

The terms “disputation”, “debate” and “polemics”, which are used to describe interfaith relations, have more than one meaning and are used in more than one way. In a narrow sense disputations are public events in which protagonists of two religions discussed their differences. There also exist literary disputations – treatises that were written to refute another religion’s claims and to strengthen one’s own. Hundreds of treatises of this genre are extant, mainly Christian and Jewish but also Muslim.¹ In a more general sense, however, disputes and polemics existed in all sorts of cultural expressions, both literary and visual, and in a broader sense one can also say that in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, Jews and Christians were living in a polemical mode. Moreover, polemics with the “other” had more than one aim. Rather than convincing the adversary, polemics were mainly intended for internal consumption, and served internal agendas.

This article will discuss three Christian stories about Mary in which the Jews act as witnesses to her sanctity. All three can be defined as polemical stories. They reflect the perception of Jews in Christian thought, the complex web of relationships between Jews and Christians, and also internal Christian doubts with regard to Marian beliefs. Before going on to the stories themselves, it is necessary to outline the figure of Mary, first in the Christian faith and then as seen by Jewish eyes. This outline will serve as a background and prelude to the stories.

Given Mary’s great importance in Christian ritual, it is surprising how little the Gospels

Mary and the Jews: Story, Controversy, and Testimony

Ora Limor

Open University, Tel Aviv

refer to her.² The story of the Annunciation, so prominent a part of Christian piety and imagination, is told only in Luke (1:26–38). Matthew mentions, very briefly, that Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but “before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit” (1:18); while Mark and John entirely ignore the subject. The Nativity stories are told in great detail in Matthew (chapters 1 and 2) and Luke (chapters 1 and 2), but Mark and John do not mention Jesus’ birth. In addition to the stories of the Annunciation and the Nativity, John refers briefly to Mary in two further scenes: once in the wedding at Cana (2:3–5; 12) and again during the Crucifixion (19:25–27); and she figures in one last scene in the account of the origins of the early church in Acts (1:14). Paul makes no mention of Mary.

The Gospels tell us nothing of Mary’s childhood and youth or of her life after her son’s crucifixion. In late antiquity – some say as early as the second century – Mary became increasingly important in Christian faith and ritual, and Christian apocryphal works, excluded from the New Testament and written after it, fill out the details of her biography. While these apocrypha never received official sanction from the church, they nevertheless became an integral and significant part of Marian tradition, also leaving their mark in the Christian calendar and the geography of the Holy Land. The apocryphal traditions elaborated in particular on the two “ends” of Mary’s life: her birth, childhood and youth were recounted in *The Protevangelium of James*,³ and her death (Dormition), burial and Ascension to heaven were described in the work entitled *Transitus Mariae*.⁴ These traditions spread rapidly through the Christian world in a variety of languages and versions, sometimes consistent but at times competing with one another. While some of the traditions associated Mary with heterodox ideas, these ideas were later dropped or reformulated in such a way as to permit the full acceptance of Mary by Christian orthodoxy. This was the basis on which Marian theology was ultimately founded, and Marian ritual became increasingly popular. These were comparatively late developments. Marian doctrine and the associated ritual were considerably encouraged at the Council of Ephesus (431), which officially bestowed upon her the title of *Theotokos* (“Mother of God”), already widespread among Christians in the fourth century. In the fifth and sixth centuries there took shape in Palestine a map of sacred sites, marking important events in Mary’s life: her resting place on the way to Bethlehem (the *Kathisma* church), her tomb in Gethsemane, at the foot of the Mount of Olives, the house in which she was born, located near the Pool of Bethesda, and the site of her Dormition on Mount Zion.⁵ In 543 the New Church of St Mary (the *Nea*), built by Justinian in Mary’s honour, was dedicated; it was the biggest church built in Jerusalem till that time.⁶ Other clusters of sacred sites were dedicated to Mary in Galilee, particularly in Nazareth and Sepphoris, and at Bethlehem, the site of the Nativity. Together with additional, less well-known sites, these places gave rise to a sacred geography of Mary, alongside the sacred geography of her son Jesus. At the same time, Mary’s position in the Christian liturgical calendar was consolidated, and various festivals were instituted to mark events in her life. Thus, Mary’s gradual rise to prominence in Christian theology was expressed both in the liturgy and on the map, in sacred time and sacred space – the two reliable, stable witnesses to official theological perceptions and conventions, and to the pious feelings of believers.

