ha-Notsri: the renegade prophet who lived in the time of Janneus. The other “Yeshu ha-Notsri”—the Christian savior from Nazareth—was a pure invention. This was the medieval Jewish scholar’s view.

Contemporary academics are so uncomfortable with facts like the foregoing that they ignore them, paper over what is inconvenient, and dispute *ad nauseam* over irrelevancies regarding the invented figure Jesus of Nazareth. As long as academics stay within accepted bounds of discourse, then ready publication, conference invitations, teaching positions, and academic prestige ensue. Ultimately, of course, the “accepted bounds of discourse” are mandated by a fawning and still very powerful Christian public.



Some paths are hard to follow and even harder to find.

The path leading to an understanding of Christian origins, however, is certainly *not* within the accepted bounds of discourse. That very neglected path is hidden under an enormous deadweight of warnings, misinformation, and academic gobbledygook. Even the editor and translator of Ibn Daud's writings, Gerson Cohen, (deliberately or inadvertently) obscures the truth when he introduces two names in English for the identical name 'Yeshu ha-Notsri' in Hebrew (ישו הנצרי). (1) When Ibn Daud refers to the prophet in the time of Janneus, Cohen writes "Yeshu ha-Notsri" in his translation, which is simply a transliteration of the Hebrew name. (2) But when Ibn Daud refers to the Christian prophet from Nazareth, Cohen inexplicably offers the English reader a different name: 'Jesus the Nazarene.' Though Ibn Daud's Hebrew name is the same in both cases, Cohen's English translation leads the reader to suppose that two different figures are involved because two different names are used.

And, indeed, the universal position of scholarship today is that Yeshu ha-Notsri and Jesus the Nazarene were two different figures. But that was *not* the view of Ibn Daud, whose writings Cohen was tasked with translating. To sort out this little puzzle, one must go two extra steps: (a) consult the Hebrew text, in which case one immediately sees that, for Ibn Daud, both 'Yeshu ha-Notsri' and 'Jesus the Nazarene' bear the exact same name in Hebrew; and (b) read all the pertinent passages in Ibn Daud's *Sefer ha-Kabbalah*, in which case one learns that, for Ibn Daud, Jesus of Nazareth was a complete fiction while Yeshu ha-Notsri was very much a historical figure who lived in the time of King Alexander Janneus.

These extra steps are like first clearing away the brambles in order to expose the hidden path of history. Few scholars, of course, are both capable and willing to take such steps. As a result, the path to truth remains hidden under an ever-increasing overgrowth of dense vegetation.

Dual competence

If Yeshu ha-Notsri is implicated in the birth of Christianity, as I firmly believe, then studying Christian origins requires scholars who are competent in both Jewish and Christian spheres. Unfortunately, few Christian scholars have taken an interest in the Talmud, much less studied it. Similarly, few Talmudic scholars have given more than cursory attention to Christian texts.

Additional problems make research into the role of Yeshu ha-Notsri difficult. I will here mention two. (1) On the Jewish side, rabbinical records are often intentionally cryptic, written for insiders, are in terse language and—in the case of the founder of Christianity—they employ a number of aliases (Balaam, Ben Stada, etc) for the founder of Christianity. (2) On the Christian side, in its early centuries the Church made deliberate and highly successful efforts to destroy 'heretical'

texts that were at odds (whether doctrinally or historically) with the canonical gospels. As a result, the suspicion is well warranted that texts attesting to a proto-Christian prophet in the time of Janneus were destroyed long ago.

These and other substantial problems combine to frustrate investigators. The biggest difficulty, however, facing the potential implication of Yeshu ha-Notsri into the origins of Christianity is not the difficulty of the endeavor but the will to go down that path. Scholars simply don't want to go *there*. As mentioned above, doing so requires a mythicist posture, and the case against Jesus of Nazareth's historicity has never gained traction in Church or academe. As long as this situation persists, Christian scholarship has no reason to seriously entertain any link between Yeshu ha-Notsri and Jesus of Nazareth. In short, *Jesus mythicism is a pre-requisite to investigating the true origins of Christianity*. Only once the prophet from Nazareth is seen as an invention will the earlier prophet from Alexandria be allowed to emerge into the light of day.

If you are a Jesus mythicist reading these posts, congratulations! You are already *at least one order of magnitude* in advance of the mainstream as regards understanding Christian origins.

7. The Difficult Way

B1 "The way is hard to go, Exalted One, and rough the path!"
"And yet along the path you call rough, O Kamada, the Noble Ones hold their course. In that 'rough path' ignoble persons fall headlong, yet to the Noble Ones the way is even.
"Noble Ones walk over the uneven with even stride."

S 1.2.6

B2 Few reach the further shore¹
Most run up and down this shore.
Yet those who follow the Norm, well-preached,
Pass beyond death's domain,
A current hard to cross.

Dh 85-86

B3 What I have won through many toils,
Enough! Why should I make it known?²
This is no Truth that can be seen
By folk consumed with anger and desire.
The Truth goes against the stream,
Deep it is, subtle, hard to see—
Invisible it will stay to passion's slaves,
Blinded by the mark of ignorance.

S 1.6.1

B4 Things not good, harmful to oneself,
These are so easy to do!
But what is good and helpful to oneself,
This is very difficult to do.³

Dh 163

B5 Blind is this world,
How few see the light!
Like a bird fleeing the net
Rare is he who flies to heaven.

Dh 174

¹ i.e., nirvana.

² In this famous passage the Buddha has not yet embarked on his career. He considers the difficult, counterintuitive nature of the Doctrine and its unsuitability for worldly people.

³ This verse appears to be paraphrased in King Ashoka's rock edict No. 5 (mid-III BCE).

C1 "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it."

Mt 7:13-14

C2 "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."⁴

Mk 10:24b-25

C3 "For many are called, but few are chosen."

Mt 22:14

⁴ This famous saying is encountered also in Chp. 11, "On Renunciation." The Aramaic (Syriac Peshitta) version of this passage reads "rope" instead of "camel," both being represented by the same Aramaic word, *gawla* (Lamsa, xvi).

Part 10

Scribes and Pharisees

Christian origins, Yeshu ha-Notsri

If we boldly proceed where the facts inexorably and surprisingly lead, then an amazing account of the founder of Christianity emerges, an account very different from that portrayed in the canonical gospels. As a young man, the historical Jesus/Yeshu was himself an elite Pharisee in the entourage of the highly-placed Joshua ben Perachiah, head of the Sanhedrin in the early decades of the first century BCE. As a mere boy of six, Yeshu fled to Alexandria with Perachiah and his entourage, probably including most members of the powerful Sanhedrin, along with their families and servants. Yeshu apparently stayed at least eighteen years in Alexandria. He would have lived in the large Jewish enclave of the Egyptian metropolis. But perhaps he did not remain there when his views began to diverge from those of his Jewish peers...

Eventually, Yeshu was expelled from Judaism. The Talmud relates that Perachiah excommunicated him on the general return of Pharisees to Israel. This would have been in 76 BCE, the year of King Janneus' death when the Pharisee-friendly Salome Alexandra assumed the throne. Yeshu was then twenty-four years old. The fact of his excommunication indicates to us that Yeshu's heretical views were already fully formed. It also tells us that Yeshu was not willing to modify or give up his views—even at the price of his reputation, of his future in phariseeism, and of being permanently cut off from the religion of his birth.

For those of us who know only the invented Jesus of Nazareth and his overblown biography, it is no doubt difficult to witness that icon of

Christianity morph into Yeshu ha-Notsri, a virtually unknown figure. But the historicity of Yeshu is well established. His bona fides were not doubted by the ancient Jewish rabbis, nor has his historicity been questioned by modern scholarship. There is absolutely no reason to suspect that the rabbis of late antiquity committed multiple errors by dating Yeshu to the time of King Janneus, by noting he was a disciple of Joshua b. Perachiah, and by recording Yeshu's excommunication at the hands of Perachiah. All these doubtless correspond to history. In fact, *the historical attestation for Yeshu ha-Notsri is far stronger than that for Jesus of Nazareth.*

If my reconstruction is correct, then Yeshu/Jesus was a learned 'ex-Pharisee after his excommunication, a person intimately familiar with the highest echelon of Jewish religious power, having himself been raised in that establishment and among its members. This throws a new, interesting, and entirely unsuspected light on the many acrid confrontations between Jesus of Nazareth in the gospels and his pharisaic antagonists. In the gospel tradition the special target of Jesus' ire are the "scribes and Pharisees," whom he often calls 'hypocrites.' The adversarial relationship between Jesus and those of the Jewish religious establishment ("from Jerusalem," Mk 3:22, 7:1) is pointed and dramatic.

