

A NEW FRAGMENT OF THE JEWISH "LIFE OF JESUS"

by ZE'EV W. FALK

Since the publication of Samuel Krauss', *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen*, Berlin 1902, few additional fragments of the Jewish literary type "Life of Jesus" have been published. However, while most of his texts were in Hebrew and had been written in the West, the documents which were found and published, meanwhile, originated from Eastern Jewry and were written in Aramaic. In 1911 E.N. Adler and S. Krauss published such fragments in the *Revue d'études juives* 61, pp. 126-130 and 62, pp. 28-37, respectively, and in 1928 Louis Ginzberg published two further texts in his *Ginze Schechter*, Vol. 1, pp. 324-338. Mention should be made also of B. Heller's "Über Judas Ischariotes in der jüdischen Legende," in *Monatschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 76 (1932) pp. 33-42, and of the study of J.Z. Lauterbach on "Jesus in the Talmud" in his *Rabbinic Essays*, Cincinnati 1951, pp. 473-570.

T-S N.S. 298:56 of the Cambridge University Library is a further fragment belonging to the Aramaic and Eastern version of this literature. It is a single leaf written on both sides in a clear handwriting. The contents is a passage of Jesus' life which has not been treated by the other texts.

The following is the text of the new fragment, notes and translations, and, finally a summary of conclusion. This publication was made possible through the help of Dr. S.C. Reif and the staff of Cambridge University Library, and by their permission.

1. דאם עבדתון נשלח ונקרי יתיה
2. ליוחנן מצבעאנא ונחזי מה דאמר
3. ונידון יתיהון ובעא ר' יהושע בן
4. פרחיה ליהודה סכריוטא ולשמעון
5. כיפא ולבני סיו יש רינן על יוחנן
6. מצבענא דאזל לכפר תנחום מדינתא
7. ואזל יהודה גנאה וגנדין עימיה
8. ואשלמי יתיה אסיר דאסריה טברינוס
9. קיסר דהוה קא מטעי עמא רבה מן
10. יהודאה ואיתוהו ליוחנן מצבענא ואקימו
11. יתיה קדם ר' יהושע בן פרחיה וקדם
12. מרינוס וקדם אומיטוס מתיבית [...]
13. ואמר ליה ליוחנן אלין כתאבי דחרשי
14. דאשתכחו בידיה דישו תלמידך אם
15. תימר לנא קושטא שבקינן לך ואם לאו
16. את וישו מתקטלין בחרבא דתרין פומא
17. מתיב יוחנן ואמר להון מארותא כתאבי
18. אלין ישו כתבינון אנא ת[...] בימי
19. טברינוס קיסר וי[...] לא חזי לי אלא
20. הוה הוא וחד עשר תלמידים כיבידו
21. וקא מטעי להון בני אינשא מתיבין
22. [...] אין ליה תלמידים דישו מה שמיהון
23. אמר להון נקי [...] ומתי ולוקא ואלקי
24. אלטאום ויהודה ופולוס ופטמוס ונצר
25. ובני ותודה [...] מד [...] ואחרין מדאזיל
26. בתריהון מתיב יהודה סכריוטא

1. The text continues the story regarding the interrogation of John the Baptist, the speaker being unknown.
2. The spelling of "Baptist" varies from the following.
3. The third word seems to be בעא, to enquire.
4. The first witness is Judas Iscariot, the second is Simon Petrus. Iscariot seems to be a name and not איש קריות.
5. The third (or the latter part of the second) word is unclear. As to the rumour, cf. Jer. Talmud Avodah Zarah 3.1, 42c. In any case the religious offence is linked with the political one.
6. Probably Kapernaum, the addition *medinta* seems to be reference to the district.
7. Judas the gardener is not identical with the above mentioned Judas Iscariot.
8. The first words seem to refer to the extradition of John on behalf of Tiberius, perhaps by Antipas (Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.5.2, 116-119).
9. The accusation is political.
10. John is brought to the rabbi, cf. Bab. Talmud Sanhedrin 43a.
- 11f. The name Marinus is mentioned in Tos. Taharot 7.7. The name of the third member of the tribunal is doubtful.