According to all the canonical and apocryphal sources Mary lived and died as a good Jewess, spending her entire life in Palestine – in Nazareth, Bethlehem and Jerusalem (except for a brief

excursion to Egypt and back). However, the Jews did not treat her kindly. Although the real threat to the Jews was her son Jesus, they generally treated him with some respect, even while disputing his teachings and deploring his messianic and divine pretensions. As far as his mother was concerned, however, they gave free reign to their tongues and lavished curses upon her. In the work *Nizzahon Vetus*, written in Germany around the year 1300, we read:

Consequently, how could this man be God, for he entered a woman with a stomach full of faeces who frequently sat him down in the privy during the nine months, and when he was born he came out dirty and filthy, wrapped in a placenta and defiled by the blood of childbirth and impure issue. The Torah, on the other hand, warns against approaching a menstruant woman, a woman who has had an impure issue, and one who has just given birth, as it is written, "And shall continue in the blood of purification three and thirty days; she shall touch no hallowed thing until the day of her purification be fulfilled" (Lev. 12:4). Hence he was not worthy of association with anything sacred.⁷

Not all Jewish anti-Christian polemical works resorted to such picturesque language as *Nizzahon Vetus*, but in fact the author of that work simply summarised, succinctly and in vulgar terms, what Jews had been saying for hundreds of years.⁸ The references to Mary reflect misogynous discourse, primarily the outrage felt by Jewish men at the mere idea of physical contact between a woman on the one hand, her stomach full of faeces, who sits in a privy and gives birth to a filthy, slimy, repulsive child, and the deity on the other – this represented contact between impurity and sanctity. One way of assuaging this outrage was to challenge the very possibility of virgin birth and to suggest other explanations for the fact that Mary gave birth to a child that was not her husband's. The Talmud and the Midrash already offered derogatory remarks about Mary's dubious personality,⁹ and there is a caustic narrative summary of the Jewish perception of Mary in the book *Sefer Toledot Yeshu*, a kind of Jewish biography of Jesus, which although its composition date is debated, there are good grounds for the assumption that it was written quite early, perhaps in the fourth or the fifth century.¹⁰ Amos Funkenstein has called *Sefer Toledot Yeshu* "counterhistory", which he aptly defines as a genre of historiography with polemical aims, which systematically exploits the other party's most reliable sources contrary to their intention and spirit, as if "combing history against the grain", to use Walter Benjamin's phrase. "The aim of counterhistory", writes Funkenstein, "is to distort the other's self-image and identity by destroying his collective memory."¹¹ This is precisely what *Sefer Toledot Yeshu* tries to do. It takes the tales of the Gospels and distorts their entire content, thus producing an alternative biography of Jesus, portraying him in caricature.

Sefer 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 in diverse versions, being communicated orally from one person to another before being committed to writing, 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 that

she was 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 came to light, 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.

The figure of Mary as portrayed in *Sefer 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; 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", 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.

Jewish contempt for Mary and the stories associated with her were surely known to Christians and caused them no little distress. Their concern was particularly acute because the Jewish criticism touched a raw nerve – fragile points of Christian theology, which were controversial and not readily explainable in a logical manner.

Two basic tenets of Christian dogma annoyed and in fact incensed the Jews: the idea that the divine messiah had been born to a mortal woman, and the doctrine of virgin birth. While the idea of Immaculate Conception was widely accepted among Christian believers and much reinforced by ritual, it was a target of Christian criticism throughout the Middle Ages and was a bone of contention among scholars.¹² This internal Christian critical attitude is important for our present purposes, and deserves mention because, here as in other contexts, things that Christians quoted as having been said by Jews actually represented suppressed Christian disapproval, or a guilty Christian conscience for heretical thoughts and doubts of accepted beliefs, as will be seen below.

How did Christians react to the Jewish criticism of and contempt for Mary? What role did they assign the Jews in the emergence of Marian theology? These questions underline this author's reading of three stories about Mary and the Jews. These three ancient oriental tales place the Jews at a sensitive juncture, a meeting place between the evolving theology of Mary, the veneration of her relics, the beginnings of icon worship, and Christian criticism of these elements. While the criticism is placed in Jewish mouths, in all three stories it is the Jews who finally confirm Mary's sanctity, her elevated status in the structure of Christian faith, and the veneration of her relics. These are thus "witness stories", narratives in which the Jews function as witnesses to Christian truths. The role of Jews as witnesses, testifying to the truth of Christianity, was first formulated by Augustine, who placed special emphasis on Jewish testimony for the authenticity of Christian Holy Scriptures.¹³ This is what Jeremy Cohen has aptly defined as the "hermeneutical Jew", the Jew as portrayed in Christian theology and exegesis, whose task is to interpret

the Christians' own beliefs for them. He is of course an invented Jew, created to serve Christian interests.¹⁴ Jewish testimony is delivered against the Jews' own will, and it is the reason for their continued existence in the world, for their being dispersed among Christians wherever they are. While Augustine was concerned primarily with Jewish evidence for the biblical text, one finds the idea in other Christian contexts, such as those concerning holy places and sacred relics. The most celebrated example of such Jewish testimony for Christian sanctity is the legend of the finding of the true cross in Jerusalem.¹⁵ According to this legend, the true cross was found in Jerusalem by Constantine's mother Helena, on the basis of evidence extorted from a Jew named Judas. Judas testified both to the truth of the cross, the most important relic in Christianity, and to the site of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, where the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was erected. Besides the idea of Jewish testimony underlying this legend, it is also associated with the concept of "Hebrew verity" (*Hebraica veritas*), a term coined by Jerome and expressing his conviction that the Hebrew text of the Bible was preferable to its translations.¹⁶ This concept assigned the Jews and Jewish exegesis of the Bible a position of special importance. In Christian belief, the Jews possessed ancient, inherited knowledge, which lent authenticity to Christian faith and Christian traditions. As the Jews tried to hide this knowledge, it was the Christian's task to wrest it from him, whether by persuasion or by force.