We can now appreciate that those confrontations rest on a historical grain of truth. Unlike so much of the canonical gospels, the 'prophet vs. Pharisee' confrontations were not invented. They are a central part of the core story that the first evangelist (presumably Mark) imported *from the received tradition regarding Yeshu ha-Notsri.* While the evangelist ignored that Yeshu had himself been a Pharisee, he preserved the confrontational stance between the prophet and the Pharisees. It is easy to envision Yeshu ha-Notsri, now a gnostic converted to a form of Buddhism, accusing his former pharisaic

colleagues of 'empty learning' and hypocrisy—just as does Jesus of Nazareth in the gospels.

In this way, when Yeshu ha-Notsri takes center stage in our thinking, some elements of the gospels suddenly make much more sense. Scholars have long wondered how the presumably unschooled and unlettered scion of a poor carpenter from the hamlet of Nazareth could best in argumentation the most educated Pharisees and scribes of his day. The surprising answer now emerges, and it makes eminent sense: Yeshu/Jesus had in fact received an exacting pharisaic education. Being in Perachiah's entourage, Yeshu was originally a member of the elite Jewish religious establishment and possibly himself destined for membership in the Sanhedrin. Of course, an intelligent, elite young Pharisee interested in ethics and theology would have been expert in the minutiae of Jewish religious law and would have been perfectly able to dispute at ease with learned 'scribes and Pharisees' from Jerusalem.

But Yeshu abandoned his Pharisaic roots. This is clear by the fact of his excommunication. He was thereafter no longer a Pharisee, nor even a Jew. He would henceforth be an outcast from Judaism—and its expert critic. The canonical gospels faithfully retain this core aspect of Yeshu's biography in the adversarial relationship between Jesus and the 'Pharisees and scribes' from Jerusalem. Yeshu was also privy to the innermost secrets of the Jewish religious establishment, having once been groomed for membership in it himself. And this aspect of his knowledge would have been very galling as well as effective, for the 'scribes and Pharisees' would not have been able to intimidate him with their learning, as they could do with the common folk. The canonical gospels portray Jesus besting the Pharisees at their own mind-games. I suspect this is based on history, and that Yeshu in the first half of I BCE was a formidable intellectual opponent of the Jewish

power structure. Indeed, his success may be the main reason Yeshu was captured, tried by the Sanhedrin, and executed about 66 BCE.

<p>Buddhist and Christian Parallels</p>	<p>Compiled by René Salm</p>
<p>18. On Ostentation</p>	
<p>B1 Whoever exalts himself and despises others, being mean by his pride, let one know him as an outcast. So 132</p>	<p>C1 "Beware of the scribes, who like to go about in long robes, and to have salutations in the market places and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation." Mk 2:38-40</p>
<p>B2 "But when a wicked man... enjoys the salutations of wealthy nobles, wealthy Brahmins, wealthy yeomen, he does so to his harm and ill for many a day. A 7.7.8</p>	<p>C2 "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." Mt 23:12</p>
<p>B3 Not by mere fine words and appearance can a man be a man of honor, if envy, greed, and deceit are in him. But he in whom these three faults are uprooted, and who has wisdom and love, he in truth is a man of honor. Dh 263</p>	<p>C3 "Woe to you, Pharisees and hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity. You blind Pharisee! First cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate, that the outside also may be clean." Mt 23:25</p>
<p>B4 The monk who quests for alms, supporting self, who has none else to keep—him gods envy, but not if he be set on praise and fame. Ud 3.8</p>	<p>C4 "Beware of giving alms in front of men in order to be seen, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. So, when you give alms, don't sound a trumpet as do the hypocrites in the synagogue and in the street, in order to be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your gifts may be in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will himself openly reward you. And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." Mt 6:1-6</p>
<p>B5 Nigrodha, austerity by self-mortification involves blemish in several ways... When an ascetic undertakes a course in austerity, he, through that undertaking exalts himself and despises others... he becomes one who pleases to sit in public places... and by the winning of gifts, attention, and fame, he becomes complacent, infatuated, and grows careless... These become blemishes in that ascetic. D 25.9-10</p>	
<p>B6 "I have nothing to do with worship, Nagita, nor do I need homage. Whoever cannot obtain the ease of renunciation, at will, freely, and readily, whoever cannot obtain the ease of seclusion, the ease of enlightenment, as I can, let that person wallow in that dung-like ease, that dirt-clod of ease, that ease gotten of gains, favors, and flattery." A 6.4.12</p>	

Part 11

Excommunication and aftermath

Buddhism, Christian origins, Yeshu ha-Notsri

In 76 BCE Yeshu ha-Notsri was about twenty-four years old. Still officially a Pharisee in exile, he had been living in Alexandria, Egypt since boyhood. However, in that year the political situation in Israel altered and the balance of power radically shifted. The rabidly anti-pharisaic King Janneus died, and his wife **Salome Alexandra** ascended to the throne of Israel. She was as pro-Pharisee as her husband had been anti-Pharisee, doubtless because her own brother, **Simeon ben Shetach**, was a leading Pharisee and would himself become head (*nasi*) of the Sanhedrin after Perachiah. In all, later rabbinical writings romanticized the short reign of Alexandra (76-67 BCE) as the glory days of the Pharisees. With Salome's ascendancy to the throne, suddenly the situation of the exiles in Alexandria dramatically improved. Without delay and with great celebration the exiled Pharisees returned to their ancestral homes in Palestine. This included Joshua b. Perachiah and his elite pharisaic retinue, doubtless including many members of the 71-strong Sanhedrin and their families, relatives, and servants.

Yeshu the heretic

The personal situation with Yeshu, however, was evidently very different. Later rabbinical writings tell us that the young Pharisee was no longer welcome in the Jewish fold. In the curt, enigmatic language of the Talmud, Yeshu "worshipped a brick" (i.e., he was no longer a Yahweh-fearing Jew), he "practiced magic" (i.e. the *acknowledged* power that he possessed did not proceed from God), and he was

accused of sexual immorality (i.e. he did not abide by the basic marriage and sexual codes of Judaism). These notices show us that, already at the age of twenty-four, Yeshu ha-Notsri was a force to be reckoned with by the Jewish establishment—a powerful and *inimical* force.

In the preceding posts we have looked at three central themes of Yeshu/Jesus' teaching, as witnessed in the gospels and other Christian writings: not of this world, self-denial, and his adversarial relationship with 'scribes and Pharisees.' These must also relate to the reasons Yeshu was excommunicated. 'Not of this world' signifies that Yeshu did not bestow honor upon the creator, Yahweh. 'Self-denial' signifies that Yeshu embraced the very un-Jewish doctrine of encratism (from Gk. *egkrateia*, 'in continence')—the sacrifice of pleasure in order to attain understanding. Finally, Yeshu was against 'scribes and Pharisees'—very understandable given that they excommunicated him, and that Yeshu believed he knew a better way.

The influence of Buddhism

And what was that better way? Significantly, all three themes—not of this world, self-denial, and against 'scribes and Pharisees'—are prominent in Buddhism. In a case similar to that of Yeshu, the Buddha had great difficulty with the elite Brahmin caste of his day, which was in a privileged position similar to that of the Pharisees in late Second Temple Judaism. Many Buddhist texts relate how the devotee is to become a 'true' Brahmin, namely, by actually seeking enlightenment rather than by repeatedly mumbling verses (cf. Mt 6:7) and executing empty rites and rituals.

