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## STORY RECOGNITION, “PLOT-GENE” ACCESS AND RETRIEVAL FROM THE “MENTAL SKETCHPAD”: CASE-STUDY (YVAN ATTAL’S FILM “ILS SONT PARTOUT” AND ITS ANCIENT COUNTERPARTS)

### Abstract

The article presents a case study which exemplifies the cognitive process of “plot-gene”<sup>1</sup> recognition and its retrieval from the memory’s “mental sketchpad”.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, the article analyzes four cinematic representations, in which the same “plot-gene” – a pejorative take on the birth of Jesus – is found: the movie by Yvan Attal titled “Ils sont partout” (available on Netflix as “They are everywhere”), the movie “Life of Brian” by “Monty Python”, the movie “Jesus of Montreal” by Denys Arcand, as well as several anti-religious sketches by the British comedian Rowan Atkinson. These movies are considered in the article at the level of their cinematic plots and narrative schema, as well as at the ideological level. The article provides comparative data for the identification of the same plot-gene in different contexts that date back to antiquity and can be found cross-culturally worldwide. The

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<sup>1</sup> LOTMAN 1990; KIMMEL 2005.

<sup>2</sup> KIMMEL 2005.

article utilizes the motif-compass method developed by the Russian scholar Olga Freidenberg. In conclusion, the article postulates the hypothesis that the plot-gene under investigation always resurges due to the specific ideological reasons (i.e., resistance strategy towards Anti-Semitism, expression of anti-clerical sentiments).

**Keywords:** narrative schemata, storage and retrieval, narratology and comparative method, Olga Freidenberg's "motif compass" method, Yvan Attal's movie "Ils sont partout" ("They are everywhere"), memory, cognition, plot-gene and mental sketchpad

### Introduction

It is necessary to emphasize that the goal of this article is not to conduct a comparative study on Toledot Yeshu and its variants, but to investigate the cognitive process of *plot-gene recognition and retrieval in unrelated narratives*. Hence, the article only surveys some of the Toledot Yeshu research data relevant to the scope (and does it superficially and cursorily, without delving into details) in order to identify its narrative elements at the plot level.

By no means can the article be contextualized within Toledot Yeshu scholarship per se. Rather, it should be seen as a case-study investigating cognitive mechanisms of plot transmission and recognition. It should be noticed also that the choice of the Toledot Yeshu "plot-gene" is arbitrary. This is not a unique case when certain narratives are transferred with or without actual knowledge of the written text from which they originate. What is unique in this case is that the "plot-gene" reappears consistently throughout the various historical moments, and is highly recognizable at the conceptual and structural level. It is also characteristic of this "plot-gene" that it invariably resurges under certain ideological conditions, expressing resistance or anticlerical sentiments.

A conceptual framework for this article is based on the theoretical premises that enable the comparison of seemingly

unrelated narratives, which was proposed by Olga Freidenberg, a brilliant but often overlooked Russian scholar, a forerunner of the cognitive approach. Freidenberg called her method “motif compass”. The compass metaphor embodies Freidenberg’s own ability to build associative networks between seemingly unrelated narratives (i.e., in a broad sample of texts ranging from Apuleius to Gospels, medieval novels, etc.).

The idea of a motif compass first appeared in 1926 in Freidenberg’s article “Metodologiya Odnogo Motiva” [A Methodology of a Motif], where she demonstrated how seemingly unrelated plots could be genetically related on a conceptual level (i.e., “topicality”), and argued that it was important to compare various plots by focusing only on their *conceptual* features, while completely severing those plots from their authors’ intentions, ideologies, and biographies.<sup>3</sup> The important contribution of this approach is that it can potentially open new avenues in comparing otherwise unrelated narratives.

The narrative in question is the “malicious” take on the birth of Jesus Christ and the personality of Virgin Mary (i.e., allegations casting doubt on her virtue and the consecutive legitimacy of her child). It is known in the research tradition as the collection of texts named *Sefer Toledot Yeshu*, circulated within the Jewish Diaspora since the Middle Ages, as well as in the Talmudic texts.<sup>4</sup>

This article argues that the “plot-gene” of the “*Sefer Toledot Yeshu*” *group of texts*<sup>5</sup> (henceforth *Toledot Yeshu*) can be found in a variety of modern narratives, such as the repertoire of Subbotniks (a religious group of Judaizers from Russia), records from the Israeli Folklore Archive (IFA), personal interviews, and cinema (c.f., a movie “*Life of Brian*” and a controversial movie “*Ils sont partout*” produced by Yvan Attal, a French-Jewish director, to name a few). The goal of the

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<sup>3</sup> FREIDENBERG 1987.

<sup>4</sup> C.f. NEUSNER 2000.

<sup>5</sup> This term is explained in Section 1.

article is to explore the process of resurgence of the same “plot-gene” (narrative elements) in the various contexts. I hypothesize that Toledot Yeshu never ceased to circulate in the Jewish milieu, although not as a full text but rather as fragments/separate narrative elements,<sup>6</sup> in a “scrambled” order, or as stand-alone tokens.

The article discusses why, when, and in which type of narratives the “plot-genes” of Toledot Yeshu re-emerge up until the present time, and what function they serve. As it will be demonstrated further, such “plot-gene” may appear disguised as a casual village rumour, as part of the modern movie’s sophisticated plot, as personal story, or as text circulated orally. Regardless of the appearance they take, “plot-genes” invariably belong to the same group of texts that originated from the same source, namely, the Jewish oral tradition, also well documented in the Talmud.

The article is structured into seven sections. Section 1 presents, cursorily and briefly, some basic facts pertaining to the Toledot Yeshu current scholarship<sup>7</sup> that identifies it as a folkloric text.<sup>8</sup> Section 2 describes a narrative scheme and structural analysis. Section 3 gives an overview of the Subbotniks’ community, where the first variant of Toledot Yeshu was found, and compares the Subbotnik’s version with the one found in the movie “Ils sont partout”. Section 4 discusses several parallels of the same narrative found in the IFA, as well as in personal interviews. Section 5 discusses three additional cinematic renditions in which Toledot Yeshu traces can be found.

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<sup>6</sup> I use the term “narrative element” here (rather than a more conventional term “motif”) in a nuclear sense because the article probes into the modern versions, in which the well-studied motifs are found in distorted or modified form and, therefore, are more difficult to recognize.

<sup>7</sup> Because the main focus of the article is on the cognitive mechanism of plot-gene recognition, and not on the textological, historical, linguistic, etc. analyses, the literature review is very limited and only deals with some superficial features at the plot level.

<sup>8</sup> C.f. YASSIF 2011.

Section 6 discusses the recurrence of Toledot Yeshu as related to Jewish humour. Section 7 presents the conclusions.

Because Toledot Yeshu essentially belongs to the category of folk literature, the consequent analysis assumes that the “full” or reconstructed version of Toledot Yeshu consists of separate narrative elements, which may or may not be found in their entirety, and may exist in any “scrambled” order. As is often the case with oral tradition, such narrative elements may be disguised, sometimes beyond recognition. However, our hypothesis is that, as long as they are *recognizable* on a structural/semantic level, they belong to the same group of texts.