The three stories cited below are figurative reflections of these perceptions of the Jew in Christian thought and imagination. They show how Christians tried to mobilise Jewish criticism and hostility to reinforce Christian beliefs, and how Jews became a source of authority for Christian truth.

I. Mary's Death

The story of Mary's Dormition (*dormitio*), probably of Syro-Palestinian or Egyptian origin, is traditionally attributed to John the Evangelist. It exists in different versions, dating from the fifth and sixth centuries, but is presumably even older. There are now more than sixty versions predating the tenth century, in nine languages (Syriac, Greek, Latin, Coptic, Ethiopic, Arabic, Armenian, Georgian and Slavonic).¹⁷ Only one of these versions omits the "Jewish" (or anti-Jewish) episode discussed below. Despite slight differences, the structure of the episode is largely the same in the different versions, an indication that it was incorporated in the story of Mary's death at a very early stage.¹⁸

The story relates how an angel (or in some versions Jesus himself) informed Mary that she would be taken ("assumed") into heaven. Miraculously, all the apostles gather from their respective countries to bid her farewell and accompany her on her last journey. The "Jewish episode" takes place outside the walls of Jerusalem, with the funeral procession on its way from Mount Zion, where she sank into sleep, to Gethsemane, where she was to be buried. The apostles' singing and the commotion of the funeral attract the attention of the leaders of the Jews in Jerusalem, who plot to seize the body and burn it, lest the site of her tomb cause miracles like that of her son. Thus, the Jews are aware of the truth, that is, of the marvellous power of the body and the tomb, but they deny that truth. As they prepare to leave the city gates to seize the body, the Jews are struck blind with one exception. A Jew named Zephaniah (in some versions

he is called Reuben while in others he is described as a priest)¹⁹ manages to reach Mary's bier and catches hold of it with the intention of damaging it. Thereupon, an angel appears, bearing a fiery sword, and cuts off Zephaniah's hands, leaving him writhing in agony while his hands remain stuck to the bier. (According to other versions, his hands dry up and adhere to the bier.)²⁰ When he begs the apostles to save him, they answer that only the Virgin can help and advise him to pray to her. This he does, is healed and converts to Christianity. The apostles then send him back to the city to heal the other Jews of their blindness. Many of them become Christians, and recover their sight.²¹

The hostility of Jews towards Mary and their criticism of the beliefs associated with her name are given literary trappings in this episode. They wish to harm the body in order to defile and ultimately burn it, thus refuting the Christian belief that Mary's body, being immaculate, had never sinned and was free from original sin. This conception of an immaculate body is the basis of the Christian belief that Mary was taken into heaven physically, entirely untouched by death.²² The Jewish designs are brutally frustrated, and what happens is the very opposite of their original intention. The Jew Zephaniah is unable to defile the pure body; on the contrary, it is his own sinful body that suffers injury. Only through prayer to Mary is he miraculously healed, and he becomes a Christian and converts his accomplices too, after their blindness has been cured. Their blindness is theological in nature – it is their characteristic quality ever since the rise of Christianity, as stated by Paul in his *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*: "In their case the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God" (2 Cor. 4:4). Their blindness is at one and the same time crime and punishment: unwillingness and inability to perceive the Christian truth. Only an admission of the Christian truth could remove this theological blindness, cleanse the Jews of their sins and save their bodies and souls. Thus, contrary to his original design, Zephaniah the Jew bears the ultimate, definitive testimony to Mary's sanctity. Though he had desired to cause her irreparable injury, Mary does not hold it against him but forgives and heals him. This opens a long chain of innumerable miraculous cures around the places and objects associated with Mary.

Mary's physical assumption into heaven indicates her special relationship with Jesus through her body.²³ Not only did she carry him in her womb and suckle him at her breasts – she also shares his immaculate nature, his freedom from any taint of sin. Her Assumption, a triumph over the body and bodily death, was also a triumph over the physical, corporeal and verbal perception of Judaism. It was a prefiguration of the bodily resurrection of all Christians, a promise of salvation to all believers. In Mary, "grace was stronger than nature", as put by Jacobus de Voragine in the *Golden Legend*.²⁴ The Jew who tried to harm Mary was questioning the power of grace, and therefore he suffered injury. Once he had a change of heart and became a believer, he too became worthy of this grace.