Thus, two global religions have been founded by prophets who stridently opposed the entrenched religious elites of their day. In fact, I would claim this is axiomatic, *de rigueur*, for any prophet worth his salt. The Buddha challenged the stale, empty rituals of Brahmanical

sacrifice in his time, and he even claimed that an outcast (of the lowly *sudra* caste) could amount to more than a sanctimonious Brahmin hypocrite, no matter how high-born the latter might be. All this resonates very closely with the attitude of Yeshu/Jesus vs. the Pharisees in the gospels.

Related 'Buddhist' themes are voluntary poverty, chastity, non-violence, and homelessness—also prominent in the canonical gospels. These themes are neither Hellenistic nor Jewish. In fact, they are *anti*-Jewish and diametrically opposed to Yahweh's command to "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion" (Gen 1:28). Also entirely incompatible with Judaism (yet quite Buddhist) is the severe self-denial enjoined by Jesus in the canonical gospels.

It is my contention that the young Jesus/Yeshu ha-Notsri absorbed these core Buddhist themes during his long exile in Alexandria, Egypt, in the early first century BCE—with life-changing results. He became either a Buddhist or a crypto-Buddhist as a young adult in Alexandria. His subsequent teachings show that he was no longer a good Jew, and certainly no longer a good Pharisee and faithful disciple of his erstwhile mentor Joshua ben Perachiah.

One further theme central to Jesus/Yeshu's message is so prominent in the gospel tradition that it also merits special attention. I call it "On empty learning" (the title of Chp. 19 of my **Buddhist and Christian Parallels**). It is related to several subthemes prominent in the gospels: meekness, against ostentation, finding fault in others, and entrapment with words.

And 'the rest is history'...

In a nutshell, the foregoing explains the eventual trajectory of Christianity away from Judaism and to the formation of an entirely new religion. In contemporary college courses it is fashionable—and, some

would say, even required—to teach that ‘Jesus was a Jew.’ Though the professors are not referring to Yeshu ha-Notsri but to the invented figure Jesus of Nazareth, their argument immediately falls on its face. For if one knows a tree by its fruit, then how can somebody who was categorically rejected by Judaism via excommunication, and subsequently even killed by the Jewish religious establishment for ‘apostasy’—how, I ask, is it possible to still consider that person ‘a Jew’? It is not, and the summary proof is that in his own lifetime the Jews themselves did not consider Yeshu to be one of them. If *they* did not consider him a Jew, then we should not either.

The source of Yeshu’s non-Jewishness—and the reason he was excommunicated—can only be because his beliefs and teachings were non-Jewish. Furthermore, the reason Yeshu was eventually crucified by the Jewish establishment must be because his teachings were a threat to the basic fabric of Judaism itself.

The excommunication

The seminal passage reads:

What of R. Jehoshua ben Perachiah? When Jannai the king killed our rabbis, R. Jehoshua ben Perachiah fled to Alexandria of Egypt. When there was peace, Shimon ben Shetach sent to him, “From me the city of holiness, to thee Alexandria of Egypt. My husband stays in thy midst and I sit forsaken.”

Rabbi Perachiyah came, and found himself at a certain inn; they showed him great honor. He said, “How beautiful is this Acsania!” [“Acsania” denotes both inn and innkeeper. Perachiyah used it in the first sense; the answering remark implies the second meaning, “hostess.”] Yeshu said to him, “Rabbi, she has narrow eyes.” R. Perachiyah said, “Wretch, do you employ yourself thus?” He sent out four hundred trumpets and excommunicated him.

Yeshu came before him many times and said to him, “Receive me.” But he would not notice him. One day when R. Perachiyah was reciting the Shema, Yeshu came before him. R. Perachiyah was minded to receive him and made a sign to him. But Yeshu thought

that he repelled him. Yeshu went and hung up a brick and worshipped it.

R. Perachiyah said to him, "Return." Yeshu replied, "Thus have I received from you, that every one who sins and causes the multitude to sin, they give him not the chance to repent."

And a teacher has said, "Yeshu ha-Notsri practiced magic and led astray and deceived Israel." [-b. Sanh. 107b. Cf. R. Herford, *Christianity in Talmud & Midrash*, p 51.]

We have already discussed some implications of this passage in previous posts. As head of the Sanhedrin, Perachiah returned to Israel in triumph. He was now arguably the most powerful person in the land after the queen herself, more powerful even than queen's brother, Simon ben Shetach. The passage relates that Perachiah excommunicated Yeshu on the way back to Israel. "Excommunication" does not merely signify that the person is no longer a Pharisee. It signifies that the person is no longer a *Jew*. In the religiously rarified atmosphere of Yeshu's upbringing, education, and former associations, excommunication is doubly devastating. It is the ultimate humiliation, the irreparable ban. Yeshu was twenty-four years old and henceforth a pariah to his relatives, colleagues, nation, traditions, and culture. It is likely that even his family would not have associated with him.

To be pronounced no longer a "Jew" must have some validity, for Perachiah would not have excommunicated Yeshu unless the young Pharisee had staked out a religious position so radical, so outside the norms of Judaism that there was no chance of reconciliation. Indeed, we read in the above citation that Perachiah did offer Yeshu the olive branch: "Return," Perachiah invited.

But Yeshu refused. Evidently, the young man was so convinced that his thoroughly incompatible theology was correct that he no longer sought reconciliation or even wished to be known as a Jew. We know that Yeshu had a "thoroughly incompatible theology" because he was excommunicated, was accused of "apostasy," of deceiving and leading

Israel astray according to the Talmud, and was eventually executed for his religious beliefs. All this is not speculation—it is a provable part of the historical record.

And so, Perachiah did the only appropriate thing: he excommunicated Yeshu. Yet the passage above reveals that the excommunication was a last resort. And indeed, the little we know of Joshua b. Perachiah is that he was a fair and mild-mannered individual. The Talmud relates:

Joshua ben Perachiah and Nittai the Arbelite received [the Torah] from them. Joshua ben Perachiah says, "Set up a teacher [*rab*] for yourself. And get yourself a companion-disciple. And give everybody the benefit of the doubt." (Pirke Avot 1.6)

We must, accordingly, suppose that Perachiah gave Yeshu every "benefit of the doubt." Yet that was still not sufficient to keep the headstrong young man within the broad bounds of Judaism. According to b. Sanhedrin 107b (above), Yeshu was excommunicated for apostasy while still in Egypt, which tells us that he already had not only fully-formed views but that those views were not compatible with Judaism. This is the only reasonable scenario that can be drawn from the Talmudic account. Mead writes: "The 400 horns, trumpets or trombones may be taken simply to mean that the excommunication was exceedingly formal and serious" (p. 146). In a **subsequent post** we will see that the excommunication received added weight because Yeshu may, in fact, have been related by blood to Perachiah himself.

We can reasonably infer that, after the excommunication, Yeshu did not keep his heretical views to himself. The young man's calling as a prophet is indicated by his subsequent career of 'deceiving and leading Israel astray.' Already in Egypt, then, repeated bitter and unresolvable religious, dogmatic, and ethical confrontations between Yeshu and his more senior Pharisaic colleagues (including Perachiah) must have led to Yeshu's excommunication as a young man.

The Talmud gives us several reasons for Yeshu's excommunication: practicing magic, sexual impropriety, apostasy, and "leading the world astray." However, three of these grounds are post-excommunication reflections on Yeshu's ministry, death (and supposed resurrection), and the success of his religion—influenced, no doubt, by the canonical gospels and other Christian writings. Only the accusation of apostasy would have clearly *preceded* the excommunication. It alone offers a compelling reason for the act itself.

According to the above citation Yeshu would suddenly have become the blackest of black sheep. Previously a promising disciple of Perachiah and himself perhaps destined for the Sanhedrin, the young Pharisee had played his cards very poorly: *he was personally excommunicated by the leading Pharisee in the land!* In all likelihood, when Yeshu returned to Israel (certainly not with Perachiah), he did so quite alone. Indeed, he probably went into immediate hiding.

To Qumran?