The caveat of the structural analysis is that it is not the *textual* analysis of any *particular* version but rather a hypothetical *reconstructed narrative scheme*, from which the separate elements from the reconstructed “full” text have been extracted. The consecutive analysis is based on the assumption that, *in theory*, all the elements in the reconstructed narrative scheme have the potential to develop into any type of narrative across genre/language/religious boundaries.

### Section 1 – Toledot Yeshu as a folkloric text

Because the approach of this article is narratological, and the Toledot Yeshu scholarship is copious, the article only deals with the plot level. I adhere to Schäfer’s point of view that different written versions of Toledot Yeshu found throughout history are “not textual mutations” of one text, but “autonomous compositions belonging to different communities”.<sup>9</sup> Different versions (multiple existence) “is considered a prerequisite for defining a story as a folk narrative”. The existence of multiple versions of Toledot Yeshu, along with their anonymity, indicates that it was regarded by the society as part of its “cultural property”, and “its members therefore gave themselves

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<sup>9</sup> SCHÄFER 2011, 6.

permission to change it and adapt it to their own life and beliefs".<sup>10</sup>

In general, Jewish doubt and sceptical reaction to the Christian belief in Jesus's virginal conception and birth manifested in various pejorative versions, which have emerged as early as in the second century AD.<sup>11</sup> Malicious stories about Jesus's origins circulated orally, and later became part of *Toledot Yeshu* or *The Book of the Life of Jesus*, which presents a "biography" of Jesus from an anti-Christian perspective, ascribing an illegitimate birth. *Toledot Yeshu* is a non-rabbinic counter-narrative and satire of the foundational story of Christianity, which circulated orally for centuries before being transcribed in various places and times.<sup>12</sup> Some "early hints of a Jewish counter-history of Jesus" can be found in the works of Christian authors of Late Antiquity, such as Justin, Celsus, and Tertullian, in early anti-Christian critiques of the virgin birth, which was documented from the second century AD onwards, and manifest in the so-called Jewish *Toledot Yeshu* literature.

Around 600 CE, some fragments of Jesus's "biography" made their way into the Babylonian Talmud. In 827, archbishop Agobard of Lyon has attested to a sacrilegious book about Jesus that circulated among Jews. In the Middle Ages, the book became the object and tool of an acrimonious controversy. Jews, Christians, and theists, such as Ibn Shaprut, Luther, and Voltaire, quoted and commented on *Toledot Yeshu*, trying to disprove the beliefs of their opponents and revealing their own prejudices. The narrative was translated to Latin and many vernacular languages, and soon branched into numerous versions with only a few basic facts in common. Scholars point out that in *Toledot Yeshu* the circumstances of Jesus's birth

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<sup>10</sup> YASSIF 2011, 110.

<sup>11</sup> JAFFÉ 2012, 587.

<sup>12</sup> AHUVIA 2014.

often switch from tragic to comic and that it can be regarded as a parodic counter-narrative to the Gospels.<sup>13</sup>

The extent to which such stories were a form of *resistance* and a *counter-narrative* is showcased by the fact that, according to some late medieval sources, there was a Jewish custom to read Toledot Yeshu on Christmas Eve.<sup>14</sup> This is also confirmed in Tartakoff, who recently discovered in inquisitorial trial documents the evidence that the versions of the Toledot Yeshu were told by “Jews and conversos to one another ... and they also seem to have functioned as an evening’s entertainment”.<sup>15</sup> According to Laato, simple common sense “indicates that a young girl cannot conceive without the help of a man”.<sup>16</sup> Every attempt to argue in that direction laid the story open to scurrilous rumours, even scoffing and parodic episodes revolving on the sexual aspects of the situation.<sup>17</sup> Along the same lines, Limor maintains that

Toledot Yeshu is not concerned with Mary’s biography as a whole, since its main subject is her son’s life story. Nevertheless, she does feature in the work and the story of her pregnancy is treated at particular length... According to Sefer Toledot Yeshu, whose plot was familiar to Jews, “Mary was a young Jewess, the daughter of a widow living in Bethlehem, who was betrothed to a humble, God fearing youth named Johanan. One Saturday evening, her neighbour Joseph Pandera, an evil, disreputable man and a war hero, of the tribe of Judah, raped her in her home during her menstrual period, doing so twice that night. On both occasions, Mary thought that the rapist was her fiancé Johanan, and she accordingly complained to him, warning him she was

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<sup>13</sup> LAATO 2016, 63.

<sup>14</sup> SHAPIRO 1999, 334.

<sup>15</sup> TARTAKOFF 2011, 24; also see Note 2, Appendix on Nittel Nacht tradition.

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that such doubts existed also within the Christian tradition in the form of Opening Virgin (Vierge Ouvrante, Schreinmadonna, Madonne scrigno, Virgenes abrideras or Virgenes tripticas), which were eventually banned by the Church (KATZ 2009, 199).

<sup>17</sup> LAATO 2016, 62.

menstruating. Upon hearing that Mary had become pregnant, Johanan, fearing that he would be held responsible, fled to Babylonia; while Mary gave birth to a son, whom she named Joshua, after her maternal uncle. When the circumstances of Jesus' birth became known, he was proclaimed a "mamzer (bastard) son of a menstruating woman", and he therefore fled to Galilee, living there for a few years until he returned to Jerusalem.<sup>18</sup>

Limor emphasizes that Mary's figure in *Toledot Yeshu* shifts from the tragic to the comical and back:

An unfortunate woman, victim of sexual abuse, who was raped during her menstrual period and gave birth to a mamzer. The story stresses that Mary objected to Joseph's advances, and that he forced himself upon her. At the same time, while she is an unwilling and innocent victim, it is difficult not to hold her in contempt as a woman who could not tell the difference in the dark between her humble, soft-spoken fiancé Johanan and her coarse, adulterous neighbour, the procurer Joseph Pandera,<sup>19</sup> who sat in the entrance to her home, so that her vile neighbour could see and have his way with her. The most insulting epithet that the Jews could find for Jesus was "mamzer son of a menstruating woman",<sup>20</sup> with the clear intention of refuting Christian belief in his divinity and disparaging him through his mother's actions. Mary, it seems, was considered easy prey.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to *Toledot Yeshu*, similar motifs appear in the New Testament apocrypha and Christian polemical works; and Talmudic texts about Jesus are scattered throughout various sources.<sup>22</sup> The earliest authenticated passage ascribing illegitimate birth to Jesus is that in *Yeb. iv. 3*. According to Jaffé:

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<sup>18</sup> LIMOR 2007, 57.

<sup>19</sup> There is a variation in spelling of this name.

<sup>20</sup> See for example MARIENBERG 2016.

<sup>21</sup> LIMOR 2007, 58–59.

<sup>22</sup> WRÓBEL 2014, 47–48.

