

# The Nestorius Legend in the *Toledoth Yeshu* \*

by

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The polemical Jewish work usually entitled *Toledoth Yeshu* («The History of Jesus») extant in several recensions, Hebrew as well as Aramaic<sup>1</sup>, is for the most part concerned with telling a sharply anti-Christian version of the life of *Yeshu ha-Noṣri*, Jesus the Nazarene<sup>2</sup>. The fascinating blend, in the Jesus story proper, of ostensibly factual information and clearly legendary, folkloristic material has attracted some scholarly attention<sup>3</sup>. The story, however, is continued by an «Acts of the Apostles» appendix, providing interesting versions of the activity of Paul and Simon Cephas, of possible significance for the study of early Jewish Christianity. In particular the intriguing picture of Simon Cephas as a crypto-Jewish stylite saint, whose dietary asceticism merely serves as a pretext for not infringing the laws of ritual purity deserves to be analyzed in greater detail<sup>4</sup>. In this paper,

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforth abbreviated TY. The fundamental work on the subject is still S. Krauss' *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin, 1902). (Henceforth abbreviated LJ). The classification of text types and manuscripts in LJ is, it should be noted, not by Krauss, but by E. Bischoff (pp. 27-37).

<sup>2</sup> For a useful summary of some recent research in this field see E. Bammel, «Christian Origins in Jewish Tradition» *New Testament Studies* 13 (1966-67), pp. 317-335, esp. pp. 325-29.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, H. J. Schoeps, «Simon Magus in der Haggada?» *Hebrew Union College Annual* 31 (1948), pp. 257-74, points to possible connections between the legends of Simon Magus, Balaam and the account of Jesus' aerial acrobatics in the TY (p. 273). See also B. Heller, «Über Judas Ischariotes in der jüdischen Legende» *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 76 (1932), pp. 33-42, and the same author's «Über das Alter des jüdischen Judas-Sage und des Toldot Jeschu» *M.G.W.J.* 77 (1933), pp. 198-201.

<sup>4</sup> «Šim'on Kifah» (שמעון כיפה) is called the head of the Jewish Sanhedrin (ראש מסנהדרין). The Christians build him a high tower (מגדל גבוה) where he secludes himself, and only eats bread and water (LJ, p. 49). We seem to have preserved here legendary memories of the great 5th century Syrian stylite saint Simeon, and that magnificent complex of buildings around his pillar, now known as Qalat Siman. In later MS glosses, to be sure, this high tower is apparently identified as St. Peter's basilica in Rome (LJ, pp. 229-230). I plan to analyze this part of the TY at a later time; suffice it to say at this point that the localization in Rome, and the identification of Šim'on as «Peter», פיטר, are, to mind, clearly secondary features. Medieval popes at



however, we shall be concerned with another one of the additions, namely the episode of »Nestorius«, interpolated, at first sight rather anachronistically, between the stories of Paul and Simon Cephas.<sup>5</sup> The Nestorius episode, as we shall see, shows particularly close contacts with specific events and persons in church history, and may be of considerable help in localizing and dating the recensions which contain this material.

The episode in question is only extant in Hebrew recensions of the TY<sup>6</sup>. An eclectic translation will be given here, based on several manuscripts<sup>7</sup>, followed by comments on the contents and significance of the text.

any rate were hardly secluded ascetics. The identification of Šim'on Kifah as a composer of *piyyuṭim*, synagogue poetry is another very curious feature. Stylite saints known to us from Christian tradition are hardly noted for their pro-Jewish sentiments. For a recently published 8th-century *adversus Judaeos* text in Syriac attributed to one Sergius the Stylite, see A. P. H a y m a n, *The Disputation of Sergius the Stylite Against a Jew*, (C.S.C.O. vols. 338-339, Louvain 1973).

<sup>5</sup> The anachronism becomes less glaring if indeed the story of Simon Cephas incorporates material about 5th-6th century stylites.

<sup>6</sup> For a conspectus of those MSS of the TY which contain »Acts of the Apostles« material, see LJ, pp. 263-4. The several extant Aramaic fragments of the TY do not include this material. See W. Horbury, »The Trial of Jesus in Jewish Tradition« in *The Trial of Jesus, Cambridge Studies in honour of C.F.D. Moule*, ed. E. Bammel (Naperville, Illinois 1970), pp. 103-121.

<sup>7</sup> The translation takes into account the Strassburg MS (siglum *S*), a representative of the *Typus Wagenseil* (LJ, pp. 48-49); the best known representative of this text type, printed in J. C. Wagenseil's *Tela Ignea Satanae* (Altdorf, 1681), under the title ספר תולדות ישו, *Liber Toldos Jeschu* (separate pagination) does not contain the Nestorius episode. I also utilize the 18th century Vienna MS (siglum *V*), a good representative of the *Typus De Rossi* (LJ, pp. 85-86). Another representative of the De Rossi recension utilized here is the text printed in A. Jellinek, *Beth ha-Midrash VI* (ed. 3, Jerusalem, 1967), under the title הגדתא דשמעון כפיא (pp. 13-14, siglum *Jell*). For a description of Jellinek's MS see *op. cit.*, p. x. The text of the TY printed in J. D. Eisenstein's אוצר ויכוחים, *A Collection of Polemics and Disputations* (New York, 1928), pp. 227-235 is without critical value, since Eisenstein expressly says in his introduction that he harmonized the texts printed in Krauss, correcting any infelicities of content or style (p. 227). I have not been able to gain access to J. J. Huldreich's text in *Historia Jeschuae Nazareni...* (Leyden, 1705). See Bischoff's summary of the contents in LJ, pp. 33-34. In the detailed description and partial translation of the Huldreich TY given by S. Baring-Gould, (*The Lost and Hostile Gospels: An Essay on the Toledoth Jeschu...* London and Edinburgh, 1874), pp. 102-115) there is no mention of the Nestorius episode. It is noteworthy that this version of the TY is attributed to the great first-century rabbi, Yoḥanan ben Zakkai; in Baring-Gould's translation, the colophon reads: »These are the words of Rabbi Jochanan son of Saccai in Jerusalem«. In general, as with kindred Christian apocryphal works, the textual tradition of the TY is quite »wild« and Jerome's adage, *tot codices, tot textus* clearly is applicable. The additional Hebrew version, based on a late manuscript published by Krauss (»Une nouvelle recension hébraïque du Toldot Yēšū« *Revue des études juives* 103 (1938), pp. 74-88) does not include the Nestorius episode; Krauss classifies the text with his »Slavic type« (LJ, pp. 35-36). The Yiddish version published by E. Bischoff (*Ein jüdisch-deutsches Leben Jesu* (Leipzig, 1895)) does not contain the Nestorius episode either. A critical, or at least a comprehensive