The cliffs of Qumran

It is here that we must consider for a moment Qumran by the Dead Sea. The location is remote, 'in the desert' (*en té erémw*) as the

gospels so frequently write, and also within hailing distance of Jerusalem (easily accessible to “scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem” –Mk 7:1, etc). I do not know for certain if the Dead Sea Sect was already in existence in early I BCE (majority opinion today is that it formed in II BCE), or if the sect was established as a result of Yeshu’s personal activity, or if there even was a Qumran sect (some scholars maintain that there was only a scroll ‘library’ in the caves).

At the conclusion of my book *The Myth of Nazareth* (pp. 306–7), I point out that the attempted casting down of Jesus from a cliff (Lk 4:29) hardly fits the typography of Nazareth (where no cliff exists) but strikingly matches the area around Qumran. Is this mere coincidence, or can it be Luke’s vestige of a distant memory? Furthermore, I note on the same page that in “the earliest gospel tradition, Q located Jesus’ home of Nazara not in Nazareth of Galilee, but in Judea.” This Southern Tradition survives in marginalized works such as the Protevangelium of James (where Mary and Joseph live in proximity to the Jerusalem temple). Such ancient traditions, long forgotten, gain in importance as we search for clues into Christian origins.

In my first book, having located Nazara in Judea, I also noted that in the earliest gospel stratum Nazara “is none other than the field of activity of John the Baptist.” This has significance for those who suspect that, originally, John the Baptist and Jesus were one and the same historical figure ([Robert Price](#), [George Ory](#), myself).

In sum, multiple clues point to Judea rather than Galilee as the original locus of the Christian founder prophet’s activity. Those who have read *NazarethGate* are aware of my view that the Dead Sea Scrolls reflect a Jewish sect (the Yachad) whose tenets are a forced and somewhat artificial mixture of gnosticism and Judaism. The DSS sectarian texts attempt to reconcile those two incompatibilities. We have seen, however, that Yeshu did not do this: his excommunication and subsequent career (ending in execution) shows that he made a

complete break with Judaism. The evidence presented in these posts favors buddhist gnosticism as the most likely source of Yeshu's heresy. On the other hand, the DSS attempt to combine gnostic tendencies (the quest for wisdom, man's discovery of the 'divine'= gnosis, and the adherent's status as a quasi-divine 'angel') with a reactionary, conservative Jewish outlook (insistence upon Torah, religious purity, ritual, and Jewish tradition). I discuss this at length in my second book [**NazarethGate**](#) (pp. 461-71).

My provisional view, then, is that the Dead Sea scriptures are the products of a sect influenced (or possibly founded) by Yeshu ha-Notsri, but that the sect was not entirely faithful to Yeshu's message. In other words, the Dead Sea Scrolls are both syncretist and revisionist.

Part 12

To Samaria

Christian origins, Samaritans, Yeshu ha-Notsri

Yeshu's teachings

In preceding posts we looked at three central themes of Yeshu/Jesus' teaching, as witnessed in the gospels and other Christian writings: not of this world, self-denial, and his adversarial relationship with 'scribes and Pharisees' (posts 8-10 in this series). These themes must also relate to the reasons Yeshu was excommunicated. 'Not of this world' signifies that Yeshu did not bestow honor upon the creator, Yahweh. 'Self-denial' signifies that Yeshu embraced the very un-Jewish doctrine of encratism (from Gk. *egkrateia*, 'in continence')—the sacrifice of pleasure in order to attain understanding. Finally, Yeshu was against 'scribes and Pharisees'—very understandable given that they excommunicated him, and that Yeshu believed he knew a *better* way.

Rabbinic literature preserves additional clues regarding the theology of the rebellious prophet. One is in the Palestinian Talmud. Though it does not mention Yeshu, "That it refers to Jesus there can be no possibility of doubt" (Herford):

R. Abahu said: If a man says to you 'I am God,' he is a liar; if [he says, 'I am] the Son of Man,' in the end people will laugh at him; if [he says] 'I will go up to heaven,' he says, but will not perform it. (*Taanith* 65b)

This revealing quote makes three accusations against Yeshu/Jesus: (1) he considered himself (and others?) divine; (2) he considered himself the Son of Man; and (3) he claimed to have gone up to heaven. All three claims are, in fact, related and immediately point to the Jewish heterodoxy known as **merkaba** ("chariot") mysticism, that is, the

theology of man's ascent to God. This theology has never been tolerated in normative Judaism, yet it has ever been present at the fringes of the religion. The patriarch Enoch is also related—he “walked with God: and he was no more; for God took him” (Gen 5:21-24). Interestingly, the theology of ascent was very important to the Dead Sea Sect, where the members may have looked upon themselves as angels in heaven (cf. [Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice](#) and writings by, e.g., [Crispin Fletcher-Louis](#)). The most radical version of this theology dispenses with God entirely and places the entire burden of finding ‘enlightenment’ upon the shoulders of man—in a word, Buddhism.

The above claims against Yeshu/Jesus are vaguely familiar from the New Testament—e.g., “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). Man's ascent to divinity implies that man is in command of his own salvation and can reach perfection by himself—*without God's help* (or even without a God at all). The ascent depends on man, on his effort and his works (Mk 12:30 etc). Hence two broad avenues opened in Christianity: the way of works, and the way of faith. For Gnostics, the former was needed, for man does all the work. Followers of Paul and later adherents of the Great Church, however, required faith, for God does all the work.

Jewish mystical traditions of late antiquity, together with the Hechalot literature, struggle with the desire to cross the chasm separating man and God. That desire is anathema in normative Judaism. Evidently, Yeshu ha-Notsri dared cross that chasm. He repudiated the broad avenue that is normative Judaism, the avenue that demands allegiance and obedience to Yahweh above all. This appears to have been the cause for his excommunication. Yeshu embraced the gnostic quest, and for that he was anathematized by his contemporaries highly placed in Judaism.

The net widens

We are now gradually, and by degrees, entering a new phase in our unorthodox exploration into Christian origins on this website. Up until now, this series of posts has focussed on what Talmudic records can tell us about Yeshu ha-Notsri, the forgotten prophet who (I maintain) was the true founder of Christianity. We have reviewed Yeshu's heritage as the scion of an elite pharisaic family from Jerusalem, his flight to Alexandria with other exiled Pharisees while still a boy, his encounter with proto-gnosticism (in the form of Buddhism) in that great cosmopolitan city, his ascetic, other-worldly, and decidedly un-Jewish views, and finally his excommunication from Judaism at the young age of twenty-four.

The next stage in Yeshu's career was his activity as a renegade, already-excommunicated prophet in Palestine. We know, indeed, that he did return to Palestine, for the Talmud relates that he was excommunicated on the journey back, that he "deceived and led all Israel astray," and that he was finally arrested by the Sanhedrin, put on trial, and executed for apostasy in Lod (Lydda), a town about 35 km NW of Jerusalem. These few details are available from rabbinical accounts. Otherwise, however, Jewish records are largely silent.

In order to trace the career and teachings of Yeshu ha-Notsri after his return to Israel, we must turn to other texts. Surprisingly, a vast array of both traditional and non-traditional religious texts awaits us. The sheer variety of relevant material attests to the fact that, astonishingly, this single prophet was not only the founder of Christianity, but also of other movements long marginalized and ignored—such as Mandeism, Manichaeism, and even that branch of Samaritanism known as Dositheanism. But I am getting ahead of our story... My point here is that, in order to continue to retrace the steps of the remarkable prophet that was Yeshu, we must explore a great variety of religious texts, including:

- the Talmud (Jewish rabbinical records)
- canonical Christian scripture (the New Testament)
- non-canonical Christian literature (gnostic and apocryphal texts)
- literature of ‘baptist’ sects (Mandean, Manichaeian, etc)
- Samaritan literature
- long known but rejected works all-too-hastily written off as spurious, forged, or ‘medieval’ (Secret Mark, the Hebrew Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Barnabas, the Acts of Mark, to name a few)

Not a Galilean

Having examined in the previous posts what we can learn about Yeshu ha-Notsri’s career from Jewish sources, we can appreciate that the biography of Yeshu is of an entirely different cast than the story of Jesus of Nazareth as presented in the gospels. The renegade Yeshu lived several generations before the turn of the era—in the time of King Janneus and not of the Herods. Yeshu is from Jerusalem, not the Galilee. He is obviously well educated. Not only that, but he is connected to the highest echelon of the Jewish establishment. Far from being an outsider, a backcountry schismatic, Yeshu is very much an insider. He is apparently a well connected Jewish legalist, with a promising future in Jerusalem pharisaic circles.