The Dormition story was known down to the last detail throughout the Christian world. It was included in entry on the Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady (August 15) in the *Golden Legend*.²⁵ Christian preachers used it in their sermons in particular on that festival, buttressing their faith in Mary's sanctity through the Jew who attempted to injure her but was himself injured. The

story was also disseminated and perpetuated through the medium of art.²⁶ In addition, pilgrims to Jerusalem were shown the place, just outside the Old City walls, where the Jews tried to seize Mary's body. The site was first mentioned in seventh and eighth-century descriptions and was continuously referred to for centuries.²⁷ Christians visiting Jerusalem could thus see the place with their own eyes and imagine the event that it was supposed to commemorate. Holy places always function as definite evidence for the truths of their traditions. For when one says, "This is where it happened", one is actually saying, "It *did* happen."

II. Mary's Robe in Galilee

While the first story was located in Jerusalem, where Mary lived after the Crucifixion, the second takes place in the northern part of the country, in Galilee, where she was born. In late antiquity Galilee was an important Jewish centre, and most of the population were Jewish. Christian communities were gradually established alongside Jewish communities, and the Christian map of Galilee began to take shape, mainly in places mentioned in the Gospels in connection with the accounts of Jesus' birth and childhood. In Nazareth, Capernaum, Sepphoris and elsewhere, churches were built, each with its specific ritual. The relations between Jews and Christians in Galilee are related in both Christian and Jewish sources, which while generally concerned with the competition between the two communities, they sometimes tell of cooperation.²⁸ The anonymous traveller of Piacenza, known as Antoninus, who journeyed to the Holy Land before 570, describes both in one breath:

*We travelled on to the city of Nazareth, where many miracles take place. In the synagogue there is kept a book in which the Lord wrote his ABC, and in this synagogue there is the bench on which he sat with the other children. Christians can lift the bench and move it about, but the Jews are completely unable to move it, and cannot drag it outside. The house of Saint Mary is now a basilica, and her clothes are the cause of frequent miracles. The Jewesses of that city are better-looking than any other Jewesses in the whole country. They declare that this is Saint Mary's gift to them, for they also say that she was a relation of theirs. Though there is no love lost between Jews and Christians these women are full of kindness ...*²⁹

The short chapter that Antoninus devotes to Nazareth thus records examples of both Christian-Jewish rivalry (the story of the bench that the Jews could not move) and cooperation at the time in Galilee. Many of the traditions of Christian Galilee revolve around Mary. Only naturally, they were feminine traditions. Antoninus' account, referring to things that he had seen on his travels and presumably lacking any polemical or hagiographic intent, implies that Jewish women of Galilee were proud of their lineage and their familial relationship with Mary – herself a Galilean Jewess like themselves – and of the unique qualities resulting from that relationship. It was because of Mary that they were particularly good-looking and kind – beautiful in a corporeal and a spiritual sense. Antoninus notes that Galilean Jews were not generally sympathetic to Christians, and for that reason he is amazed at the behaviour of Jewish women in Galilee. Perhaps his account hints at the existence of some local Marian rituals around sites and objects associated with Mary which enjoyed the participation of both Christian and Jewish women? In other periods

and places there are a number of ecumenical rituals devoted to the veneration of saints and also of Mary.³⁰ These concern mostly Christian holy places connected with Mary that were also frequented by Muslims,³¹ but in some rare cases we also have evidence of Jewish participation in the rituals.³² While Antoninus does not in fact refer to Jewish women in Galilee actually worshipping Mary, their declaration as reported by him does allude to their veneration for the Virgin, an admission on their part that she was the source of their beauty and good qualities.

Antoninus refers to miracles performed at Nazareth by virtue of the relics kept there, particularly her clothing. Since Mary was taken into heaven in the flesh, her admirers had to content themselves with the remains of her clothing – her sash, hair, and her breast milk. These relics confirmed her absent historical person.³³ The most important holy relic in Byzantine Constantinople, documented as early as the seventh century, was Mary's robe. Kept in the Church of Blachernae at Constantinople, it was credited with many miracles, some associated with the defence of the city. There were various versions of the origins of the robe. One version placed its origin in Jerusalem, another, in Galilee.³⁴ As the Galilean story is more developed and interesting it should be discussed here in detail. The story has survived in the hagiographical literature of the Greek Church in a few versions, the earliest of which dates to the fifth century. Here are the main points of the story:³⁵

Two noble brothers, Galbius and Candidus, resident in Constantinople at the time of emperor Leo the Great (457–474), decided to go on a pilgrimage to the holy places.³⁶ They made their way to Jerusalem not by the coastal road but through Galilee in order to visit the holy places of Nazareth and Capernaum. As night overtook them, they found lodgings in the home of an old Jewess who offered them her hospitality.³⁷ Upon entering the house, the brothers saw a room full of invalids – men, women and children – which aroused their astonishment. Curious to learn the reason, they invited the woman to dine with them. She at first refused, saying that, being Jewish, she could not dine with Christians. However, she agreed to their suggestion that she bring along her own food. During the meal, the brothers plied her with wine, and then asked her why so many invalids were crowded into the inner room. Whether because of the wine or by Divine Providence, the woman told them her secret.

In a chest in the next room, the woman said, she kept the sacred robe of Mary, who upon her departure from this world had entrusted it to a female acquaintance, a member of the old lady's family. That woman had enjoined her family to guard the robe well and respect it, and from that point it had thus been handed down from one generation to the next. The chest was now in the inner room, and it was the robe within it that was working all those miracles.