T-S 6N6298.56

Facsimile of New Fragment of a Jewish "Life of Jesus" from the Cairo Genizah. lines 1-13

13. For sorcery cf. Jer. Talmud Hagigah 2.2, 77d.
14. This is a form of execution practised by the Roman administration, cf. Mishnah Sanhedrin 7.3, not the one prescribed by Mishnah 4 *ibid.* for sorcery. John was indeed beheaded.
- 15f. A confession is desirable. The end of line 16 seems to refer to a double-edged sword.
17. The last word but one is an expression of reverence.
- 18f. The meaning is not clear.
20. The reference to eleven disciples seems to be based on the New Testament, the traitor being omitted.
21. In this context the incitement seems to consist of religious, not political, ideas.
22. The first word seems to be a synonym of the preceding one.
23. The name נקי is mentioned in Bab. Talmud Sanhedrin 43a. Lauterbach, *op.cit.*, p. 557 f. refers to Jer. Talmud Ma'aser Sheni 5.2, 56a, and to the names Nicolaus, Nicodemus and Nicanor. Our text has, indeed, a suffix, perhaps Nicophor. Matthew and Luke are taken from the New Testament. The last name is either theophoric, or it refers to Elchasai [cf. S. Pines, "The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity according to a new Source," *Israel Academy of Sciences* 2 (1966)]:
24. The first name seems to be a misspelling of אלתארום (Thomas, Didymus); Judas is perhaps neither identical with Iscariot nor with the gardener. Paulus and Petrus are taken from the New Testament, the latter is misspelled, though the name is mentioned as father of Rabbi Jose, living in Judea at the beginning of the third century: Jer. Talmud Moed Katan 3.5, 13b. Here the Greek name is mentioned instead of the Aramaic one above. The last name is taken from Bab. Talmud Sanhedrin, cf. Lauterbach *op. cit.*, p. 559.
25. Boni is also taken from the Talmud *ibid.*, compare Judah ben Boni: Jer. Talmud Baba Mesia 7.1, 11b. Todah is also from the Talmud *ibid.*, and refers to Thaddeus, cf. Lauterbach, *op. cit.*, p. 556. Can it be the name of the prophet in Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.97-99, and Acts 5.36?

TRANSLATION

1. . . . if you did, let us send and call
2. for John the Baptist and let us see what he says
3. and let us judge them. Then Rabbi Joshua ben
4. Perahyah interrogated Judah Iscariot and Simon
5. Petrus and the (Sons . . .?) there is a rumour regarding John
6. the Baptist that he went to Kaper Tanhum District
7. and that Judah the gardener went with him with his forces
8. and they extradited him as a prisoner, for he was imprisoned by Tiberianus,
9. the Emperor, for having incited many people of
10. the Judeans. One brought John the Baptist and made him stand
11. before Rabbi Joshua ben Perahyah and before

12. Marinus and before Ometos (?). Then [. . .] inquired
13. and asked John: These scriptures of sorcery
14. which are in the hands of Jesus your disciple, if
15. you tell us the truth, we will release you, otherwise
16. you and Jesus will be killed with a double-edged (?) sword
17. Then replied John and said, My Lords, these scriptures
18. were written by Jesus, I [. . .] in the days of
19. Tiberianus, the Emperor, [. . .] I have not seen them,
20. he and his eleven disciples [. . .]
21. incite the people. Then asked
22. [. . .] him: What are names of the disciples?
23. He said: Nike [. . .], Matthew, Luke, Alke
24. Althom, Judah, Paulus, Petmus, Nesor,
25. Boni, Todah [. . .] and others who go
26. after them. Then asked Judah Iscariot

CONCLUSION

This passage of the Jewish “Life of Jesus” seems to be of a special character. First, it deals with a stage which has not been treated by the other texts. Secondly, it is rather realistic and in line with the historical setting. Jesus and his disciples are shown to be in conflict with the Romans as well as with Jewish authorities. No mention is made of the claim of messiahship, but the “incitement” of the people may be connected therewith. Thirdly, the rabbis are shown to be interested in the “scriptures of sorcery”, which seems to be a reference to Christian letters describing the miracles.