The Jewish allegation that Jesus was the son of a *prostitute* (sic!) is quite well grounded in the Talmudic tradition. It appears in both the Talmudic and Midrashic corpus and without doubt testifies to a very old Jewish representation of the person of Jesus, where Jesus is alleged to be the product of an illicit union between Mary and a Roman soldier named Pantera. The latter is regarded as the lover of Jesus’ mother and his biological father. The accusation that Jesus was the son of a *prostitute* is elaborated in the Midrash in the form of the affiliation between Jesus and Christianity.<sup>23</sup>

Although special literature indicates that there exist numerous versions of the related legends, one common theme uniting them and pointing towards their oral origin and circulation is the accusation of illegitimacy, magic and sorcery which were frequently brought against Jesus. Thus, for example, Laato maintains that

Toledot Yeshu tradition argues, as it were, parodically, that Jesus was indeed wise, but this was due to his being illegitimate and having escaped to Egypt with his mother (who continued her harlotry there); there he learned magic and sorcery.<sup>24</sup>

## **Section 2 – Structural analysis of the reconstructed version of Toledot Yeshu in search of its plot-gene**

It is important to emphasize that there never was a “Toledot Yeshu *Urtext* back to which all the existing versions can be traced”, that is why Schäfer refers to Toledot Yeshu as an abstract text, “various foci or nuclei”, “snapshots” that cannot be “fixed in place and time”.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> JAFFÉ 2012, 588.

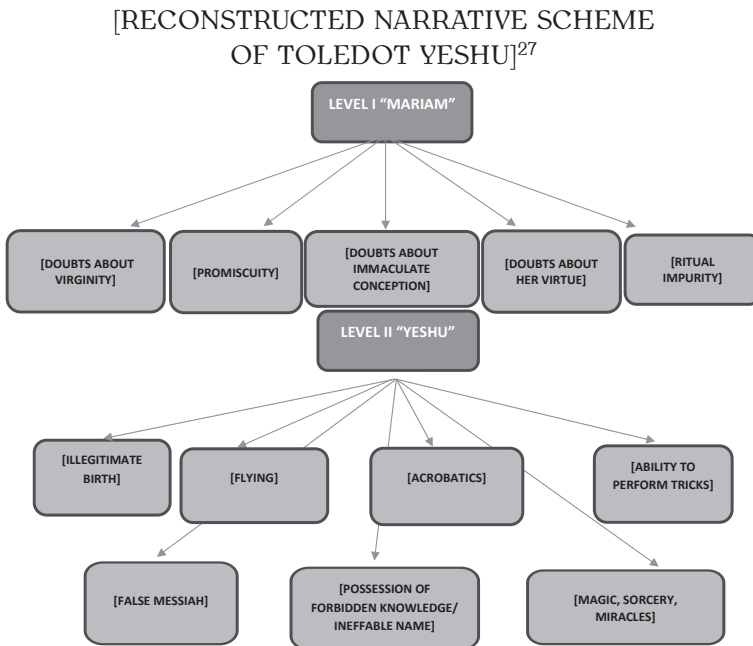
<sup>24</sup> LAATO 2016, 72.

<sup>25</sup> SCHÄFER 2011, 2.

to put it differently and more precisely, there may well have been different nuclei representing different macroforms of Toledot Yeshu at different times and places.<sup>26</sup>

Hence, the theoretical approach that abstracts minimal narrative elements is highly justified and grounded in the contemporary Toledot Yeshu scholarship.

Based on the versions that can be found in the relevant literature, below is a *reconstructed* narrative scheme of the *hypothetical* version of Toledot Yeshu:



<sup>26</sup> SCHÄFER 2011, 3.

<sup>27</sup> This is by no means the full scheme. The elements presented here were found in the various modern texts, which were identified as related typologically/genetically to the proto-text ("Urtext"). For example, the motif of Jesus's burial, the motif of cabbage stalk, which are discussed in detail in Schäfer et al, and several others, were omitted here because they were not found in any modern version I have studied so far.

Although I have identified traces of Toledot Yeshu in a variety of modern narratives, it is hard to say how current and widespread their circulation is. To the best of my knowledge, the study of Toledot Yeshu’s current circulation has not been conducted before. However, it is clear from the data presented in this article that, from time to time, its narrative elements continue re-emerging in unrelated narratives and contexts. It should be emphasized that one can analyze the above narrative elements from multiple angles, and they can participate in multiple analyses (historical, textual, etc.), but this article is only concerned with the ways of narrative transmission and recognition *per se*.

In the following sections, several modern narratives, in which the aforementioned narrative elements are found, are discussed as typologically/genetically related to Toledot Yeshu. In order to exemplify the process of recognition of “narrative DNA/genetically close” narratives,<sup>28</sup> I use a comparative method, specifically, I propose that a rough outline of a narrative that was once heard (or viewed, or read, i.e., “received” in some form by an individual) may be stored in the individual implicit memory infinitely. Although often it is completely “dormant”, it can “wake up” and develop into a full-fledged narrative under favourable conditions. This phenomenon is well studied in folklore with respect to separate motifs and multiple variants of the same story, and it is acknowledged that the ways of transmission of a story can range from oral rendition, such as rumours or urban legends, to films and modern mass media.<sup>29</sup> The register in which the story is rendered is also a variable; hence, the consequent analysis includes both “serious” and “parody” renditions.

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<sup>28</sup> OFEK 2013.

<sup>29</sup> C.f. DÉGH 1994.

### Section 2.1: Subbotniks in Israel and their oral tradition

The first version was recorded in the community of Subbotniks' – an ethno-religious group, which unconditionally self-identifies with Judaism. Subbotniks are considered Jewish by the State of Israel, and are granted the right to return to Israel under the Law of Return. In the early 1990s, a Subbotnik community from the villages of Illinka and Vysokii of the Voronezh district of Russia (see map in the Appendix), immigrated in their entirety and settled in the Israeli town of Beit Shemesh, where, in 1996, I conducted interviews with several elderly women. In one of these interviews (in Russian), while we were discussing Anti-Semitism back in the Soviet Union, my interviewee, an old woman named Leah (pseudonym) suddenly said something to the extent that *everybody knows that Jesus Christ was born of a harlot*.<sup>30</sup>

When I requested clarifications on what she meant, and her friend, who was present there, added interjections confirming and validating everything Lea was telling me. It was an elaborate story that could be summarized in a reduced narrative scheme as: "Mary, mother of Christ, was not a virtuous woman, and her son was illegitimate". What struck me back then was a very matter-of-fact way my informants were talking about it – a scurrilous village rumour of something that everybody knew, yet on a plot level (narrative scheme) it resembled Toledot Yeshu. The interview remained in my

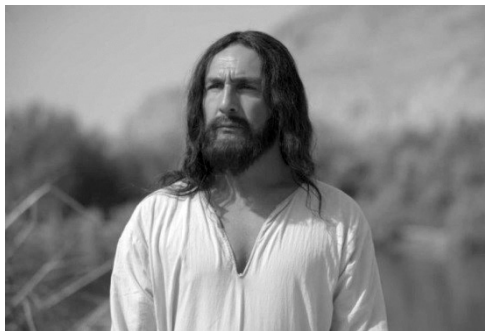
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<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that due to its polemical, satirical, folkloric nature, and its provocative claims, Toledot Yeshu is not a "politically correct" text: it uses a highly expressive language when conveying the claims of illegitimate birth, ritual impurity, etc. Hence, there is coarse language, which the Toledot Yeshu scholarship studies as such ("acts of harlotry (znut): "midehatsif kul [sic] ha 'e shemma' minah ben niddah hu), to which Rabbi Joshua responds that he is the son of a prostitute. Rabbi Akiva says that he is a bastard (Cited in YOFFIE 2011, 64–65). Not surprisingly, in my interviews, there was very strong vocabulary in line with the terms found in other works on this topic. For the sake of political correctness, I replace these coarse terms either with euphemisms or two Hebrew terms used in the literature – "mamzer" (illegitimate child) and "zona" (a harlot).

archive until the appearance of the French movie titled “Ils sont partout” directed by Yvan Attal, in which the same narrative scheme was recognizable (available on Netflix as “They are everywhere”/“The Jews”), hence the *reduced narrative scheme* (“doubts about Mary’s virtue”) in both the Subbotniks version and *Ils sont partout* movie can be traced to the Toledot Yeshu.