The brothers thanked the woman and begged her permission to sleep in the room containing the robe, which she granted. During the night, they measured the chest precisely, recording its height, length and width. On the morrow they asked the woman if she needed anything from Jerusalem and set off for the Holy City. On their arrival, they visited the holy places, and then found a carpenter, from whom they ordered an exact replica of the chest from the very same wood. On their way home, they again passed through the woman's village, gave her the things they had brought her

from Jerusalem, dined with her, and requested to sleep in the room with the robe. During the night, after ensuring that all the sick people in the room were asleep, the brothers prayed to Mary, requesting her agreement, and then exchanged the chests. In the morning, they took their leave of the old Jewess and went on their way, taking the sacred treasure with them. They brought the original chest and the robe to their city, the Queen of Cities – Constantinople, where an imperial church was erected at Blachernae in honour of the Holy Virgin and her robe was placed in a gold and silver chest in the church. When the old Woman discovered the theft, she died of sorrow.³⁸

The Virgin's robe was one of Constantinople's most important holy relics, mentioned and extolled in many sources. A magnificent mosaic told the story of the robe, with Mary in the centre and around her other figures, among them the brothers Galbius and Candidus.³⁹ The deposition of the robe in the church was celebrated on 2 June, a festival mentioned in the sources before the first report of the Feast of the Assumption on 15 August. The robe was credited with having Galilean, or to be more precise, Jewish-Galilean origins. Mary herself entrusted the robe to a woman known to her, and it was passed down from one generation of her family to the next until the old Galilean woman divulged the secret to the two brothers. This is thus a story of *furta sacra* or "sacred theft",⁴⁰ as well as a story of *translation* or transportation of the sacred robe from Galilee, the Virgin's homeland, to Constantinople, and from Jews to Christians. If any person had doubts as to the authenticity of the robe kept in the church at Constantinople and its miracle-working qualities, the Jewish woman from Galilee was called upon to bear witness to them, and thus to the eternal virginity of the *Theotokos*.

On an allegorical level, one might read the story as a homily on Jewish-Christian relations: Judaism is likened to an old woman, preserving an ancient truth – the *Synagoga* – that she herself does not fully comprehend.⁴¹ When the time comes, she passes this truth on to the young, victorious, Christianity – the *Ecclesia* –, the open-eyed heir to the truth.

The story of the Virgin's robe has survived in several versions, each differing in some small detail from the other. One late version, for example, states that the robe still bore the stains of the milk that Jesus sucked from his mother's breasts.⁴² Nevertheless, the plot as a whole remains unchanged, as does the figure of its main protagonist. The unfavourable turn taken by Christian-Jewish relations in Byzantium from the sixth century on, and the subsequent decline of the Jews' position there, had no effect on the sympathetic figure of the Galilean woman – the guardian of the robe and witness to its authenticity.

III. The Portrait of Mary

Jews were frequently described in Christian literature, the *Exempla* in particular, as plotting to damage Christian holy objects and actually doing this.⁴³ The story of Mary's icon cited below is an early example of such stories. It was told by Adomnán, the famous abbot of Iona off the coast of Scotland, and author of the biography of Saint Columba, the founder of the monastery. Adomnán heard the story from Arculf, bishop of Gaul, who travelled to the East in the 670s. After visiting

Jerusalem and other holy places, Arculf ended his journey in the magnificent city of Constantinople, from where he brought the following story:

The oft-mentioned Arculf gave us an accurate rendering also of a true story about an ikon of the holy Mary, mother of the Lord, which he learned from some well-informed witnesses in the city of Constantinople. On a wall of a house in the metropolitan city, he said, a picture of the blessed Mary used to hang, painted on a short wooden tablet. A stupid and hardhearted man asked whose picture it was, and was told by someone that it was a likeness of the holy Mary ever virgin. When he heard this that Jewish unbeliever became very angry and, at the instigation of the devil, seized the picture from the wall and ran to a building nearby, where it is customary to dispose of the soil from the human bodies by means of openings in long planks whereon people sit. There, in order to dishonour Christ, who was born of Mary, he cast the picture of His mother through the opening on the nuisance lying beneath. Then in his stupid folly he sat above himself and evacuated through the opening, pouring the nuisance of his own person on the icon of the holy Mary which he had just deposited there. After that disgraceful action the hapless creature went away, and what he did subsequently, how he lived, or what sort of end he had, is unknown. After the scoundrel had gone, one of the Christian community came upon the scene, a fortunate man, zealous for the things of the Lord. Knowing what had happened, he searched for the picture of the holy Mary, found it hidden in the refuse and took it up. He wiped it carefully and cleaned it by washing it in the clearest water, and then set it up in honour by him in his house. Wonderful to relate, there is always an issue of genuine oil from the tablet with the picture of the blessed Mary, which Arculf, as he is wont to tell, saw with his own eyes. This wondrous oil proclaims the honour of Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus of whom the Father says: "With my oil I have anointed him" (Ps. 88:21). Likewise the psalmist addresses the Son of God himself when he says: "God thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of joy beyond thy companions" (Ps. 44:8).⁴⁴