»After a time<sup>8</sup> the kingdom of Persia was established; a gentile<sup>9</sup> called Nistor<sup>10</sup> went away from them<sup>11</sup> and babbled<sup>12</sup> against them, as the heretics [*minim*] babbled against the wise<sup>13</sup>, and said to them: »Paul erred in his writing<sup>14</sup> when he said to you that you should not be circumcized; rather it is by a just ordinance that you should be circumcized, since Jesus was circumcized<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore you are unbelievers<sup>16</sup> since you say that Jesus

edition of all the TY material is still a desideratum; Kraus in his book unfortunately does not even reprint the Wagenseil and Huldreich texts. For an English translation of the passage, not entirely accurate and based only on the *S* text as printed by Krauss, see H. J. Schonfield, *According to the Hebrews* (London, 1937), pp. 58-59.

<sup>8</sup> לאחר זמן (*S*). And after this arose for the second time (פעם שנית) the kingdom of Persia. (*V*, *Jell*). That מלכות פרס has indeed the usual sense of »Persia« is shown by the rest of the story, despite Krauss' note (*LJ*, p. 298, n. 11). The comment »for the second time« can only refer to the Sassanian restoration.

<sup>9</sup> *S* does not mention the name of the *goy* at this point; later it gives it in the clearly Greek form נסתורס. (Cf. note 15).

<sup>10</sup> ר"ל נוסו או שנקרא שמו ניסמור (*V*, *Jell*). The parenthetical comment which follows, »the foreigner is impious,« rather than, as Krauss surmises (*LJ*, p. 114, n. 1), of some Italian expression. The loss of the initial vowel in transcribing ἀνόσιος as *Nosi* would be rare, but is not without parallel; thus נקליט is derived from ἀνάκλητον.

<sup>11</sup> That is, the »Paulinists« described in the preceding episode, who rejected circumcision and the dietary laws, and replaced Jewish feasts by Christian ones.

<sup>12</sup> עלג (*S*, *V*); *Jell*. has התחיל לפלפל »and he brought up arguments«. The lectio difficilior עלג should be retained; Eisenstein, without any manuscript support, substitutes the common לעג, »mocked«. עלג is a rather rare word; it is noted in the famous 11th century Hebrew lexicon, the 'Arukh (ed. A. Kohut, ספר ערוך השלם VI (Vienna, 1926), p. 206). The root is not attested in classical Syriac, Christian Palestinian and Talmudic Aramaic; in Mandaean, however, the root ALG with the same connotation of »stammering« is well attested. See E. S. Drower - R. Macuch, *A Mandaic Dictionary* (Oxford, 1963), s.v. ALG, alga. I query the appositeness of Macuch's adducing Arabic علاج as cognate to Heb. עלג and Mand. ALG. The modern Syriac حلا (R. Payne-Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, col. 2895) with the meaning »remedy, medicine« in fact reflects rather accurately a borrowing of the Arabic علاج.

<sup>13</sup> *V*, *Jell*. here add: »with many arguments (בהרבה דברים) and he went to the land of Israel and came upon the apostates (טועים) who were undisturbed and were observing the commandments of Saint Paul«. (התקנות של ס' פאוולן). This spelling of »Paul« clearly reflects the Italian pronunciation, San Paolo; the spelling in *S*, פאלוס is a reflex of the Greek Παῦλος.

<sup>14</sup> »Misleads you« מטעה אתכם (*V*, *Jell*).

<sup>15</sup> מהול. At this point *S* introduces a free quotation from the Gospel of Matthew (10:41), ostensibly used by Nestorius: »Furthermore Jesus said »I did not come to take away a [single] word from the law of Moses, even one letter, rather [I came] in order that every one of his words should stand firm«.

ועוד אמר ישו לא באתי לגרוע דבר מתורת משה אפילו אות א' אלא לקיים כל דבריו *S* then also adds the seemingly after superfluous remark: »This is their shame (חרפתם) which Paul did to them, [when he said] »Do not be circumcized«. And Nestoros (נסתורס) said to them »Be circumcized, as Jesus was circumcized«.