Despite the above very advantageous perquisites, Yeshu ha-Notsri turned against his entire religious heritage. In the words of the Talmud, he “worshipped a brick” and “caused the multitude to sin.” These accusations indicate that the prophet was not only heretical but also successful. He was able to gather a significant following in his homeland: Yeshu “led astray and deceived Israel.” Obviously, the rabbis considered Yeshu very dangerous and took him seriously. The Talmud never disputes Yeshu’s success with the people, nor does it

doubt his power and abilities, though it accuses him of deriving those powers from magic and trickery. Nevertheless, Yeshu was a threat to the ascendant pharisaic power base, for *he had the potential to turn the people against the Jewish religious establishment*. This, we can confidently surmise, was the true cause of Yeshu's eventual execution. The arrest, trial, and execution of Yeshu ha-Notsri as recorded in the Talmud were not simply for religious reasons. They were, above all, because Yeshu was a political threat.

In his book *Did Jesus Live 100 B.C.?* (1903:180), G.R.S. Mead even opined that "Yeshu was a person of great distinction and importance, and 'near those in power' at the time, that is to say, presumably connected by blood with the Jewish rulers—a trait preserved in the Toldoth Yeshu." This is possible and would explain the young boy's presence in the general pharisaic flight to Egypt under Perachiah. This general line of reasoning receives support from b. Sanh. 43a, where one reads: "With Yeshu, however, it was different, for he was connected with the government [*malkuth*]." I discuss this important passage in *NazarethGate* (p. 425):

We now consider the astonishing final words of the above citation: "for he was connected with the government." This is the Shachter-Freedman translation and fully confirms our above observation that Yeshu was "connected to the highest echelon of the Jewish establishment." In fact, the pertinent words have secular meaning in Talmudic Hebrew. Thus the translation clarifies the word GOVERNMENT with the bracketed phrase: "or royalty, i.e., influential." Jastrow's Talmudic dictionary translates *malkuth* in this context as "court," and adds in parentheses: "influential."

It is clear, then, that Yeshu ha-Notsri was not some obscure back-country schismatic. He was the most dangerous of rebels: a charismatic and highly-placed insider, a well-born Pharisee once himself groomed for the Sanhedrin. To use a military analogy, Yeshu successfully preaching an alternate gnostic theology to the Jewish

people was like the defection of a general at the height of battle—a defection straight to the headquarters of the enemy camp!

“Straight to the enemy camp” indeed... Those words may be more than mere hyperbole. Now excommunicated from Judaism and *persona non grata* in ultra-pharisaic Jerusalem, upon returning to Palestine Yeshu would have gravitated towards the one area in his homeland that was also historically hostile to Jerusalem and to its religious power structure: Samaria. In the preceding post I suggested that Yeshu may in fact have gone to Qumran by the Dead Sea. That is certainly a possibility. But more numerous clues, coming from different traditions, link the founder of Christianity to Samaria.

It will be appreciated that in Samaria Yeshu would have found ready support for his deeply-felt crusade against ‘scribes and Pharisees.’ This Samaritan support, in turn, ultimately strengthened his power and largely explains the Sanhedrin’s accusation against Yeshu prior to his execution, namely, that the prophet ‘deceived and led Israel astray.’

Part 13

The falsified biography

Christian origins, Yeshu ha-Notsri

The Toldoth Yeshu

Before proceeding with Yeshu's activities in Samaria after his return to Israel, I would like to expand a little on a remark made in the preceding post. There I noted that Yeshu was not merely a religious rebel due to his unconventional (Buddhist-gnostic) views, but also that he was a *political* threat. This suspicion derives from several clues, most importantly being that the young Yeshu was important enough to accompany Perachiah, the head of the Sanhedrin, into Egyptian exile. This alone suggests that Yeshu was probably associated somehow with an influential Jewish family.

Many other clues, however, support the suspicion that Yeshu was indeed connected to Jewish aristocracy—if not to royalty itself. In his book *Did Jesus Live 100 B.C.?* (1903:180), G.R.S. Mead opined that “Yeshu was a person of great distinction and importance, and ‘near those in power’ at the time, that is to say, presumably connected by blood with the Jewish rulers—a trait preserved in the **Toldoth Yeshu**.” This general line of reasoning receives support from b. Sanh. 43a, where one reads: “With Yeshu, however, it was different, for he was connected with the government [*malkuth*].” I discuss this important passage in *NazarethGate* (p. 425):

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Talmudic Hebrew. Thus the translation clarifies the word GOVERNMENT with the bracketed phrase: "or royalty, i.e., influential." Jastrow's Talmudic dictionary translates malkuth in this context as "court," and adds in parentheses: "influential."

The first Jewish history of Jesus, the *Toldoth Yeshu* at least partly goes back to earliest Christian times. This suspicion is not new or original with me. The founder of American Atheists, Madalyn Murray O'Hair, once wrote: "We venture to think that the Christian legend of Jesus may have originated with the Jewish story of Jeshu" (in her introductory remarks to the 1982 reprinting of the *Toldoth Jeshu*, original edition online [here](#)). O'Hair herself, however, may have derived the opinion from no less a luminary than Voltaire, who opined long ago:

"The *Toldoth Yeshu* is the most ancient Jewish writing against our religion that has been transmitted to us. It is a life of Jesus Christ, one completely contrary to our holy gospels. It appears to derive from the first century and to have even been written before the gospels" (Voltaire, *Lettres sur les Juifs*).

In the *Toldoth*, Queen Alexandra ("Helena") is herself personally impressed with Yeshu and, at one point, interrogates him:

Jesus said: Lady, I am he, and I raise the dead.

In the same hour the queen was affrighted and said: That is a great sign.

Apostates still joined themselves to [[Yeshu]], were with him, and there arose a great schism in Israel.

G.R.S. Mead (p. 317) also offers the following regarding the mother of Yeshu:

[F]rom several forms of the *Toldoth* we glean that [Mary] was regarded as a woman of distinction. Not only is she said to have been the sister of a certain Joshua, who is presumably to be identified with Joshua ben Perachiah, but she is also said to have been related to Queen Helene, that is, if our argument holds good, to Queen Salome, whose brother was Simeon ben Shetach. Here we have the close relationship of Jesus to the most distinguished Rabbis of the time.

Of course, if Mary the mother of Yeshu/Jesus were the sister of Joshua b. Perachiah, then we have here eminent reason why the young lad would have accompanied his own uncle, the head of the sanhedrin, into Egyptian exile. I certainly do not insist upon this interpretation, which at this point is a mere possibility. However, if Yeshu were indeed the nephew of Perachiah, he would have been a favorite—Perachiah's darling, and doubtless Perachiah would have taken his nephew under his wing. We perhaps now catch a glimpse of the enormous *deception* (in the French sense) presented by Yeshu's later betrayal of the Jewish religion. In this scenario, Perachiah's excommunication of Yeshu in 76 BCE takes on stupendous personal overtones.

Not to mention the Sanhedrin's execution of Yeshu ten years later.

We now are admittedly in speculative territory and none of this is provable. How much is true we may never know. But the clues are suggestive, and they do combine in certain ways to yield a rather exceptional, though still believable, story. Now, if the boy Yeshu accompanied his uncle into Egypt, we may then ask: what about Yeshu's father? Why is he nowhere mentioned?