### Section 2.2: *Ils sont partout*

The “*Ils sont partout*” movie is built of several separate mini-plots (skits). One of the skits in the movie tells how the Israeli secret agency Mossad, in order to combat anti-Semitism, has developed a time machine, which brings a slick Mossad agent to the ancient Palestine right before the Christ was born. The mission is called “Revi-Zionism”. The agent is on a mission to destroy the baby Christ, and thus alleviate the future “Jews killed Jesus” accusations. While on the mission, the Mossad agent meets a beautiful woman “Mariam” (who is to become the Virgin Mary). The Mossad agent falls in love with her and suffers the consequences. Strikingly, the Virgin Mary is portrayed in this skit as a woman of easy virtue.



Gilles Lellouche as Norbert © La Petite Reine –  
Ran Mendelson

This skit has a sci-fi and humorous twist, and it has provoked a huge controversy even among the Jews – let alone Christians – who were perplexed, did not think it funny, and agonized over the question why Attal has decided to address such a touchy subject in such a “tactless” manner.

I argue that the controversial reaction that the movie has provoked diverted critics from noticing filmmaker’s subtle yet recognizable way of referring to a collective lore and the Jewish oral tradition, whereby Attal has encoded a hidden layer of meaning in order to play with the “knowledgeable” spectator the game of recognition (whether intentional or subconscious). What is remarkable is that this skit can be justly considered as built on the narrative elements found in *Toledot Yeshu*.

Yvan Attal was born in Tel Aviv to French-Algerian Jewish parents, and it would be safe to assume that he had heard this story transmitted orally in the same casual way that it had been transmitted for several generations in the Subbotniks’ milieu. In order to validate my hypothesis that the link between three versions of the same narrative – *Toledot Yeshu*, the Subbotniks’ and the movie – is not haphazard, it is necessary to examine how my own memory has retrieved the similar narrative scheme, which had been stored there years ago. I speculate that it was based on a simple semantic connection “doubts of virginity – doubts of legitimate birth”, which represented a dormant narrative scheme, and which unfolded into a full narrative when the material for comparison (the movie) presented itself. The appearance of the same story disguised as a sci-fi skit is a well-known phenomenon in folklore studies, which demonstrate repeatedly that the same text/motif gets transmitted in various, often unrecognizable, forms.<sup>31</sup> As folklore studies also convincingly show, modern media often transmit traditional narratives. According to Dundes, “folk ideas are

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<sup>31</sup> C.f. SCHECHTER 2000.

not limited to folklore and they can surely be found in movies, television, and the mass media generally”.<sup>32</sup>

Let us examine the two variants of the same narrative, Subbotniks’ and the Mossad skit.

### **Text #1 The Subbotniks’ version:**<sup>33</sup>

Some people think that Jews killed Jesus, and for this reason they hate Jews. But Torah says, and I have read it myself, that those people have been discredited long ago, and Jews have nothing to do with it. She – the Virgin Mary – was a harlot. And she conceived him – Christ – and gave birth to him – from a Jew. And this Jesus Christ – they say he is God – but what kind of God is he? And the Jews never crucified this Christ, because some say that Jews crucified Christ and they didn’t even touch him! And Jews are very clever, they immigrate, they manage, they would manage everywhere. Because Jews are very clever. Even Zhirinovskiy<sup>34</sup> said so. Just don’t tell journalists anything I told you here – my daughter will kill me.

### **Text #2 The Mossad version:**

[Sr. Mossad agent:]

*“Can we start it over? ... We bear the cross, in fact, we are the real Christians, everybody accuses us of killing Jesus – that’s where all the problems started.” ...*

[Sr. Mossad agent to the Mossad agent to be sent with the help of the time machine to kill Christ:]

*“You must kill the baby, simulate a sudden death syndrome, because the guy [Jesus] became a revolutionary, a goy. Ah. if he’d stayed a rabbi, we would be fine.”*

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<sup>32</sup> DUNDES 2007, 191.

<sup>33</sup> Despite the fact that the scholarship on Subbotniks has grown exponentially in the recent years, I was only able to find one additional variant of the similar narrative, which can be found in Note 1, Appendix.

<sup>34</sup> Vladimir Zhirinovskiy is a Russian politician and leader of the LDPR party.

[When the Mossad agent, whom the natives took for the Messiah, meets Mariam, she starts flirting with him. And the women witnessing it, obviously her neighbours, observing it, start gossiping]: *"Her again! She was always easy. True to the form. She knows no limit. But with Messiah? Seriously? God knows what Joseph finds in her."*

[Then another says]:

*"Wait until he finds out..."*

{Then follows a dialogue between Mariam and the Mossad agent, "Messiah"}:

[Mariam]: "You are not Messiah!"

[Mossad agent] "Why not?"

[Mariam]: "Where are the miracles?"

{A dialogue between Joseph and Mariam}:

*"Where is he? The Messiah? How dumb do I look? First, God, and now a Messiah!"*

*"And I stayed a virgin with God."*

*"And then who got you pregnant?"*

*"The Holy Ghost, I told you."*

It is easy to see that both the Mossad and the Subbotniks' version are based on the same narrative scheme, which was discussed in Section 2, and the elements found in these two versions are: [PROMISCUITY] ; [DOUBTS ABOUT IMMACULATE CONCEPTION] ; [ILLEGITIMATE BIRTH] ; [MAGIC AND MIRACLES] ; [FALSE MESSIAH].

As it was demonstrated in Section 2, stories about Jesus's obscure origins were part of the Jewish oral tradition for centuries, and circulated in various forms. Therefore, one can assume that the two variants studied here, the Subbotniks' and the Mossad version can be regarded as belonging to the Jewish repertoire transmitted orally from generation to generation in each respective tradition (i.e., Jewish Algerian and the Subbotniks').

#### **Section 4 – Israeli Folklore Archive (IFA) and personal interviews**

To support the hypothesis that the similarities found in the Subbotniks’ and the Mossad versions were not just a coincidence, I searched for parallels in the IFA<sup>35</sup> and to substantiate this claim further, I have conducted five personal interviews. The found patterns of co-occurrence of the various narrative elements of the reconstructed narrative scheme of Toledot Yeshu in the IFA and the personal interviews point to the same conclusion: the identifiable traces of Toledot Yeshu Urtext are found (with deviations, alterations and in scrambled order). As expected, the standalone or scrambled narrative elements are recognizable on the semantic level.

In the IFA, out of the 14 texts that contain the keywords “Mariam” and “Yeshu”, and are catalogued as legends, anecdotes, and parables, one text is a highly recognizable version of the Toledot Yeshu, four texts contain its narrative elements, and one text contains a token of co-occurrence “MAMZER<sup>36</sup> + YESHU”, unmotivated by the plot. In addition, the studied narrative elements appear in several jokes and anecdotes.