<sup>16</sup> כופרים.



is God<sup>17</sup> and that he was begotten of a woman<sup>18</sup>, although the Holy Spirit rested upon him<sup>19</sup> as [upon] the prophets. And this Nis̱tor was the first one<sup>20</sup> who created a quarrel<sup>21</sup> against the Christians<sup>22</sup> because he beguiled all the women<sup>23</sup>. He said to them<sup>24</sup> »I rule<sup>25</sup> that they should not be permitted to take other than one wife<sup>26</sup>. And thus Nis̱tor became loved by the women<sup>27</sup>. And as Nis̱tor was abhorred in their (masc. ! ) eyes, there arose a controversy<sup>28</sup> between them; and accordingly no Christian would pray to the abomination<sup>29</sup> of Nis̱tor and the faction<sup>30</sup> of Nis̱tor to the abomination of the Christians<sup>31</sup>. »And afterwards when Nis̱tor went to *Bbl*<sup>32</sup>, to another place the name of

<sup>17</sup> אל'י'ק (S) *V* has the abbreviation שאומרים ישו אלוה.

<sup>18</sup> ילוד אשה. *V*, *Jell.* add: »and a son of man« ובן אדם, i.e. a human being.

<sup>19</sup> שרה עליו רוח הקדש. *V*, *Jell.* (S). שרתה בו רוח הקדש.

<sup>20</sup> הרישון om. *S*.

<sup>21</sup> התחיל פליג (S) *V*, *Jell.* עשה מריבה.

<sup>22</sup> עם הנוצרים (S) על הנוצרים (Jell.) The interesting reading of *V*, המצרים, must be rejected as a scribal error; it is highly unlikely that the author of the TY knew that Nestorius' quarrel was with the Egyptian Christians, led by Cyril of Alexandria.

<sup>23</sup> כי השיא הנשים (S) *V*, *Jell.* מפתה את נשותיהם: *S* has a different wording.

<sup>24</sup> *V*, *Jell.* add: »S. Paul commanded your husbands that they take all the wives that they wish and you will remain as slaves (שפחות).«

<sup>25</sup> Literally, »make a fence« אעשה סייג (S) *V*, *Jell.* have »But I command,« אבל אני רוצה.

<sup>26</sup> So *V*, *Jell.* *S* has the simpler phrasing »that no Christian should have two wives« שלא שני נוצרי ב' נשים. *V*, *Jell.* then add the charmingly simple reason for monogamy: »that you may be esteemed by your husbands« שתהיו מכובדות מבעליכן.

<sup>27</sup> This sentence is omitted by *S*.

<sup>28</sup> מחלוקת

<sup>29</sup> תועבה (S) This seemingly strange substitution for an object or place of prayer goes back to Proverbs 29:9: מִסֵּר אָזְנוֹ מִשְׁמַע תּוֹרָה גַּם - תִּפְלֹתוֹ תוֹעֵבָה.

It is less likely, though possible, that specifically an altar or a Christian icon is meant by *to'ebāh*.

<sup>30</sup> סיעת

<sup>31</sup> The account in *V*, *Jell.* is more circumstantial. Nestorius, acting like a well-trained rabbi, forbids polygamy »subject to the punishment of the greater and lesser excommunications (*herem* and *nidduy*) and the loss of the world to come.« The struggle is pictured as taking place directly between »Nis̱tor« and »S. Paolo«. The breakoff of communion between the two groups is described in somewhat more lucid language than in *S*: »And there arose differences between Nis̱tor and S. Paolo and therefore the gentiles make no prayers in the house of prayers of Nis̱tor and likewise the people of Nis̱tor in the house of prayers of S. Paolo.«

ונפל חלוקים בין ניסטור לס' פאוולו על כן הגוים אינם עשים תפלות בבית תפלות של ניסטור וכן אנשי ניסטור בבית תפלות של ס' פאוולו.

<sup>32</sup> בבבל. The clear and obvious meaning is Babylonia, though Krauss (p. 298) adduces some texts where בבל stands for Rome. There are many more texts; cf. H. L. Strack - P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* III (Munich, 1926), p. 816.



which was *Hṣṣh*<sup>33</sup>, and all of them (masc.) fled from him<sup>34</sup>. And the women were hiding<sup>35</sup>, for Niṣtor was a bully<sup>36</sup>. The women said to him »What do you want from us«? He said to them, »I want from you only that you take from me the offering<sup>37</sup> of bread and wine. And it was a custom of the women of *Hṣṣh* that they carried in their hands big keys<sup>38</sup>. He gave the offering to one of them, and she threw it upon the ground. He bent down to the ground<sup>39</sup>, and the women threw the keys in their hands, and struck him and he died«<sup>40</sup>.

We have already noted the possible influence on the TY account of Siṃon Cephas of stories about Syrian stylite saints. With the Nestorius legend we are on even more solid ground, though careful analysis is called for. First, in spite of the retrojection of the Nestorius story into apostolic times in our text there is no reason to attempt to identify the Niṣtor of our story with some early Jewish Christian, perhaps Ebionite, heretic<sup>41</sup>. The theological views attributed to Nestorius reflect (of course in an even more distorted form than usual, on account of the Jewish redactors' ignorance of Christian theology) the hostile interpretations of Nestorius' opponents. The statement in particular that Jesus was not God, but that he was begotten by a woman, although the Holy Spirit abode upon him as upon the prophets, is simply

That *Βαβυλών* is an allusion to Rome is, of course, a common suggestion for the exegesis of Revelation and I Peter 5:13. That the author of TY thinks of the town of Babylon in Egypt, and therefore of Nestorius' Egyptian exile, is an attractive but untenable alternative. The TY has no reliable information on Nestorius' biography, and it would be an error to read such information into the text at the expense of its natural meaning.

<sup>33</sup> חצצא (S); חצ'צה (V); חצ'צ'ה (Jell.).