In fact, it may be (see below) that Yeshu's father is mentioned in one guise or another. But it is also possible that Yeshu's father was killed in one of Janneus' pogroms/wars against the Pharisees. I am not asserting here that the father's demise occurred specifically in the infamous mass crucifixion of 800 Pharisees by Janneus, so graphically depicted by Josephus. This would be one of the more macabre possibilities. If my reconstruction is correct, then Yeshu would probably already have been in Egypt at that time (87 BCE?). More likely is that Yeshu fled to Egypt in the retinue around Perachiah, while Yeshu's father remained in Palestine to fight against King Janneus.

Before closing this section I wish to signal that an alternate account of Yeshu's parentage exists in Jewish records. (This is discussed at Mead:148 f.) In the Palestinian Gemara it is not Perachiah who flees to

Alexandria, but his successor as head of the Sanhedrin, Judah ben Tabbai (see [here](#) and [here](#)). Though I am no Talmudic scholar, it appears to me that the **Gemara** is considerably later than the Toldoth Yeshu (IV CE vs. I CE). Hence, I provisionally give preference to the account with Perachiah, and Mead (p. 169) seems to agree.

The Protevangeium of James

Another possible hint that Yeshu/Jesus was linked by blood to aristocracy (if not royalty) comes from the **Protevangelium of James**, a very early work in which Joseph and Mary live in Jerusalem, not Nazareth/Galilee. We read concerning Jesus' cousin, John [the Baptist]:

23.2. Now, Herod was searching for John, and sent officers to Zacharias at the altar [of the Jerusalem temple] to ask him, "Where have you hidden your son?"... Herod was angry and said, "Is his son [i.e. of Zacharias] to be king over Israel?"

Here, Zacharias is a 'high priest' officiating in the Jerusalem temple and is the father of John [the Baptist, cf. Lk 1:5]. The Protevangelium goes on to relate that Zacharias is slain in the forecourt of the temple by the king's men. This account seems known to Luke (11:51), while Matthew glosses "Zachariah *the son of Barachiah*." All this may go back to 2 Chr 24:20, where a certain "Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest" is stoned in the forecourt of the Jerusalem temple. But the early Christian tradition contemporized this account, and the reason is not immediately clear. In any case, the Protevangelium explicitly links John's father with the temple priesthood and, as we all know, in the canonical tradition John's family was linked to that of Jesus by blood, for Elizabeth and Mary were "kinswomen" (Lk 1:36), presumably cousins. Thus, according to the Protevangelium, Jesus the son of Mary was connected by blood to the high priestly functioning of the Jerusalem temple.

It is also possible, if one conflates the Baptist with Jesus (as Price, Ory, and myself do) that Jesus is a cipher for John [the Baptist]. Originally, it was John's folks who were associated with the Jerusalem temple. This parentage was no longer desired by the evangelists, who desired an entirely new biography for their God-Man, now from Galilee and not from Jerusalem. So, their new figure was furnished with a new set of parents, a new homeland (Galilee), and an entirely obscure (and hence unverifiable) background. Ergo, the Christian gospels.

This is not the place to delve into **the conflation of John and Jesus**. But, here too, many clues exist, including: Herod's own fear that Jesus was John resurrected from the dead (Mk 6:16); Trobisch's view that Jn. the Bptist had 12 disciples (cf. Acts 19:7; *The 1st Ed. of the NT*, 2000:81); Rod Blackhirst's observation that in the Gospel of Barnabas Jesus "virtually subsumes the Baptist character" ("Herbs and Wild Fruit," **Journal of Higher Criticism 9:2** [2002] p. 287); the 'pre-Christian' Mandeans venerating John the Baptist (cf. the Book of John) while vilifying Jesus; the birth of John on June 21 (the summer solstice –Wünsch, *Das Frühlingsfest* 55); John's birth in a cave (Paciaudi, *De Cultu* 1755:53), etc.

To pursue the matter one step farther, if John were the originator of the Christian religion, then the prophet's real name was either Yachanan ("Yaweh is Gracious") or Yanathan ("Yahweh Gives"). The two names, while etymologically different, were occasionally interchangeable—particularly because the often imaginative and linguistically challenged people who in antiquity took upon themselves to translate/edit/abridge/expand these religious writings were hardly following the formal rules of linguistics when going from one language to another.

Of the two names, Yachanan or Yanathan, separate clues (to be discussed) favor the latter: the prophet's name translates to "Yahweh Gives"—that is, Jonathan, or simply John. "The Baptist" was an

ascription, an appellation bestowed upon the prophet by the congregation that he founded. For readers now familiar with the gnostic water symbolism [highlighted often on this website](#), describing the prophet as a baptist signals that the core doctrine had to do with immersion in gnosis. Originally, then, the resurrection was spiritual, ritually identified with emerging from the water of baptism. (All this will have much to do with the figure of the Samaritan heresiarch Dositheus, to be considered later.)

Aside: We encounter a similar problem with Heb. *Notsri* yielding → Gk. *Nazarene* and *Nazareth* of the gospels. In this case, it was beyond the linguistic capacities of the evangelists to preserve the Semitic tsade (“ts”), which is an unvoiced phoneme and in the natural permutations of language yields the unvoiced “s” and not the voiced (aspirated) “z”: Tsforah → Sepphorah (wife of Moses); Tsarephat → Sarepta (place); Yitshak → Isaac; Tsidon → Sidon, etc. This is one clue that the true heirs of Yeshu ha-Notsri were the Natsuraiia (Mandaeans) and the Nasarenes of Epiphanius (Panarion 18), while all the ancient groups and related places that have the “z” sound in their name are bogus (Mk 1:24, Mt 2:23, Acts 24:5, Panarion 29, Nazarenes, Nazoraeans, Nazara, Nazareth, etc).

If the Toldoth Yeshu and the Protevangelium of James are indeed as early chronologically as mooted above, this of course significantly affects the Synoptic Problem and the source history of the canonical gospels. Mainline scholarship still clings to the largely discredited ‘oral tradition’ hypothesis. What we have above, however, is a much more probable and demonstrable hypothesis: *the canonical gospels rest upon pre-existent Jewish sources*. I am convinced that the account in the Protevangelium of James served as one source for the canonical gospels (at the minimum, for Matthew and Luke). It is also my view that at least some portions of the Toldoth Yeshu served as model for the evangelists.

Already in mid-II CE Justin Martyr seems to know elements of the Toldoth, and it was his generation (as argued on this site [here](#)) that witnessed the birth of the canonical gospels. So, if one clearly locates these texts chronologically, it becomes eminently possible that the Jewish Toldoth Yeshu (an early anti-Yeshuine polemic) could have preceded the Christian gospels. With this in mind, when we read a passage such as the above—as well as its context in Toldoth ¶14—the possibility readily presents that Mark simply transposed the Yeshu-Alexandra scene to Jesus-Pilate, with necessary adjustments.

If the prophet's name was, in fact, "John," then the moniker *Yeshu ha-Notsri* is itself secondary, attached to the prophet about the turn of the era by the nascent rabbinical tradition. *Yeshu*, of course, is in the Hebrew semantic field meaning "salvation." *Notsri* is (I maintain) in the semantic field of "watcher, keeper" (Heb. *natsar*). For reasons of encratism (to be discussed elsewhere), the original Christians were known as *netsarim*, "watchers" (signifying watching one's behavior in order to maintain spiritual purity).

Interestingly, a common synonym of *natsar* is *shamar*. Both these words equally define the semantic field "Watch-Observe-Keep." From *natsar* are derived "Notsri" and "Natsarene" (and, in the canonical Christian tradition, "Nazarene" and "Nazareth"). From *shamar* is derived the exact synonym "Samaritan."

As we shall see, the early followers of Yeshu ha-Notsri were not only known as *naturaiia* (Mandeans, Natsarenes), but also as *shamarim*, "Samaritans."

Part 14

Dositheus

Christian origins, Dositheus, Yeshu ha-Notsri

In prior posts I have hinted that, after his excommunication in Egypt at age twenty-four, Yeshu ha-Notsri (not his actual name) returned to Palestine. The chronology for Yeshu that I have been using was pieced together from various places, including the Talmud (which explicitly dates Yeshu to the time of Joshua ben Perachiah, i.e., early 1 BCE) and the medieval Jewish writer Abraham ibn Daud (who gives a lifespan for Yeshu of about 34 years and his date of death in the 60s BCE). Additional information came from Epiphanius who—in an apparent slip of the pen—also dated the founder of Christianity to the time of King Janneus and Queen Salome Alexandra.