Following the line of thought of the “Life of Jesus” literature Judah Iscariot and Simon Petrus are described as messengers of the Jewish Court. Judah the gardener, refers perhaps to Judah the Galilean who rebelled against the administration of Emperor Tiberius and was said to have been imprisoned by him. Judah the gardener, in the usual version of the “Life of Jesus” fulfills other roles.

The names of Joshua ben Perahyah and Marinus are mentioned also in the other texts, but the third name, Ometos (?) is particular to our fragment. John the Baptist, is held responsible for the acts of his disciple Jesus, he does not, however, admit to having seen the latter’s scriptures. Instead he gives a list of eleven disciples of Jesus, which is partly composed of names mentioned in the usual version of the “Life of Jesus,” partly of names derived from the gospels and a new name.

The “Life of Jesus” texts, therefore, must have been rather pluralistic and may, perhaps reflect a variety of views as to the beginning of Christianity. Instead of speaking of a book of which various versions have been preserved, we should think in terms of a literary genre.

A PERSONAL POSTSCRIPT¹

Upon the occasion of publishing a new fragment of the "Life of Jesus" from the Cairo *Genizah*, I may be permitted to sketch a few thoughts which arose in this connection.

First, the evolution of Christianity has been the most terrible cause of suffering for the Jewish people. There is no justification for the contempt, hatred and atrocities which have been the indirect result of Jesus' activity. On the other hand, just as Rabbi Abin thought Joseph's brothers' sin of selling their brother to be the cause of later generations' suffering,² so Jewish fate has been terribly affected by the trial of Jesus. However, there must also be an inner Jewish theological meaning to the whole event. One cannot be satisfied in seeing it as a mere occasion for Jewish self-criticism, perhaps of self-hatred and destruction.

Secondly, this part of our own history and of human history should serve as a warning against fanaticism and exclusiveness. The rabbis were, indeed, aware that the outright rejection of an apostate was a mistake. Jesus should have been pushed away only with the left hand, while the right hand should have drawn him near.³ Judaism is in need of liberty and democracy as values to be integrated into its system. This conclusion, already drawn by Mendelssohn in his "Jerusalem," is the right response to present-day pluralism in society and ideas. Freedom of speech, free flow of ideas, and spiritual competition should be the bases of Jewish spiritual development. From the point of view of political theory, a re-appraisal of rabbinical attitudes towards Jesus' activities, should be part of a new orientation towards other forms of non-conformism. Normative Judaism can no longer maintain the stand which its fathers have taken towards Sadducees., Karaites, Spinoza and – Reform Judaism.

Thirdly, Christian history and existence must be integrated into the Jewish idea of divine providence. According to the rabbis, God had offered the Torah to the nations, who had rejected it, so that it was finally given to Israel only.⁴ Cannot something similar, in spite of all the differences, be said of Jesus' message which was rejected by the Jews and then accepted by the Gentiles? According to the rabbis, Jesus had quoted the end of Zechariah 2:12 (8) to describe his attitude to the Jewish people; "who touches you touches the apple of his eye."⁵ But does not the first part of the verse ("For thus said the Lord of hosts, after his glory sent me to the nations who plundered you. . ."), describe also the tragedy of his being

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1. Based on considerations presented to the Jerusalem Rainbow Group in its meeting of 3 November, 1976.
 2. Midrash Prov. 1.13
 3. BT. Sanhedrin 107b.
 4. Sifre Deut. 33:2, 34:3
 5. BT. Gittin 57 a.

unable to receive honour from his brothers and thus being pushed towards their enemies?⁶

Fourthly, on the part of Jewish thought, recognition is due to the role of Jesus and Christianity in the service of God. Admission of positive values outside Israel, such as the intellectual, spiritual and moral achievements of Christians, are no violation of Jewish loyalty; on the contrary, they may enrich it, showing a further phase of divine-human interaction.

Finally, Christian presence in Israel is needed to make the Holy Land the future centre of world peace and of unity. Moreover, Israeli society, being pluralistic and open, is also in need of a Christian dimension as a necessary link in the modernization of theology. Jewish identity and awareness cannot develop in a spiritual ghetto but only in constant dialogue with other systems.

6. Cf. Mt. 10:6; 13:57; 15:24; 28:19.