<sup>34</sup> The text in V, Jell. is obviously corrupt: »and they all disputed before him« וכולם (מפּלפלים לפניו). The sequel makes it clear that the women only were left behind.

<sup>35</sup> נסתרו (S), from the root סתר: Schonfield is probably right in seeing here a pun of the name נסתורס ((According to the Hebrews, p. 59, n. 3). But V, Jell. have simply ונשארו, »and remained behind«, probably the more primitive reading.

<sup>36</sup> בעל זרוע.

<sup>37</sup> קרבן.

<sup>38</sup> מפתחות גדולות.

<sup>39</sup> To pick up the profaned eucharistic elements, obviously.

<sup>40</sup> This is the account in S. The story in V, Jell. differs in several features. N. asks that the women actually bring the bread and the wine to him, and in particular no mention is made of the keys at all. But with this last, the S version is preferable; it preserves a feature of the legend which later scribes or redactors found in comprehensible and simply omitted; this feature, however, as we shall see, has close parallels in Christian sources. The last comment in S, however, is an awkward and redundant gloss: »And there was a disputation between them for a long time«. The reference is, I suppose, to the continuing hostility between the Paulinists and the adherents of Nestorius.

<sup>41</sup> Many of the relevant Christian texts can now be found conveniently collected in A. F. J. Klijn - G. J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects* (Leiden, 1973).



a popularized distortion of Nestorian christology, assimilating it to more familiar categories<sup>42</sup>. To be sure, the claim that Nestorius annulled Paul-Elijah's innovations and reinstituted circumcision<sup>43</sup> *could* point to the practices of a bona fide Jewish Christian sect; but I think that a simple explanation is that the author of the TY naively accepted the charges (of course meant *in malam partem*) made by Nestorius' ecclesiastical opponents that he was a »Jew« or a »Judaizer«<sup>44</sup>: therefore the TY writer simply attributed to him the advocacy of the Jewish practice of circumcision<sup>45</sup>. In reality there is absolutely no evidence that Nestorius was a Judaizer in any ritual matter. The TY does show some knowledge, though very confused, of the Nestorian controversy, providing a terminus a quo of at least the middle of the fifth century.

However the actual TY Nestorius story does not correspond with what is securely known about the life and teachings of Nestorius. Nestorius was a monastic ascetic from Antioch who owed his elevation to the episcopal throne of Constantinople to his rhetorical gifts; in particular we have no evidence that he carried on personal propaganda in Palestine, and that he agitated against polygamy among Christians. Though the TY notes that Nestorius denied that »Jesus is God«, still, according to the TY, the storm centers of the controversy were circumcision and marriage customs. The flight of Nestorius from Palestine to Babylonia is again quite unhistorical; Nestorius, upon being deposed at the council of Ephesus, was first exiled to his old monastery in Antioch, and later to Egypt, and died there, some-

<sup>42</sup> Nestorian christology, less clear-cut and consistent than either the classical monophysite formulas or the Chalcedonian definition was reduced, for popular consumption, to very simple terms, and was often identified with the adoptionism of Paul of Samosata: for instance in a statement attributed to the 6th century monophysite propagandist Philoxenus we read »Diodore, Theodore, Theodoret, Nestorius, Irenaeus, Euthérius and Baršauma say that Christ was merely a human being (ܕܡܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ), a man (ܕܡܬܐ) who was justified by good works, and God loved him and dwelt in him«. (ed. F. Nau, in *Patrologia Orientalis* 13 (1919), pp. 248-49). Incidentally, I can perceive no clear influence at this point of Muslim views of Jesus, or anywhere else in the TY for that matter.

<sup>43</sup> But not explicitly the dietary laws, one should note.

<sup>44</sup> E.g. the hagiographer Cyril of Scythopolis (6th cent.) calls Nestorius 'Ιουδαίφρων (*Vita Euthymii*, ed. Schwartz, *Texte und Untersuchungen* 49, 2 (1939), p. 40); cf. the Coptic Acts of the Council of Ephesus: »May Nestorius the Jew be burned! ... Cast out the Jew!« (ΜΑΡΟΥΡΕΚΖ ΝΕΣΤΩΡΙΟΣ ΠΙΟΥΔΑΙ ... ΝΟΥΧΕ ΕΒΟΛ ΜΠΙΟΥΔΑΙ ed. V. Bouriant, *Actes du Concile d'Ephèse, Mémoires ... de la mission archéologique française au Caire* VIII, 1 (Paris, 1892), p. 50, lines 9,12).

<sup>45</sup> It should perhaps be noted at this point that in fact the monophysite Copts and Ethiopians practice circumcision but not the Nestorians. Cf. E. Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians*, 2nd ed. (London, 1965), p. 103.



time before the Council of Chalcedon. These are well-known facts of church history and there is no need to rehearse here the documentation for them<sup>46</sup>.

In particular Nestorius' advocacy of monogamy, his flight to Persia, his violent behavior there<sup>47</sup> and his death at the hand of a group of women does not accord with the facts. However, much of the material just mentioned fits *exactly* certain historical and legendary features of the life of Barṣauma of Nisibis, a zealous and powerful pro-Nestorian ecclesiastic in Persia in the latter half of the fifth century<sup>48</sup>. Barṣauma fled from Edessa, in Byzantine-controlled Syria, upon a monophysite reaction there after the death of Ibas (457). He was then instrumental in the founding of the school of Nisibis after the flight from Edessa of the »Persian« theologians during the emperor Zeno's reign<sup>49</sup>.