##### **IFA, text #4823, The Rabbi’s tune<sup>37</sup>**

In the Beit Mikdash<sup>38</sup> time in the Lower Galilee town, there lived a Rabbi, from the house of Levi and his wife Miriam Bat Israel was very beautiful ... The Rabbi would come back very late from his prayers. There was a guard, an idolater, a goy. Mariam was in her room in the dark waiting for the Rabbi. The goy has learnt that the Rabbi was going to be late and he sneaked into

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<sup>35</sup> I would like to thank Professor Ulrich Marzolph for his valuable suggestion to search for the Toledot Yeshu traces in the IFA.

<sup>36</sup> Illegitimate.

<sup>37</sup> Catalogued as “Mishnaic novella”, recorded in 1962, by Zalman Baharav, from the informant of Turkish/Kurdish origin. The translations of the IFA texts from Hebrew are mine. Note that, because the focus of the article is not lexical or linguistic analysis, the translation is not a verbatim one, but a story gist sufficient for the identification of the narrative elements.

<sup>38</sup> The Temple in Jerusalem.

Mariam's room singing a Rabbi's song ("pizmon") and he laid with her. Then the Rabbi came back home and wanted to say a blessing of the wine. But Mariam told him – "You already came home and did another mitzva "pru u rvu".<sup>39</sup> The Rabbi denied it and they had to go to the court, and got divorced, because it was the time that Mariam was forbidden to the Rabbi ("niddah"<sup>40</sup>). When the time came for Mariam to give birth ... she went to another city where she gave birth to a baby boy, whom she called Yeshu. The boy has grown, studied the Torah, was sent to the Temple, learnt from the Sages, and also had the Name made known to him and he levitated. The Beit Lechem people have seen him flying to the sky ... This boy without a father ... other students used the name and also flew and made him fall. Roman soldiers caught him and put him on a wooden cross.<sup>41</sup>

#### IFA, Text #12068<sup>42</sup>

The Sage named Sason (his son still lived in Israel), when was asked why Yeshu was mamzer?

He said: because he was born of a woman and a Holy Spirit, and this is cannot be.

But it was possible for Kadosh Baruch Hu ("The Holy One, Blessed Be He") to create a woman out of the rib?

He said: When The Holy One, Blessed Be He, created Hava from the man's rib, there were no women in the world, but in Yeshu's time there were a lot of Mariams and a lot of men.

Despite their differences, these two versions are genetically related to Toledot Yeshu, based on the narrative elements they contain on two levels, [MARIAM] and [YESHU], such as

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<sup>39</sup> A commandment: be fruitful and multiply.

<sup>40</sup> Ritually impure.

<sup>41</sup> The translation from Hebrew is mine; it is not a verbatim translation but a gist – an outline of the plot.

<sup>42</sup> Catalogued as an anecdote (humor). Recorded by Haya Gabish from the informant of Iraqi /Kurdistan origin (also cross-listed under \*1873 (IFA) Confrontation Between Jew and Christian). Variants can be found in Note 3, Appendix.

[PROMISCUITY] ; [FLYING] ; [POSSESSION OF THE INEFFABLE NAME] ; [RITUAL IMPURITY] ; [ILLEGITIMATE BIRTH].

**IFA Text #18458, Yeshu didn't want to fall down**

When Yeshu was ... on the cross, he was guarded by the Roman soldiers, so he will not be taken off the cross. Maria Magdalena came there and said to the Roman soldiers: “If someone takes out one nail from his feet, I will have sexual intercourse with 500 Romans.”

And they took out one nail out of the cross.

And she said: “If someone takes out a nail out of his hands, I'll have a sexual intercourse with 1000 thousand Romans.”

And [at this moment] Yeshu yelled from his cross: “I don't want to fall down!”

As maintained throughout this article, historical accuracy is of no consequence for oral transmission; hence, Mariam and Maria Magdalena in the above text are merged into one persona. The above excerpts are just a few examples; the preliminary results of this study are that at least seven texts found in the IFA may be *genetically* related to Toledot Yeshu.

**Personal interviews**

In order to test a hypothesis that *traces* of Toledot Yeshu texts could have been passed from generation to generation orally, survived till our days, and are in circulation in the various strata of the Jewish milieu, I have conducted five personal interviews, in which I casually asked the following question: “Have you ever heard in your family anything about Yeshu?”

As predicted, the traces of the reconstructed version were found in 4 out of 5 interviews. In interview #1 the following elements are found: [SORCERY] ; [FLYING] [OBSCURE ORIGINS/ILLEGITIMATE BIRTH]; in interview #2 – [ACROBATICS/MAGIC MAKING] (Interview #3 and #4 can be found in Note 3, Appendix) interview #3 – [FALSE MESSIAH] ; [FLYING]; and in interview #4 – [MAGIC/TRICKS/FOCUS-POCUS].

**Interview<sup>43</sup> #1: Jewish, male, 45 years old, from the USSR**

My grandfather told me in the 80-s, he studied it when he was young. [Where?] In the cheder<sup>44</sup>, possibly. I am even afraid to tell you this story, basically, my grandpa said that it was because Jesus was – how should I put it – not exactly of the known origins (they were telling that Joseph, the carpenter, was not his father, he was someone else's son), but Jesus was very clever, very gifted. He was a sorcerer. He is acknowledged by the Kabbalists, didn't you know? Yes, Rabbi Ashlag for example, they think Jesus is one of the 70 most important Kabbalists. Well, he flied. [How?] Didn't you know? Yes, he studied a lot, and then he has received access to some *forbidden knowledge*<sup>45</sup> and he learned how to fly. And they [the elders] had to somehow stop him. So they hired some village idiot,<sup>46</sup> who jumped really high and was able to urinate<sup>47</sup> on him. That stopped him. So he was clever, but a sorcerer.

Interview #2<sup>48</sup> Jewish-Canadian, 45 years old, male, of Algerian origin

They never discussed Jesus in my family. Just ignored him. The only thing I remember growing up is my mother would never mention his name, but would only say “this acrobat”.

[Like this?] Yes, I never understood why, she said he was involved in magic-making, maybe that's why.

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<sup>43</sup> The interview was conducted in Russian, Toronto, Canada, 2019.

<sup>44</sup> A school for Jewish children in which Hebrew and religious knowledge are taught.

<sup>45</sup> This is a distorted reference to [INEFFABLE NAME].

<sup>46</sup> This might be the surviving reference to Judas Iscariot but in distorted form. Note that in the literature, it is attested that in the Jewish sources Judas is depicted in an extremely positive light “as the Jewish hero of the story (PIOVANELLI 2011, 96), whereas in this interview the antagonist is presented as an idiot as opposed to the clever Jesus. Again, this is a normal deviation from the “canonical” version due to the memory retention and retrieval mechanism.

<sup>47</sup> The story of Judas defiling Jesus by some form of desecration (urinating, ejaculating semen, etc.) is not discussed here and this narrative element is not included in the scheme because in our data there is only one token, but this is a well-studied motif (see YASSIF 2011, 132; KATTAN GRIBETZ 2011, 178; LIMOR 2011, 200–201).

<sup>48</sup> The interview was conducted in French, Toronto, Canada, 2019.

Although, arguably, more data are needed to validate the hypothesis about vitality of the plot-gene pertaining to Toledot Yeshu group of texts, the above interviews and the IFA records show that the article deals with findings that are not random: remnants of the similar stories not only were circulated orally for centuries, but continue to re-appear *systematically* in variable contexts.