The next step in our search for the prophet's story concerns what happened after his excommunication. Here Jewish records fall silent. In any case, those records were already off the beaten path—at least, where Christians are concerned, for very few New Testament scholars occupy themselves with the Talmud. Now, however, because the Jewish records themselves fall silent, we must venture much, much deeper into the forest of literature that survives from Roman and Byzantine times. The obscure traditions that preserve clues regarding Yeshu have either long been marginalized, such as the Samaritans and Mandaeans, or they are already extinct, such as the Manichaeans and the plethora of Gnostic sects described by the Church Fathers.

Epiphanius (again)

Regarding what happened to Yeshu after his excommunication, the first clue comes from a passage of Epiphanius, that erudite but absent-

minded heresiologist of the late fourth century. But Epiphanius writes not of Yeshu in the passage I wish to signal, but of *Dositheus*, the Samaritan heresiarch! The difference in names is astonishing—but don't let that throw you off the path. Recall (from the preceding post) that Yeshu's given name was in all likelihood *Yonathan* ("John"). This Hebrew name—a common one—means "Yahweh Gives" or, if you prefer, "Gift of Yahweh" (*Ya-nathan*). In Greek, there are two equivalents: Theodore (*Theos-Doron*, the feminine being Dorothea) and Dositheus (*Dosis[<didwmi]-Theos*). Thus, the names Yonathan and Dositheus are linguistically compatible. This alone, of course, does not mean that the two religious figures from antiquity are identical. What Epiphanius writes about Dositheus, nevertheless, confirms that very fact, for he relates concerning Dositheus what we have already learned concerning Jonathan/Yeshu:

Dositheus was a mixture, because he turned from the Jews to the Samaritan peoples. He was a leading student of the Law and the Jewish repetitions of it, and ambitious for the highest rank. But as he failed to achieve it and was not considered worthy of any special respect among the Jews, he defected to the Samaritans and founded this sect. (Epiphanius, *Panarion* 13)

Several elements in this short passage will already sound familiar to readers of these posts:

(1) "He was a leading student of the Law and the Jewish repetitions of it, and ambitious for the highest rank."

We have seen that Yeshu ha-Notsri was a young man in the company of the leading Pharisee, Joshua b. Perachiah. They fled together to Egypt in the early first century BCE, in order to escape the pogrom against the Pharisees instigated by their arch-enemy, King Alexander Janneus. It may be, **as already noted**, that Yeshu was himself related by blood to Perachiah. In any case, the Talmud informs us that he was associated in some way to the *malkuth*, "government." Evidently Yeshu was an important young man, the scion of an aristocratic Jewish family,

sufficiently important to accompany Perachiah into exile and to be repeatedly noted by subsequent rabbis in the Talmud.

It is relevant that the New Testament figure of Jesus is obviously also well instructed in Jewish Law and the “repetitions of it,” for Jesus is constantly besting the scribes at their own game—something impossible if he were a country bumpkin from Nazareth. We are now able to offer a solution for this curiosity: the evangelists based their figure of Jesus on authentic tradition, on a promising, well educated Pharisee known to the later Talmud as Yeshu ha-Notsri, a young man bought up at the very center of Jewish religious power and perhaps himself groomed for the Sanhedrin (cf. “ambitious for the highest rank,” in the words of Epiphanius).

(2) “But as he failed to achieve it and was not considered worthy of any special respect among the Jews...”

These words also sound familiar. Yeshu “failed to achieve” a position of honor in Judaism, a place in the Sanhedrin, or any other distinction in the religion. Quite the contrary. He was excommunicated for “apostasy”, for worshipping “a brick”, and for “practicing magic”—among other accusations. Yeshu certainly “was not considered worthy of any special respect among the Jews.”

(3) [Dositheus] “defected to the Samaritans and founded this sect” [i.e., the Dositheans]

This is most interesting because if Epiphanius is actually referring (unbeknownst to him, of course) to the founder of Christianity, then we have here new and astounding information: the figure who founded Christianity also founded Dosithean Samaritanism! Of course, we haven’t yet established *with any certainty* this Jesus-Dositheus link (via Yeshu ha-Notsri). But the elements, though scanty, are present. And, as we shall see shortly, those suggestive elements will rapidly accumulate.

Abu'l Fath

Abu'l Fath was a Samaritan historian who lived in the fourteenth century. His history is one of several chronicles to survive, at least piece-meal. Abu'l Fath's "chronicle" was published in 1895 in Latin, then translated into English by John Bowman (*Samaritan Documents* 1977, excerpts). Abu'l Fath calls Dositheus "Dusis," but he clearly has the Samaritan heresiarch in mind. I first give only a short passage from the medieval chronicler:

Now the origin of Dusis was from the mixed rabble who went out with the children of Israel from the land of Egypt to Nablus. (Bowman 163)

We learn here that, according to the Samaritan chronicler, Dusis/Dositheus came from Egypt. Furthermore, he was of "the children of Israel"—that is, Dositheus was among the Egyptian Jews.

"Mixed rabble" is merely Abu'l Fath's disparagement of Dositheus' heritage, given that the chronicler had no relevant information and was hostile to Dositheus. After all, Dositheus founded a heresy that Samaritanism promptly rejected. (Hopefully, more on that Samaritan schism later.)



Shechem/Nablus and Mt. Gerizim, c. 1940.

The above citation also tells us that Dositheus went to Nablus. Now, **Nablus** is the semitic corruption of "Flavia Neapolis," so named by Vespasian in 72 CE. However, Nablus has a very ancient and august history. It is the biblical **Shechem**, located in the hill country of Ephraim, the first capital of Israel and the most hallowed city in the Pentateuch, with links to the patriarchs Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and Joshua.

Shechem famously lay between two great hills, Mounts Gerizim and Ebal. The inhabitants of Samaria chose to build their temple atop Mt. Gerizim (ca. 450 BCE?), which the Samaritans consider to be the highest, oldest and most central mountain in the world.

Israel and Judah are the two kingdoms of the Jews in the First Temple Period. While Jerusalem was always the religious center of the southern kingdom of Judah, Shechem was similarly the religious center of Israel. The Jerusalemite, Hasmonean King John Hyrcanus I destroyed the Samaritan temple about 120 BCE and enslaved most of the Shechemites. The Samaritan temple would never be rebuilt. A decade later he returned and ravaged all of Samaria.

If our reconstruction of Yeshu's history is at all correct, then he/
Dositheus came to Shechem shortly after his excommunication, that is,
about 75-70 BCE. The destruction of Samaria and its temple would
still have been fresh, and the hostility of Samaritans (inhabitants of
Samaria) towards the Jews would have been most keen.

Part 15

Dositheus = John = Jesus = Simon Magus

Christian origins, Dositheus

In the preceding post I made a bold claim: the founder of Christianity, Yeshu ha-Notsri, is identical to Dositheus, the Samaritan arch-heretic. If I am accused (or lauded?) in future for being the inventor of this claim (which must appear monstrous to ordinary Christians), I accept full blame (or credit)—for I don't believe it has been made before.

One objection that immediately arises to the above claim is that Dositheus is generally dated to the first century CE. But it is not a serious objection. The conventional dating of Dositheus depends on the dating of so many other mythical characters (see below), including John the Baptist, Simon Magus, and Jesus of Nazareth himself—all of whom have been placed in the first century by the fabulous Christian documents that come down to us. And I am not simply referring to the canonical gospels, for Dositheus does not appear in them. Rather, scholars who are acquainted with Dositheus at all know him primarily from the Pseudo-Clementine literature, where Dositheus and Simon Magus are disciples of John the Baptist and vie for leadership of the fellowship after John's death (Hom 2.24), and where those figures have the ability to fly through the air, etc. (Hom 2.32).