Another facet of his activities is more pertinent to our TY text here, namely that Barṣauma was also involved in an anti-ascetic movement within the Persian church in the 5th and 6th centuries, which resulted in the severe restriction of the role of monasticism. This is not the place to discuss at length the causes and the exact extent of this movement. A desire to accommodate Christian mores to the anti-ascetic mood of the ruling Zoroastrian religion may have been a contributing, though by no means the crucial factor.<sup>50</sup> At any rate Barṣauma was in the forefront of the movement to abolish celibacy among the secular clergy proper, and he himself married a former nun.<sup>51</sup> According to some sources he did this to curry favor with the Persian king Peroz; Barṣauma certainly obtained the sup-

<sup>46</sup> Krauss' attempt, on the basis of his own rather slender and second-hand knowledge of the biography of Nestorius and the course of the Nestorian controversy, to harmonize the TY account with the historical sources (LJ, pp. 232-36) is unfortunately an almost total failure.

<sup>47</sup> Though at first, upon his elevation to the episcopal see of Constantinople he acted as a veritable *malleus haereticorum* (cf. e.g. Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, VII:29,31), Nestorius certainly does not appear as a violent man amidst the shady politics of Ephesus and its aftermath, but rather he seems to be a pathetic victim of more powerful or less scrupulous individuals than himself. Cyril of Alexandria deserves the epithet **בעל זרוע** much more than Nestorius.

<sup>48</sup> Though of course Barṣauma features prominently in all modern histories of the Nestorian church, there is no monograph devoted to his biography. For an accurate account of Barṣauma, based on the sources, see J. Labourt's standard work, *Le christianisme dans l'empire perse sous la dynastie Sassanide* (224-632), (Paris, 1904), pp. 131-152. See also W. A. Wigram, *An Introduction to the History of the Assyrian Church ... 100-640 A.D.* (London, 1910), pp. 142-171.

<sup>49</sup> See A. Vööbus, *History of the School of Nisibis* (C.S.C.O. vol. 266, Louvain, 1965), pp. 47-53.

<sup>50</sup> Disciplinary canons, however, condemn in the strongest terms polygamy and the incestuous marriages common among pagan Persians, and apparently not unknown even among the Christians. See e.g. the strictures of the synod of 544, ed. J. B. Chabot, *Synodicon Orientale ou Recueil des synodes nestoriens* (Paris, 1902), pp. 335-337.

<sup>51</sup> Labourt, pp. 149-50.



port of the state in imposing »Nestorianism« on recalcitrant elements among the Christians in the Persian empire. Barṣauma was a violent personality, who was involved in continuous struggles with his own ecclesiastical superiors. The details, in particular his turbulent relations with the catholicos Babowai and Acacius do not directly concern us here. For our purposes it is enough to note that the synod of Beit Laphaṭ (484), presided over by Barṣauma, inter alia condemned polygamy and incest<sup>52</sup>, and his activity in this regard was remembered by the later Nestorian tradition<sup>53</sup>.

Barṣauma is a well-known figure in monophysite sources which, as could be expected, depict his anti-ascetic attitude as a pretext for mere sensualism, and accuse him of the foulest conduct against the catholicos Babowai. This polemical material shows no direct contact with the TY; but there is a close affinity between the account of the death of Barṣauma in several Syriac monophysite sources and the murder of Nestorius in the TY. We shall present this Syriac material first, and then compare it with the TY tradition.

The earliest extant form of the story is found in the late 12th century chronicle of Michael the Syrian<sup>54</sup>. Michael draws most of his information about Barṣauma from Marutha of Tagrit (died 649 A.D.).<sup>55</sup> At the end of the material borrowed from Marutha, Michael quotes from a »book in the Arabic language«<sup>56</sup> the story of the murder of Barṣauma: »We found in a

<sup>52</sup> The proceedings and canons of the council are only imperfectly known, because it came to be regarded as a schismatic conciliabulum and was repudiated later by Barṣauma himself. However the 13th century Nestorian writer 'Abdišo' (Ebed Jesus) preserves some fragments, in particular of its marriage legislation. For text see Chabot, *Synodicon Orientale*, pp. 623-5.

<sup>53</sup> E.g. the Chronicle of Se'ert (11th cent.): »And Barṣauma, bishop of Nisibis, wrote a letter and in it permitted that monks and priests, who do not have the power to restrain their desires, should get married«.

وكتب برصوما مطران نصيبين كتاباً اطلق فيه ان يتزوج الديرايون والكهنة  
الدين لا يمكنهم ضبط انفسهم

(ed. A. Scher, *Patrologia Orientalis* 7 (1911), p. 100). On the character and sources of this work see G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, II (Vatican, 1947), pp. 195-6).

<sup>54</sup> Ed. J. B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien...* (Paris, 1901), vols. I-III (tr.), vol. IV (text). For the passage in question see vol. IV, p. 427, outer column (tr. II, p. 440).

<sup>55</sup> Unlike Bar Hebraeus, Michael does not give any scandalous stories about the immoral conduct of Barṣauma and his fellow bishops. On Marutha. cf. A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur* (Bonn, 1922), p. 245.