### **Section 5: Additional traces of Toledot Yeshu in comedy and cinema**

It has to be emphasized that traces of Toledot Yeshu in “*Ille sont partout*” movie is not a random stand-alone finding, but a continuation of the cinematic tradition that uses Toledot Yeshu as its pivotal element of the plot. There are at least four precedents that have alluded to Toledot Yeshu (all – somehow provocative, parodic, heretical, or blasphemous).

#### **Cinematic Version #2: “Life of Brian” by Monty Python**

A 1979 British comedy film, created by the comedy group Monty Python, has caused a huge uproar from the Christian community and a lot of controversy and debate. It was followed by massive allegations of blasphemy and claims that Brian represented Jesus. The movie was banned and there were scholarly attempts to refute the allegations. Nevertheless, there is a very convincing evidence that Monty Python’s work on the script was very academic; they “immersed themselves in the world of critical gospel studies”.<sup>49</sup> It is plausible to assume that they were very well familiar with Toledot Yeshu and its scholarship.

To summarize the movie plot, the protagonist, Brian Cohen, is born in a stable; Brian’s father was not Mr. Cohen but the Roman centurion Nortius Maximus; Brian grows up an idealistic young man, who resents the continuing Roman

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<sup>49</sup> CROSSLEY 2011, 21.

occupation of Judea and joins the “People’s Front of Judea”. His followers, an enormous crowd, proclaim him to be the Messiah. The crowd demands miracle cures and divine secrets. After that, Brian is captured and crucified. Several excerpts from the script that are highly reminiscent of the studied narrative scheme – [ILLEGITIMATE BIRTH] ; [PROMISCUITY] ; [FALSE MESSIAH] are found in Note 5, Appendix. According to Crossley, in the “Life of Brian”, a combination of skepticism and suspicion in the assessment of gospel miracles seems to be a direct or indirect influence of Geza Vermes’ discussion of Jesus as a charismatic healer and exorcist.<sup>50</sup>

### **Cinematic Version #3 Rowan Atkinson’s “Jesus Magician”**

The British comedian’s Rowan Atkinson sketch, “The Amazing Jesus and Trixy (Jesus Magician)”, which was aired in March 1992 seems to draw from the same tradition. The full transcript can be found in Note 6, Appendix. The Atkinson’s sketch is based on the narrative elements under investigation: [TRICKS] ; [MAGIC MAKING]. At this point it is unclear if Atkinson’s sketch has been influenced by the Toledot Yeshu group of texts, or was a tribute to the long established Christian *parodia sacra* tradition. Atkinson’s rendition of Jesus as Trixy is in line with Biale, who sees the figure of Jesus in Toledot Yeshu as “an audacious trickster operating within the rabbinic elite”.<sup>51</sup>

### **Cinematic Version #4**

Lastly, “Jesus of Montreal” by the renowned Canadian director Denys Arcand also evokes the Toledot Yeshu group of texts. The film’s protagonist undertakes a thorough academic research, including studying Talmudic sources, incorporates in

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<sup>50</sup> CROSSLEY 2011, 107.

<sup>51</sup> BIALE 1999, 136.

his script some of the main Talmudic/Toledot Yeshu themes such as: [ILLEGITIMACY] ; [MAGIC-MAKING] ; [DOUBTS ABOUT IMMACULATE CONCEPTION] ; [FALSE MESSIAH], the relevant excerpt from its transcript can be found in Note 7, Appendix. This movie was not intended to focus on religion itself, but rather to express a satirical stance with Catholic clergy as negative protagonists: “as a lapsed Catholic and self-proclaimed atheist, Arcand did not envision Jesus of Montreal as a religious film”.<sup>52</sup>

### Section 6: Jokes and anecdotes

In addition to the aforementioned cinematic manifestations and personal/archival stories, the studied narrative scheme is also found in numerous jokes. The records found in the IFA indicate that Toledot Yeshu may emerge in both serious and comic registers, such as legends, rumours, and anecdotes. The vitality of some of the Toledot Yeshu’s elements and their ability to reappear in our times proves that the fascination with its themes continues.

Below are two Jewish jokes, which are based on the [ACROBATICS] ; [MAGIC AND TRICKS] themes.

#### Joke #1:

An elderly Jewish man walks into a jewelry store to buy his wife a present. “How much is this?” He asks the clerk, pointing to a sterling silver crucifix. “That’s six hundred dollars, sir,” replies the clerk. “Nice,” says the man, “And without the *acrobat*?”<sup>53</sup>

#### Joke #2:<sup>54</sup>

Christ and Moses announce that they are going to appear before thousands of people at Coney Island to walk on the water. The crowd gathers and, just as they had announced, the two figures start to walk on the water – and Jesus starts sinking. And Moses

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<sup>52</sup> ROSENTHAL 1990.

<sup>53</sup> Cited in DAVIES 1999.

<sup>54</sup> A variant of the same is found in Note 4, Appendix.

looks over at him and whispers, “on the rocks, schmuck, on the rocks”.<sup>55</sup>

It should be noted that some of the non-Jewish blasphemous jokes, invectives and profanities across languages are also typologically related to themes found in the Toledot Yeshu group of texts. Thus, for example, Marienberg maintains that

Jesus of Nazareth was probably considered by many Jews, and probably also by others, since the very beginning of Christianity, to be the fruit of adultery ... This theme continued to haunt Christians for centuries: Origen (184–253) responded to the accusation that Jesus was a result of adultery, Augustine (354–430) also felt the need to answer to similar accusations by Jews. It seems Jews continued, throughout their history, to say Jesus was a bastard (Mamzer). A millennium after Origen, in the thirteenth century, Peter of Reims acknowledged in a sermon that “alas, blessed Mary, how many people nowadays treat you in their way as a prostitute, if I may put it so!” A number of modern jokes do exactly the same.<sup>56</sup>

Marienberg maintains further that

It is indisputable that some Jewish expressions offending Mary were known to ecclesiastical authorities, at least from the thirteenth century. One of the charges against the Talmud, which finally led to the burning of countless of its copies in Paris in June 1242, was the ridiculous and offensive way Mary was presented in Jewish sources. The Church authorities knew that Mary was called, in certain Jewish texts, “the fornicating woman”.<sup>57</sup>

Likewise, cross-linguistically there exist swearing and insults which utilize religious and blasphemous components and

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<sup>55</sup> WISHNIA 1998, 48.

<sup>56</sup> MARIENBERG 2016, 4–5.

<sup>57</sup> MARIENBERG 2016, 7.

are based on a prostitution-related theme. According to Ljung, there are Italian expressions like *Porca Madonna!*, *Ostia madonna matrona di bordello!* and Spanish *Puta Virgen* (Me cago en Dios y en la Puta Virgen!