This story attests to the development of icon worship in the Christian world, and of the role assigned to the Jew as a confirmed opponent of that worship. There is an interesting parallel in a sermon attributed to Theophilus of Alexandria.⁴⁵ It tells the story of a Jew who finds an icon of Mary and begins to smash it into smithereens, but it begins to bleed and the crime is thus discovered. The icon is brought to the church and pieced together, washed and hung in the church, whereupon it begins to perform miraculous cures. The Jew converts to Christianity and dies three days later.⁴⁶ It would seem that the sermon was delivered in the church in the presence of the icon – a kind of homily on a picture, in which the Jew is enlisted to testify to its qualities.

The iconoclastic controversy broke out in the eighth century, but criticism of the increasingly popular cult of images was already common before then, among Muslims and Jews but also among Christians.⁴⁷ As early as the year 600, Leontius of Cyprus wrote a tract, aimed at the Jews, in defence of the cult.⁴⁸ The advocates of icon worship, who were aware of Jewish views, labelled any criticism of icons as Jewish. Christians were also familiar with the Jews' attitude to Mary, and could not ignore this hostility, which was expressed quite publicly. Jewish literature took the Latin form of Mary's name – Maria – and distorted it to *haria*, meaning "faeces".⁴⁹ Christian imagination shortened the distance between verbal violence – name-calling and offensive references

to refuse and filth (as in the passage quoted above from *Nizzahon Vetus*, on the assumption that the book merely puts into writing ancient Jewish turns of speech) – and violent actions, such as throwing Mary’s image into refuse and filth.⁵⁰

The story of the icon furnishes an early example of a powerful and dangerous image of the Jew as a person who defiles Christian holy objects by throwing them into sewage, an unsurpassable act of contempt and degradation. This image was common in the Middle Ages. In the Lincoln blood libel of 1255, Christians accused Jews of having killed a Christian child and dumping his body in a cesspool.⁵¹ The “Prioress’s Tale” in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* relates a story about a boy who used to sing a hymn to Mary. The Jews killed him and threw his body into a pit “where the Jews purged their entrails”.⁵² Similarly, in the story of the ritual murder of Adam of Bristol, written in the second quarter of the thirteenth century, the body of the crucified child is thrown into a cesspit, but the Jewish murderer who wishes to defecate there is forced to flee by a supreme force.⁵³ The event took place on the day of Mary’s Assumption, and the text stresses the Jew’s hostility to Mary. As in these stories, the story of Mary’s icon quoted above portrays the most sublime sanctity as being defiled in the most sordid, disgusting place. But that is not the end of the tale. As a result of the Jew’s crime, the icon miraculously begins to exude pure oil, an expression of Mary’s sanctity. Thus, this story, too, becomes a “witness story”, with a denouement diametrically opposed to the perpetrator’s original intent. The very act by which he sought to debase Mary bore witness to her glory.⁵⁴



The Jewish attitude to the mysterious figure of Mary, as reflected in the three stories, reflects not the Jewish but the Christian world. These stories were told for immediate Christian needs, and their Jewish protagonists were enlisted in the service of three urgent Christian goals – confirmation of the Virgin’s robe, the most important sacred relic in Constantinople; confirmation of the sanctity and miraculous quality of Mary’s icon in a church in that city; and commemoration of Mary’s departure from this world, which began atop Mount Zion and culminated at the foot of the Mount of Olives. All three cases were testimony to her supernatural nature and formulate a complex, powerful, narrative answer to troubling questions, attesting to the intensity of Marian beliefs, which had become binding dogmas – new, vulnerable beliefs, only lately formulated: immaculate conception; virgin birth; the body untouched by sin and death; and the increasingly popular icon worship. The Jewish voice in these witness stories is the voice of criticism – not only the voice of Jewish criticism but also that of the Christian opposition, which has been censored out of the sources. Wherever there are new, controversial definitions; wherever the theological ground is still soft and tremulous, before becoming encrusted with new definitions, adopted in church councils and attaining the status of orthodoxy by virtue of political power and a consensus of aggressive bishops – the Jew can be found. He expresses the rejected voice of doubt, and his persuasion or eradication is intended to remove any doubt or feelings of guilt and to provide a liberating catharsis. In the Middle Ages, too, stories abound which involve doubting Jews blaspheming in the most theologically problematic places – those most in need of defence.⁵⁵ Stories along these lines always end in miracles that provide the definitive, ultimate

proof to the truth revealed through the Jew. Sometimes the Jew and the miracle coexist in harmony, as in the tale of Mary's robe; at other times they clash, as in the stories of the funeral and the icon.