<sup>56</sup> ܡܝܚܕܐ ܕܡܪܬܐ ܕܬܓܪܝܬ. This source is not connected with Marutha's account of Barṣauma's violence, and is possibly much later than the seventh century. Chabot puts forth the possibility that the first person plural »we found« is the language of Michael's immediate source, a work of the 9th century Jacobite patriarch Dionysius of Tell-Mahrē. (II, p. 440, note 3).



book in the Arabic language concerning the killing of the evil Barṣauma which was in this fashion. After he went into the presence of the King of the Persians [to procure permission] that he should persecute more and destroy the faithful<sup>57</sup> completely, he went to a village the name of which was *Krmh*<sup>58</sup>, which is in the neighborhood of Tagrit. And he busied himself with offering the eucharist<sup>59</sup> in order that by violence he may compel the villagers. And when the men fled they<sup>60</sup> summoned the women that they may partake of his impure eucharist<sup>61</sup> by force. Then a nun<sup>62</sup>, after she took his eucharist in her mouth, threw it away<sup>63</sup>. And he bowed down [to the ground] to take it, and she struck him in the head with an iron key<sup>64</sup>, and her companions continued [to strike him]. His disciples and the soldiers<sup>65</sup> were standing outside. And when he delayed [his exit] they entered and found him prostrate<sup>66</sup> and that the women have fled. And they carried him to Nisibis and buried him in the church. The end of these stories».

First, though this dramatic account of Barṣauma's demise is missing

<sup>57</sup> I.e. the monophysites.

<sup>58</sup> ܟܪܡܗ ܕܬܓܪܝܬ. The name ܟܪܡܗ can be vocalized as either »Karmah« or »Karmeh«; the first pronunciation is supported by the spelling Բարձայ in Armenian sources, e.g. in the Confession of Comitas preserved in the »Book of Letters« (Գիրք թղտոյ), cf. E. Ter-Minassiantz, *Die armenische Kirche in ihren Beziehungen zu den syrischen Kirchen...* in *Texte und Untersuchungen* 26 (1904), p. 32 and p. 64, note 7. This locality should, it seems to be fairly clear, be distinguished from the Nestorian bishopric of Karmā or Karmē (ܟܪܡܐ) the existence of which is attested in the 5th and 6th centuries (e.g. *Synodicon Orientale*, p. 109, line 20); but the location of which cannot be ascertained. Cf. J. M. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, vol. III (Beyrouth, 1968), pp. 112-113., A. Van Lantshoot, art. »Carmé«, *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques* 11 (1949), col. 1070.

<sup>59</sup> ܡܥܪܝܬܐ.

<sup>60</sup> I.e. Barṣauma and his henchmen.

<sup>61</sup> ܟܪܡܗ ܕܬܓܪܝܬ.

<sup>62</sup> ܟܪܡܗ. The word is inserted above the line in the MS! (Chabot's edition of the Syriac text is the photographic reproduction of one, late MS).

<sup>63</sup> ܡܥܪܝܬܐ, from ܡܥܪܝܬܐ, i.e. she spit it out.

<sup>64</sup> ܟܪܡܗ ܕܬܓܪܝܬ. *Qlida* does have the basic meaning of »key«, and is clearly derived from κλειδα, the accusative of κλεις. The word can also signify a buckle or a clasp. The spelling ܟܪܡܗ is also attested, but is less frequent. This loanword also occurs, in the form ܐܩܠܝܕܐ in Talmudic Aramaic, in both the forms *qlida* and *aglida* in Mandaean, and is also a loanword (via Syriac?) in Arabic (اقليد) and Persian (کلید).

<sup>65</sup> ܥܠܝܬܐ.

<sup>66</sup> Pass. part. ܟܪܡܗ. It should be noted that the account in Michael does not expressly mention that the scene takes place in a church; it, however makes perfect sense, and explains why the pagan soldiers at any rate, if not his disciples, ܐܠܬܡܢܐ should stay outside. The parallel account in Bar Hebraeus does say that the setting is in a church, ܟܪܡܗ. (Cf. text in note 70).



from the 13th century Armenian epitome of Michael's work<sup>67</sup>, it seems to have been in the text of Michael's work which was utilized by the 13th century Syriac writer Bar Hebraeus. In his so-called »Ecclesiastical Chronicle»<sup>68</sup> Bar Hebraeus gives an account parallel to Michael's Barṣauma story without mentioning Marutha of Tagrit or any other written source<sup>69</sup>. As far as the death of Barṣauma is concerned, Bar Hebraeus drastically abbreviates the story, and, transferring the scene from Karmah to Ṭur-Abdin, he merely notes : »Some people say that nuns in Ṭur-Abdin gathered against him in the church and killed him with the keys of their cells. But others point out his grave in the church of Mari Ya'qob which is in Nisibis»<sup>70</sup>. The divergences from Michael's text are, of course, considerable, but nonetheless I think that Bar Hebraeus depends on Michael. Bar Hebraeus knows that the tradition of Barṣauma's death, presumably peaceful, and subsequent burial in his metropolitan church in Nisibis is quite separate from the legend of his violent death at the hands of nuns, and he refuses to harmonize the two traditions as was done by Michael or his immediate source<sup>71</sup>. That Bar Hebraeus puts the scene of the murder at Ṭur-Abdin would argue at first against direct dependence on Michael; I think, however, that here again we are faced with a conscious modification on Bar Hebraeus' part. Ṭur-Abdin was a well-known center of monophysite monasticism<sup>72</sup> whereas in the region of Karmah there was no wealth

<sup>67</sup> This important, but frequently abbreviated translation (*Ժամանակագրութիւն տեառն Միկայելի ասորիոց պատրիարքի ...* ed. Jerusalem, 1871) does give the story of »Barsuma« (*Բարսումա*) without the final episode which interests us, but (as could perhaps be expected) describes in greater detail than does the Syriac original the heroic Armenian resistance to Barsuma's propaganda, supported though he was by Persian soldiers. (pp. 314-18). Babowai (*Պաւլի*, *sic*) had close relations with the Armenians — there is nothing corresponding to this in the Syriac text.