The Spanish expression uses no fewer than three different themes: the scatological theme represented by *me cago en* ‘I shit on’, the religious theme *Dios* ‘God’ and the highly blasphemic combination of *la Puta* ‘the whore’ which represents the prostitution theme, and *Virgen* the word for ‘the Madonna’. (LJUND 2011, 36) The Madonna may be called “a *matrona di bordello*, viz. a *madam*”.<sup>58</sup>

Uspenskij brings similar examples (*Madonna puttana* and *Madonna troia*)<sup>59</sup> and argues that some of the Russian profanities targeting mother also can be interpreted as related to the Virgin Mary as a manifestation of Mother Earth (through the association of folk ideas).<sup>60</sup>

It is my contention that the narrative elements described in this article also need to be studied in diachronic perspective, because they are historically related to *parodia sacra*, especially when they emerge in satirical, blasphemous contexts or jokes.<sup>61</sup> According to Yassif ... Toledot Yeshu belongs to the literary genre of parody, because it makes use of the “lowest” elements, principally the human organs situated below the belt.<sup>62</sup>

This is in line with Bakhtin, who writes that:

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<sup>58</sup> MARIENBERG 2016, 37.

<sup>59</sup> In Italian it literally refers to the ancient city of Troy, but mainly it is used to curse a female off. 1.whore 2.bitch 3.slut 4.skank Hey troia..stai lontana dal mio ragazzo! Hey bitch..stay away from my boyfriend! In the Italian language profanities belonging to this category are called *bestemmie* (singular: *bestemmia*), in which God, the Virgin Mary, Jesus, the Saints or the Roman Catholic Church are insulted.

<sup>60</sup> USPENSKIJ 1994, 83–84.

<sup>61</sup> C.f. FREIDENBERG 1973; BAKHTIN 1984.

<sup>62</sup> YASSIF 2011, 108.

[T]he so-called *parodia sacra*, “sacred parody/parody”, [is] one of the most peculiar and least understood manifestations of medieval literature. There is a considerable number of parodical liturgies (“The Liturgy of the Drunkards”, “The Liturgy of the Gamblers”), parodies of Gospel readings, of the most sacred prayers (the Lord’s Prayer, the Ave Maria), of litanies, hymns, psalms, and even Gospel sayings. ... All of it was consecrated by tradition and, to a certain extent, tolerated by the Church. It was created and preserved under the auspices of the “Paschal laughter”, or of the “Christmas laughter”; it was in part directly linked, as in the parodies of liturgies and prayers, with the “feast of fools” and may have been performed during this celebration.<sup>63</sup>

Bakhtin specifically mentions the broad range of permitted topics that include vulgar language and subject matter, mockery and derision, and blasphemous, erotic, indecent content found within *risus paschalis* and *risus natalis*.

### Section 7: Conclusions

In this article, using a comparative motif compass method and exploring the cognitive mechanism of plot-gene narrative recognition, storage and retrieval, I have discovered similarities between otherwise unrelated narratives. I have demonstrated that similarities between the Subbotniks’ and the Mossad versions were not a random finding, but indicated that the *traces* of the Toledot Yeshu group of texts keep re-emerging systematically in our days.

I have also demonstrated that there exists a link between a Toledot Yeshu tradition and a significant number of modern narratives; the main theoretical implication is that such *genetic* link could be established based on the common nuclear narrative elements. Such link has not been explored in a systematic way in the past.

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<sup>63</sup> BAKHTIN 1984, 14.

The question why the studied narrative elements continue re-emerging in our days can be answered in several ways. First, such narratives may function as mockery on the neighbours and their beliefs as in the Subbotniks' version. Second, they may be incorporated as a self-defence strategy in reaction to the hostile environment and anti-Semitism. This is the case with the Mossad skit in "Ils sont partout" movie, which is a bold parody on the essential beliefs of the Christian Church doctrine to remind the spectators that Anti-Semitism has been around since the beginning of Christianity. The movie is a powerful wake-up call to respond to the rising Antianti-Semitism in France, and a mass exodus of French Jews to Israel. In such conditions, Jews have always resorted to humour, and it is not surprising to find the same strategy in Atal's movie.

Third, the versions found in the IFA, as well as in the personal interviews and jokes further support the vitality of the Toledot Yeshu themes and the various ways of their circulation. Forth, because Toledot Yeshu essentially is a counter-narrative with polemical and satirical function, it is also manifest in anticlerical narratives such as "Life of Brian", "Jesus and the Trixy (Jesus the Magician)", and "Jesus of Montreal".<sup>64</sup> In this role, it helps conveying the ideas of resistance and antireligious sentiments, which is fully supported by Biale, who presents Amos Funkenstein's view of the text as "the assertive voice of an oppressed minority whose response to its condition was not passivity"<sup>65</sup> and maintains further that ... counter-history can function as a literature of protest.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Along the same lines, RADZIK (2013) suggests that Toledot Yeshu in the context of Polish-Jewish relationships served the same function – it was the "weapon of the weak" in opposition to discriminating group (p. 206).

<sup>65</sup> BIALE 1999, 14.

<sup>66</sup> BIALE 1999, 14.

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## APPENDIX:

### Note 1: Subbotniks’ version #2

The below text was included in the travel journal by the 19th century ethnographer S. Maiximov, who encountered the exiled Subbotniks in Siberia, element found: [SORCERY /MAGIC] ; [FALSE MESSIAH]:

The Subbotnik landlady has rushed home hysterically with her hair undone lamenting and yelling that it is the end of the world and that all the Christians have perished and there is no return of them because they were deceived – their Jesus Christ, in whom they believed, turned out to be not the God but a human, a *sly man*, who *using sorcery and charms* was able to recruit some fishermen, who were Abraham’s descendants, who were ignorant and believed in him, and that others joined the above

fishermen. In fact, the real Messiah is already on his way, albeit still invisible, and he will be there any moment and will save everyone. (Translation from Russian is mine, source in: 19th century Максимов С. За Кавказом (из дорожных заметок) // "Отечественные записки" 1867, № 5, С. 333–353.

Note 2: Nittel Nacht tradition

It is an early European Jewish tradition carried out on Christmas eve "whereby many Jews marked the arrival of the Christmas holiday by putting aside their holy books, refraining from sexual relations, consuming garlic, staying up late, and holding rowdy communal gatherings (often centered on card playing)".<sup>67</sup> There is a possibility that this anti-Christian Nittel Nacht traditions has actually originated in the Christian context.<sup>68</sup>

Note 3: IFA, additional version (#7447/20.051)

Doubts about Yeshu's being a descendant of David: Joseph was from the House of David but Yeshu was born from the Holy Spirit, hence, it is doubtful he was David's descendant.

Miracles: there is no doubt he had only one loaf, but that it was enough to feed the crowd – doubtful (there is no doubt they all stayed hungry).

Jews have killed him is a fact, but that he has lifted to the sky after that is doubtful.<sup>69</sup>

Note 4: Additional personal interviews:

*Interview #3, Israeli, 55 years old, male, of Moroccan origin*

He was a Jew. We call him false Messiah ("Mashiah sheker"). What they are saying – we don't believe it. Just take this flying episode. [What flying?] Didn't you know? We believe – it is told – that he flew. His father was Yosef, from Nazareth, a carpenter. But he wasn't his biological father, this is a well-known fact he wasn't his biological father. He doesn't even appear in his father's

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<sup>67</sup> SCHARBACH 2013, 340.

<sup>68</sup> SCHARBACH 2013, 341.

<sup>69</sup> Yet another variant is found in text #12428 and in #20051: That there was only one loaf for 24 people can be true, but they after that stayed hungry – there is no doubt.

name. Like other prophets – who knows – he appears as the son of David. Someone killed him, for sure, but it wasn’t the Jews. And why everyone went after him? He is just 2000 years, whereas us, we’ve been around longer. I’ve learnt this in the history lessons.