The three stories propose three possible solutions to the Jewish question: the Jew who is saved by converting to Christianity; the Jewess who does not even have to convert because in her innermost being she is already a Christian in any case; and the Jew who disappears, leaving no trace. The latter – the vanishing Jew, who neither converts to Christianity nor is punished, but continues wandering, likely to reappear at any moment – is the most dangerous.⁵⁶ This was the Jew who reappeared all through the Middle Ages, portrayed time and again as the Jewish arch-criminal and sinner, present nowhere and everywhere, constantly plotting injury to the sacraments and to Christians themselves: he would despoil icons and crosses, desecrate the Host and kill Christian children, all in the name of a Jewish world conspiracy to destroy Christianity. While the story of the Galilean woman, who willingly bears positive witness, was not known at all in the Christian West, the story of the funeral was, as was that of the icon. In these stories the Jew indeed testifies to Christian truths; but he is a hostile witness, testifying under duress and torture.

In its own way, each of the three stories discussed above is a travel narrative, recounting revelations that occurred on journeys. It is during the funeral procession that the true nature of Mary, Mother of God, is revealed to the participants – the apostles and with them all the people of Jerusalem; her illustrious robe is revealed during the pilgrimage journey of the noble Byzantine brothers; and Arculf, the intrepid traveller from Gaul, returning from his journey to the East, brings the story of the icon to the distant shores of Scotland, whence it spreads to all of Western Christendom. Travel accounts are always accounts of searching and finding, and pilgrimages are quests for an inner truth and for the deep roots of belief. Upon returning home, pilgrims like Galbuis and Candidus, and Arculf, bishop of Gaul, would tell their astonished listeners about their adventures and findings. They would also attest to the role of the Jews in these findings.

Finally, the three stories also raise questions of gender. In the Christian imagination, Mary's worst enemy is the male Jew who profanes her innocence by words and touch. Jewish women are seen as possible allies. Like Mary, they are sometimes virgins (as in the Galilean tale), and sometimes mothers (as in the famous story of the Jewish woman who converts to Christianity together with her son, who witnessed a miracle wrought by Mary, whereas the stiff-necked, cruel father is thrown into a fiery furnace).⁵⁷ The story of the alleged ritual murder of Adam of Bristol also features a woman, who first cooperates with her husband in the plot to crucify the Christian child, but later repents, expresses the desire to be baptised and is immediately murdered by her husband.⁵⁸ While the story of the virgin from Galilee was not known in the Christian West, the idea of female fellowship between Mary and her Jewish sisters was familiar there. It has survived in such stories as that mentioned above in which Mary saves a Jewish mother and child from a fanatical, violent father, or in the famous *Exempla* quoted by, among others, Vincent of Beauvais in his *Speculum Historiale* – the story of a Jewish woman in the pangs of labour, already expecting to die, who hears a voice telling her to call upon Mary. She does so and proceeds to give birth painlessly.⁵⁹ This story, too, corroborates through the Jewish mother the Christian belief that Mary gave birth without labour pangs, for she was untouched by sin and

therefore by punishment for sin. The book *Nizzahon Vetus*, mentioned at the beginning of the article, contests this belief as well:

*You may argue that he was not defiled in her womb, since Mary had ceased to menstruate and it was the spirit that entered her; subsequently, he came out unaccompanied by pain or the defilement of blood. The answer is that you yourselves admit that she brought the sacrifice of a child-bearing woman. Now it is clear that this sacrifice is brought as a consequence of impurity ...*⁶⁰

However, theological discourse is a male discourse. Ultimately, even the 'gentler' stories of female comradeship reflect male Christian fantasies about Jewish women, just as the discourse of Jewish polemical literature reflects the views of Jewish men about Mary and about women in general. What Jewish women in the Middle Ages really thought about Mary is an as yet unsettled question.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Samuel Krauss, *The Jewish-Christian Controversy: from the Earliest Times to 1789*, ed. and rev. by William Horbury, Tübingen: Mohr, 1996; Heinz Schreckenberg, *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos-Texte und Ihr Literarisches Und Historisches Umfeld*, Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1982, 1988, 1994.
- 2 There is a voluminous body of scholarly literature about Mary in Christian belief. See, for example, the following summaries: Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture*, New Haven: Yale UP, 1996; Marina Warner, *Alone of All her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, New York: Knopf, 1976; Klaus Schreiner, *Maria: Jungfrau. Mutter. Herrscherin*, Munich: Hanser, 1994.
- 3 The Protevangelium of James, in *New Testament Apocrypha*, rev. edition, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990, vol. 1, pp. 421–38.
- 4 See below.
- 5 Stephen J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002, pp. 81–98; Ora Limor, "Eastern Sites in Western Eyes: The Sacred Map of Mary" (forthcoming).
- 6 Procopius, *Buildings*, 5:6, trans. H. B. Dewing and G. Downey (Loeb Classical Library), London: Heinemann, 1940.
- 7 David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages: A Critical Edition of the Nizzahon Vetus*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979, chap. 6, p. 44. See also his appendix in the same volume, "God in the Womb and the Problem of the Incarnation", pp. 350–4. On Mary and the Jews see lately: Johannes Heil and Rainer Kampling (eds.), *Maria – Tochter Zion? Mariologie, Marienfrömmigkeit und Judenfeindschaft*, Paderborn: Schöningh, 2001. Two recent works deal with the similarity between the Christian image of Mary and feminine images of God in Judaism: Peter Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God from the Bible to the Early Kabbalah*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002, pp. 173–216; Arthur Green, *Shekhinah, the Virgin Mary, and the Song of Songs*, Jerusalem 2003 (in Hebrew).
- 8 See Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, pp. 350–4, who supplies references to further polemical literature. The passage quoted is not the only relevant one in *Nizzahon Vetus*. For further excerpts see *Ibid.*, Index, s.v. "Mary". Cf. Yom Tov Lipmann Muelhausen, *Sefer ha-Nizzahon* (photographic reproduction of ed. Hackspan, Altdorf-Nürnberg 1744), Jerusalem 1984, chap. 8. The subject of Mary in the