<sup>68</sup> *Պատմություն Եկեղեցիական*.

<sup>69</sup> Ed. J. B. Abbeloos - T. J. Lamy, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum... Tomus III* (Paris-Louvain, 1877), col. 61ff.

<sup>70</sup> *Եւրոպայի և Երեսնայի ժողովուրդի պատմություն*, (ed. Abbeloos-Lamy, col. 75-77).

<sup>71</sup> That two separate traditions were in fact dovetailed may be indicated by the closing comment of Michael's text *Եւրոպայի և Երեսնայի ժողովուրդի պատմություն*, »The end of these stories«. But of course this colophon may just refer to all the stories told about Barṣauma, not only the two versions of his death.

<sup>72</sup> See H. Jedin *et al.*, *Atlas zur Kirchengeschichte* (Freiburg in Breisgau, 1970), map 38 : »Das jakobitische Mönchtum des Mittelalters«. On early Jacobite monasticism, cf. W. Hage, *Die syrisch-jakobitische Kirche in frühislamischer Zeit* (Wiesbaden, 1965), pp. 41-45, and on nuns in Bar Hebraeus' period, P. Kawerau, *Die jakobitische Kirche im Zeitalter der syrischen Renaissance* (Berlin, 1960), p. 49.



of monastic establishments. Accepting, or at least trying to make sense of, the tradition that Barṣauma fell victim to the fury of a mob of nuns<sup>73</sup>, Bar Hebraeus, in my opinion, simply picked an a priori more likely locale.

At any rate, both Michael and Bar Hebraeus are witnesses for the existence of a rather precise legend about Barṣauma's death, a legend which with some likelihood considerably antedates Michael. Our contention here is that this particular feature of the Barṣauma story, coupled with his historic activity against irregular marriages and clerical celibacy, came to be transferred in the TY from the chief Nestorian in Persian-ruled Mesopotamia to the reputed founder of the sect, Nestorius himself. It is hardly surprising that the tradents and redactors of the TY material telescoped the deeds and fate of the master and the disciple, or, more precisely, merged the personality of the disciple with that of the master<sup>74</sup>. What is much more significant, for a localization of the TY, is that we clearly have here the reflection of Syriac monophysite propaganda with no parallels in extant Greek or Latin sources. Whatever the ultimate origins of the Jesus legend proper in the TY, the portion of the TY under discussion here apparently originated in Babylonia. In fact it is possible that the legend in the TY, though it confuses Nestorius and Barṣauma and is provided with explanatory matter meant for the Jewish reader, nevertheless may preserve some features more primitive than the corresponding ones in the Syriac texts. Thus in the TY Niṣtor is killed by the women of the village — no mention is made of nuns. This fits well with the first part of the story — the men simply fled upon the approach of the strangers, but their women were left behind. That Nestorius-Barṣauma was struck down with a key or keys is a common and clearly primitive feature of the legend<sup>75</sup>; Michael's version that first

<sup>73</sup> In depicting Barṣauma's murderers as nuns, is this tradition perhaps registering a sardonic comment on the fact that the bishop married a former nun?

<sup>74</sup> For a summary statement of a similar process at work in a particular set of Talmudic traditions, cf. J. Neusner, *Development of a Legend: Studies on the Traditions Concerning Yohanan Ben Zakkai*. (Leiden, 1970), p. 5. The merging of traditions about Nestorius and Barṣaumā may have been influenced by a popular etymology which apparently identified the first part of the name *Νεστόριος* with *νηστευτής*, «faster». This is attested by Mārī ibn Sulaymān (12th cent.):

وفي هذه الايام كانت فطرحة مار نسطوريسر وتفسير اسمه ابن الصوم

ed. H. Gismondi, *Maris Amri et Slibae de patriarchis nestorianorum commentaria, pars prior, Maris textus arabicus* (Rome, 1899), p. ٣٤, lines 14-15. («And at this time the patriarchal dignity appertained to Mār Nestorius, and the interpretation of his name is «son of fasting».) That is, Nestorius = *Ibn al-ṣaum* = *Bar ṣaumā*!

<sup>75</sup> The *qlidā* or *maphteah* in these accounts should obviously be regarded as the «blunt, heavy instrument» of police reports, and one is immediately tempted to think of a heavy bar or bolt. On this point I quote the lively remarks of W. A. Wigram, the one scholar who has



one woman struck him with her key, and then the others pounced on him is a priori more likely than the picture given by the TY (and Bar Hebraeus) that Barṣauma was literally killed by an avalanche of keys<sup>76</sup>. However the more picturesque and less logical version is not necessarily the later one when one deals with legend of this sort.

Much more significant is the topographical reference to *Hṣṣh* in the TY. Al-Ḥaṣṣāsa is a known locality, in the vicinity of Tagrit<sup>77</sup>, and quite close to Karmah<sup>78</sup>. Thus Michael who places Barṣauma's murder in Karmah and the *Hṣṣh* of the TY agree against Bar Hebraeus' Ṭur-Abdin, which, we have argued, is an artificial localization. In judging between Michael and the TY, there are grounds for preferring the TY. Karmah was an important monophysite bishopric<sup>79</sup>, whereas al-Ḥaṣṣāsa-Ḥaṣiṣā was a much more obscure locality, of little importance in Christian history and lacking any mention in the sources extant for the history of Babylonian Judaism.<sup>80</sup>

commented at length on the subject, and who denies, on the basis of his personal knowledge legend which later scribes of redactors found in comprehensible and simply omitted; this feature, of oriental customs, that the account is realistic: »Killed with the keys of their cells' says the historian [Bar Hebraeus]. If so, one would like to know how it was achieved, for the oriental key is not an iron bar that can be a weapon on emergency, but a notched slip of wood some eight inches long, and about as formidable as a paper knife». (*An Introduction to the History of the Assyrian Church*, p. 171, note 1). Now, there is evidence for the use of wooden keys in the Middle East, especially Egypt (M. Daumas (ed.), *Les origines de la civilisation technique* (Paris, 1962), pp. 349-50), and even in the medieval West (F. M. Feldhaus, *Die Technik der Vorzeit, der geschichtlichen Zeit und der Naturvölker* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1914), col. 967). However, Michael's account does emphasize that the key was made of iron (*parzlā*) and the TY has »big keys».