*Interview #4, Israeli, of Moroccan descent, male, 46 years old*

In my family he was never mentioned, but in my opinion, Yeshu was a magician, similar to David Copperfield, he gathered people – people didn’t know much and he showed them magic. Back then people weren’t sophisticated, believed everything they saw – focus-pocus. He was a bright child, studied with the Rabbi, but he realized early enough if he shows tricks, he’ll get by in life very fast.

Note 5: Life of Brian

[Brian asks his mother, Mandy, directly about her virginity]: she is not a virgin, yet his followers keep believing she is a virgin:

[Youth]: Excuse me.

[Mandy]: Yes?

[Youth]: Are you a virgin?

[Mandy]: I beg your pardon.

[Youth]: Well, if it’s not a personal question, are you a virgin?

[Mandy]: “If it’s not a personal question!” ‘How much more personal can you get? Now piss off.

[Youth]: She is.

[Crowd]: Yeah. Definitely.

Brian denies he is the Messiah:

[His mother protests]: He’s not the Messiah; he’s a very naughty boy, there’s no Messiah in here. There’s a mess, all right, but no Messiah.

[Brian]: I am not the Messiah, will you please listen.

[Crowd]: Only the true Messiah denies his divinity.

[Brian]: What? What chance does that give me. All right. I am the Messiah.

[Crowd]: He is a Messiah!<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Cited in CROSSLEY 2011, 72–73.

Note 6: Full transcript of the Atkinson's Jesus and the Trixy (Jesus the Magician)

And on the third day, there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee. And it came to pass that all the wine was drunk. And the mother of the bride came to Jesus and said unto the Lord, they have no more wine. And Jesus said unto the servants: "Fill six waterpots with water." And they did so. And when the steward of the feast did taste from the water of the pots, it had become wine. And they knew not whence it had come. But the servants did know, so they applauded loudly in the kitchen. And they said unto the Lord: "How the hell did you do that?" And inquired of him: "Do you do children's parties" And the Lord said: "No." But the servants did press him, saying; "Go on, give us another one!" And so he brought forth a carrot, and said: "Behold this, for it is a carrot." And all about him knew that it was so. For it was orange, with a green top. And he did place a large red cloth over the carrot, and then removed it, and lo, he held in his hand a white rabbit. And all were amazed, and said: "This guy is really good! He should turn professional." And they brought him on a stretcher a man who was sick of the palsy. And they cried unto him: "Maestro, this man is sick of the palsy." And the Lord said: "If I had to spend my whole life on a stretcher, I'd be pretty sick of the palsy, too!" And they were filled with joy. And cried out: "Lord, thy one-liners are as good as thy tricks. Thou art indeed an all-round family entertainer." And there came unto him a woman called Mary, who had seen the Lord and believed, and Jesus said unto her: "Put on a tutu, and lie down in this box." And then took he forth a saw, and cleft her in twain. And there was much wailing and gnashing of teeth. But Jesus said: "Oh ye of little faith!" And he threw open the box and lo, Mary was whole. And the crowd went absolutely bananas. And Jesus and Mary took a big bow. And he said unto her: "From now on you shall be known as Trixy, for that is a good name for an assistant." And the people said unto him: "We've never seen anything like this. You shouldn't be wasting your time in a one camel town like Cana. You should be playing in the big arenas in Jerusalem!" And Jesus did harken to their words. And he did go on to Jerusalem, and he did his full act before the scribes, the Palestines and the Romans. But alas

it did not please them in their hearts. In fact, they crucified him. Here endeth the lesson. Amen.”

Note 7: Excerpt from the movie “Jesus of Montreal”

What’s the play? We’ll write it. Is it a collective text? ...History of the Jewish prophet Yeshu ben Panthera, the one we call Jesus... Our knowledge of Jesus is so scarce that some pretend he never existed. A paradox: Jesus was not Christian, but he was a Jew. He was obsessed with Israel’s destiny. The Jews proclaimed Jesus to be a false prophet born of fornication. They called him the son of Panthera. All the Jewish tradition he was always referred to as his parents’ son, unless he was illegitimate. In his village Jews exclaimed is not this a carpenter – Mary’s son? In these times, people believed in daemons, magic, resurrection of the dead. The world swarmed of false prophets, magicians. Take for example Simon the Magician – when he said: by my mental powers alone .... Jesus was also a magician. He was said to be born in Egypt – the cradle of magic His miracles were probably more popular than his sermons...

{Reaction from the Catholic clergy}: Are you completely out of your mind? Jesus – a biological son of a Roman soldier? Also Virgin Mary – an unwed mother? Are you sick?

Note 8: Joke #3

Moses said, “Hey Jesus, you know what we haven’t done in a while? Go down to Earth and perform some miracles.” Jesus thought that was a great idea, so the two of them hopped onto a cloud and floated down to a city. “What miracle would you like to perform first?” asked Moses. “I think I’ll walk on water,” replied Jesus. “Last time I did that the people really went wild!” So Jesus walked to the edge of a lake surrounded by hundreds of people, took a step onto the water... And promptly sank. Confused, he stepped out of the water, tried again ...And sank for a second time. He turned to Moses and said, “I don’t know what’s wrong. Last time I did this it worked like a charm!” To which Moses replied, “Well Jesus, you have to remember: last time you did this you didn’t have holes in your feet.”<sup>71</sup>

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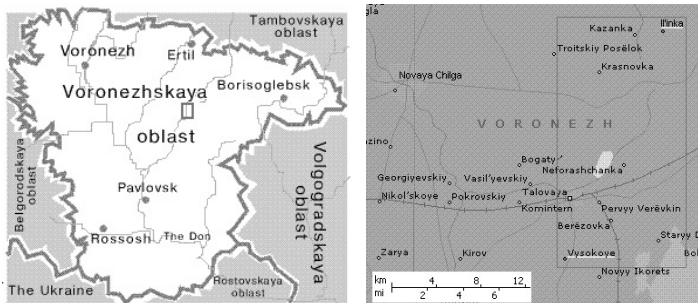
<sup>71</sup> Cited in DETWEILER 1974.

## Note 9: Bungee Jesus

It is possible that the below popular “Bungee Jesus”<sup>72</sup> meme is also related to the studied texts (the narrative element [FLYING]), however, more data for comparison and on its origin are needed:



Subbotniks’ settlement in Russia, Voronezh district – Map of Iliinka and Visokii villages:<sup>73</sup>



Credit to the Israeli Folklore Archive

I am indebted to Dr. Haya Milo, IFA Scientific Coordinator of The University of Haifa, Israel, for her responding to my query and providing me with the requested archival records.

<sup>72</sup> [https://www.reddit.com/r/funny/comments/9bkc5d/jesus\\_christ\\_he\\_is\\_bungee\\_jumping/](https://www.reddit.com/r/funny/comments/9bkc5d/jesus_christ_he_is_bungee_jumping/)

<sup>73</sup> [http://www.russianaz.org/molokane/subbotniki/Russia/Voronezh/Map\\_Vysokii\\_Iliinka.html](http://www.russianaz.org/molokane/subbotniki/Russia/Voronezh/Map_Vysokii_Iliinka.html); accessed September 2018.