While we can (and must) dismiss the miraculous and magical aspects of these accounts, we can still glean useful information from them. I here cite **the pertinent passage** from the Clementine Homilies in full:

He being absent [1]in Egypt for the practice of magic, and John being killed, Dositheus desiring the leadership, [2]falsely gave out that Simon was dead, and succeeded to the seat. But Simon, returning not long after, and strenuously holding by the place as his own, when he met with Dositheus did not demand the place, knowing that a man who has

attained power beyond his expectations cannot be removed from it. Wherefore with pretended friendship he gives himself for a while to the second place, under Dositheus. But taking his place after a few days among the [3]thirty fellow-disciples, he began to malign Dositheus as not delivering the instructions correctly. And this he said that he did, not through unwillingness to deliver them correctly, but through ignorance. And on one occasion, Dositheus, perceiving that this artful accusation of Simon was dissipating the opinion of him with respect to many, so that they did not think that he was [4]the Standing One, came in a rage to the usual place of meeting, and finding Simon, struck him with a staff. But it seemed to pass through the body of Simon as if he had been smoke. Thereupon Dositheus, being confounded, said to him, 'If you are the Standing One, I also will worship you.' Then Simon said that he was; and Dositheus, knowing that he himself was not the Standing One, fell down and worshipped; and associating himself with the twenty-nine chiefs, he raised Simon to his own place of repute; and thus, not many days after, Dositheus himself, while he (Simon) stood, fell down and died. (Cl. Hom 2.24)

[Point 1]

Beginning with the very first words of this account, we learn that Dositheus was absent "in Egypt." This agrees with what Abu'l Fath, a millennium later, tells us about Dositheus, as cited in the preceding post: "Now the origin of Dusis was from the mixed rabble who went out with the children of Israel *from the land of Egypt* to Nablus."

Nablus, we recall, is the latter day name for Shechem, the religious center of Samaria. As mentioned in the preceding post, Epiphanius also tells us that Dositheus "defected to the Samaritans and founded this sect" (Pan 13), that is, the sect of the Dosithean Samaritans.

[Point 2]

Simon Magus is well known to Christian literature. Eusebius writes that "Nearly all the Samaritans, and a few of other nations, worship him, confessing him as the Supreme God" (Eccl. Hst. 13). In the Clementine passage above, upon his return from Egypt Dositheus usurped the leadership of Simon Magus' fellowship, presumably setting *himself* up

as the "Supreme God" (or *megale dynamis*, "great Power"). Regardless of how much of this is fiction, the Clementine account seems to provide additional evidence that Yeshu/Dositheus, upon his return from Egypt, indeed went to *Samaria*.

For the moment we must defer interesting questions such as "What was the pre-existing congregation that Dositheus usurped?" or "Who was this figure 'John the Baptist' who died just before Dositheus attempted to take over the fellowship?" However, it can be noted that—according to the above passage—*John* has died, but Dositheus makes out that Simon is the one who is dead. This bizarre situation is a clue that the writer is conflating two figures, John the Baptist and Simon Magus. But, as the account continues, Simon Magus 'comes back to life' as it were. He wasn't *really* dead. Of course, similar confusion regarding Jesus' death also existed—Jewish texts such as the Toldoth Yeshu claim that his body was stolen away by disciples (to feign the resurrection), and to this day Muslims believe that Jesus did not really die on the cross but only appeared to do so. I mention these tangential details because they highlight the porousness, the overlapping of personae and traditions that took place already in early Christianity. Things were not nearly as definite as the textbooks today might lead us to believe!

[Point **3**]

"...thirty fellow-disciples." The number thirty (= days in the month) is lunar symbolism, in contrast to the solar symbolism of Jesus having twelve disciples. In ancient esoteric religious traditions, the moon was the great revealer, able to shine in the night/darkness of ignorance. In short, it was a symbol of gnosis, of that which is hidden in contrast to that which is manifest. We recall that the *Nazarene*, in Mandeian (and gnostic) religion is "the revealer of secret wisdom," and that one of the

meanings of *natsar* (from which "Nazarene") is "to keep secret" (BDB 666; cf. "hidden things" *netsuroth* at Isa 48:6).

Thus, the word *nazarene* is intimately involved with esoteric, lunar, and gnostic symbolism—and, apparently, also with the Samaritans, for *shamar* (from which "Samaritan") is a synonym for *natsar* (from which "Nazarene"). Both mean (among other things) "keep, preserve," and the Samaritans consider themselves the true keepers/preservers of the Law.

What is less known, and more apposite for our present purposes, is that the Dositheans were known in antiquity sometimes as Samaritans, sometimes as Nazarenes, and sometimes even as Mandeans. Thus, Theodore bar Konai (8th cent.) wrote that the *natsraia* of his time were in some places called Mandeans and in other places "followers of Dositheus." The literature familiar to Christian scholars, however, generally pigeon-holes the Dositheans as 'a Samaritan heresy.' In fact, the latter is also the view that the Samaritans themselves hold.

Epiphanius exalts Dositheus by calling him the "founder of the Samaritans" (Pan 13.1.3). This incredible claim will strike us as a great exaggeration, for nobody remembers Dositheus today, and the Samaritans themselves would strenuously object to this assertion of their (heretical) origin. But Epiphanius actually goes much farther: for him "Samaritans" included many sects that we hardly consider Samaritan, *including the Essenes and other baptist sects* (Pan 9-13). Epiphanius writes that "the whole nation were called Samaritans" (Pan 9.1.1). All this is quite astonishing, and the chief culprit responsible for all these heresies, according to Epiphanius, *was none other than Dositheus!*

[Point **4**]

"...the Standing One." The Greek form is *ho Estos*, but the term has deep connotations going far back in religious literature. The Hebrew

root is *amad* (ayin-mem-daleth) and it is used in Jewish scripture primarily in the sense of “standing before the Lord,” that is, being found worthy of God’s presence. Theologically, then, “the Standing One” is proven, blameless, and *spiritually successful*. Moses, Aaron, and Elijah all stood before the Lord.

“*The Standing One*,” however, is a locution not found in literature before Christian times. No prior tradition applies the concept of such worthiness itself *exclusively* to a single person. The concept is an aberration, but it is clear that the Clementine author of the above citation understood the exclusive nature of the epithet, for Simon Magus and Dositheus vie with one another over which of them is the Standing One—implying that only one person with that title can possibly exist. It is as much an aberration as Jn 14:3, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me”—thus effectively closing off all other routes to salvation and acknowledging Jesus as the sole “Standing One.” I suspect that the Clementine author was indeed influenced by the Hellenist gospel tradition in this matter.

Esoteric gnostic traditions had much to say about “standing” which I have touched upon [previously on this site](#). In the Book of Joshua priests stand in the middle of the Jordan River, and even the stones from that hallowed ground were worthy of religious veneration (Josh 4:9). Why the stones? Because only they can “stand” (i.e. endure) in the middle of the sacred river (of gnosis, for the gnostic traditions). Thus, standing is related to endurance, firmness, and surely linked to the name Cephas/Peter in the gospels. Jewish scripture also knows this meaning quite well, for the noun *amad* means “pillar,” sometimes leading the children of Israel in the desert and thus representative of God.

Quite overlooked, and yet supremely important for understanding Christian origins, is that *amad*, “stand,” in Aramaic also means

“baptize.” I have written about this [here](#). What this means is that “John the Baptist” = “John the Standing One.” This understanding of John has been completely suppressed since ancient times. The Pseudo-Clementines no longer recognize John in this way. He is simply “the baptist,” and the (now heretical) aspects of “standing” in water (= gnosis) were shunted off to rank heretics like Simon Magus and Dositheus.

As we are slowly discovering, however, the different strands of this riddle are resolving one into the other:

- Yeshu’s name was “John.”
- John was “the Baptist” and also “the Standing One” (*amad* = both “stand” and “baptize”)
- John = *Yonathan* = Dositheus (“Gift of God”)
- Dositheus = the Standing One = *ho Estos* = Simon Magus

Conclusion:

Yeshu ha-Notsri = Jesus = John the Baptist = Dositheus = Simon Magus.