<sup>76</sup> The TY redactors show some perplexity vis-à-vis the many keys of the story, and awkwardly explain that the women of the village had the peculiar custom of carrying big keys.

<sup>77</sup> The Arabic sources (Tabarī, Yāqūt) clearly locate al-Ḥaṣṣāsa, الحصاصه, not far from Tagrit in the Tigris valley. Unfortunately Syriac evidence proper is rather poor; Michael, only once, mentions the *Hṣṣn* ܚܨܨܢ, the »Ḥaṣiṣanites» as belonging to the jurisdiction of the metropolitan of Tagrit (IV, p. 718, inner column; tr. III, pp. 376-7), from which the existence of a locality *Hṣṣ* is only a deduction. Bar Hebraeus again only refers to the adjectival forms ܚܨܨܢܐ. (Chronicon Ecclesiasticum, vol. III, cols. 213, 373, 375). Cf. E. Honigmann, *Le couvent de Barṣaumā et le patriarcat jacobite d'Antioche et de Syrie* (C.S.C.O. vol. 146, Louvain, 1954), p. 129. and J. LM. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne* vol. III (Beyrouth, 1968), p. 113.

<sup>78</sup> Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, ed. Wüstenfeld, IV, p. 268, 14. (according to Honigmann, loc. cit.).

<sup>79</sup> Honigmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-134. Cf. note 58.

<sup>80</sup> Now, though the words ܚܨܨܐ (»partition») and ܚܨܨܐ (»sand») often occur in Talmudic and Targumic literature, I could find no reference to a place ܚܨܨܐ, or reasonably similar spellings of the same, in concordances and indices to the Babylonian and the Palestinian Talmuds; the locality is not mentioned either in J. Neusner's five-volume work *A History of the Jews in Babylonia* or in A. Neubauer's *La géographie du Talmud* (Paris, 1868). However in view of the documentation for al-Ḥaṣṣāsa it is surprising that Krauss does not even consider the possibility that we have topographical information here; rather, nothing that ܚܨܨܐ



Without necessarily accepting that there is any historical kernel to the story of Barṣauma's murder<sup>81</sup> one can argue with some plausibility that it is a local legend which originated in Ḥaṣiṣā after it became definitely monophysite, and only in the course of later transmission of the story was the setting transferred to the neighboring Karmah. Perhaps one can go even further, and try to find an approximate period for the genesis of the legend. According to the Chronicle of Se'ert al-Ḥaṣṣāṣa, »received«, at the same time as Tagrit and Karmah, the great monophysite missionary Jacob Baradaeus<sup>82</sup> (ca. the middle of the sixth century), and from that time onward was definitely in the monophysite camp. Perhaps, to speculate somewhat, it was at this time that, to signal their adhesion to the monophysite party, and to show that they were »orthodox« *ab initio*, the Ḥaṣiṣanites invented a legend that their female ancestors have already struck a decisive blow against Nestorianism, in the person of the well-known propagandist, Barṣauma. To be sure, this hypothesis, even if correct, does not provide any clear clue as to *when* this legend penetrated to Jewish circles. But we have been able to find no allusion to the rise of Islam in the TY — the reference to the establishment of the Persian kingdom rather leads one to think that the Sassanian empire was still existing in the author's time. This, coupled with the seeming allusion to the cult of stylite saints, allows one to conclude that the »Nestorius« recension of the *Toledoth Yeshu* — which clearly is not the earliest one — can be traced to Babylonia, and that it received written fixation there sometime in the second half of the sixth or in the early seventh century. At any rate the connection of the TY Nestorius story with the monophysite Barṣauma legend is quite certain; it is hoped that the foregoing discussion has demonstrated also that even the later accretions in this work which is often set aside as a worthless medieval fabrication should not be dismissed out of hand. Rather one can find material in this work which is of some importance not only for the Jewish comprehension of, and contact with, Christianity in the Talmudic period but also for the study of the history of the Christian East in the patristic era.

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»bedeutet Scheidewand« Krauss deduces »und ist damit vielleicht der Beichtstuhl gemeint,« i. e. חֲצִיזָה = confessional box!! His alternative speculation that the reference to the »dividing wall« is an allusion to Nestorius' enforcing the segregation of sexes during nocturnal services (according to Elias of Nisibis) likewise needs no comment. (LJ, pp. 234-5).

<sup>81</sup> The complete silence of the Nestorian sources on Barṣauma's violent death, which could of course have been easily presented as a most praiseworthy martyrdom, argues against historicity.

<sup>82</sup> وقبله اهل تكريت وكرمي والحصاصة (»And the people of Takrīt and Karmā and al-Ḥaṣṣāṣa received him«) ed. Scher, *Patrologia Orientalis* 7 (1911), p. 142, lines 2-3. The omission of the diacritical point in »Ḥaṣṣāṣa« may only be a typographical error, not the reading of the single MS which the editor had at his disposal.