Mary and the Jews: Story, Controversy, and Testimony

polemical literature has yet to be discussed thoroughly.

- 9 Jacob Z. Lauterbach, "Jesus in the Talmud", in: *Rabbinic Essays*, Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1951, pp. 473–570; William Horbury, "A Critical Examination of the Toledoth Jeshu", Ph.D. Thesis, Cambridge, 1971.
- 10 Johann Christoph Wagenseil, *Tela Ignea Satanae*, Altdorf 1681; Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen*, Berlin: Calvary, 1902; Ora Limor, "Judaism Looks at Christianity: The Book of Nestor the Priest and *Sefer Toledot Yeshu*", *Pe'amim* 75 (1998), pp. 28–109 (in Hebrew).
- 11 Amos Funkenstein, "History, Counterhistory and Narrative", *Alpayim* 4 (1991), p. 210 (in Hebrew).
- 12 Only in 1854 was the dogma of the Immaculate Conception defined by the Roman Catholic Church. See Warner, *Alone of all her Sex*, pp. 236–54; Pelikan, *Mary through the Centuries*, pp. 189–200.
- 13 Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 18, 46, ed. Bernardus Dombart and Alphonsus Kalb, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina (CCSL)* 47–48, Turnhout: Brepols, 1955.
- 14 Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jews in Medieval Christianity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, pp. 2–3. On the doctrine of the Jewish witness, see pp. 23–65.
- 15 See Ora Limor, "Christian Sacred Space and the Jew", in Jeremy Cohen (ed.), *From Witness to Witchcraft. Jews and Judaism in Medieval Christian Thought* (= Wolfenbütteler Mittelalter-Studien 11), Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996, pp. 55–77. In that paper I presented a few examples of witness narratives of this type relating to holy places and objects in the Holy Land.
- 16 J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies*, London: Duckworth, 1975, pp. 153–67.
- 17 Antoine Wenger, *L'Assomption de la T. S. Vierge dans la tradition byzantine du Ve au Xe siècle. Études et documents*, Paris, 1955; Frédéric Manns, *Le récit de la Dormition de Marie*, Jerusalem, 1989; Simon Claude Mimouni, *Dormition et Assomption de Marie: Histoire des traditions anciennes*, Paris: Beauchesne, 1995; Mary Clayton, *The Apocryphal Gospels of Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998; Stephen J. Shoemaker, "'Let Us Go and Burn Her Body': The Image of the Jews in the Early Dormition Traditions", *Church History* 68 (1999), pp. 775–823. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, pp. 290–414; Michel van Esbroeck, "Les textes littéraires sur L'Assomption avant le Xe siècle", F. Bovon et al. (eds), *Les actes apocryphes des apôtres: christianisme et monde païen*, Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1981, pp. 265–85 (reprinted in Michel van Esbroeck, *Aux origines de la Dormition de la Vierge*, Aldershot: Variorum, 1995); Schäfer, *Mirror of his Beauty*, pp. 172–91.
- 18 Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, pp. 788–9.
- 19 The names may have some interpretive significance: Zephaniah is derived from the Hebrew root *z-f-n*, "to hide", so that Zephaniah is the one who reveals what is hidden; and the first part of the name Reuben is derived from a root meaning "to see", so that Reuben is one who sees the truth.
- 20 Scholars have noted the similarity between this story and the biblical account of Uzzah, who touched the Ark of the Lord (2 Sam. 6:1–8; 1 Chron. 13:9–14). In Christian tradition Mary has a variety of designations, including "tabernacle", i.e. the receptacle that previously held the Messiah; and "Ark of the Covenant", representing the New Testament. See Warner, *Alone of All her Sex*, pp. 11, 31.
- 21 Summary based on Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, pp. 789–90.
- 22 The belief that Mary was transported physically into heaven was debated among Christian scholars. A papal bull issued in 1950, *Munificentissimus Deus*, proclaimed it to be a dogma of the Catholic Church; see Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, pp. 9–10.

- 23 Denise L. Despres, "Immaculate Flesh and the Social Body: Mary and the Jews", *Jewish History* 12 (1998), pp. 47–69 (56–7); Clayton, *The Apocryphal Gospels*, p. 2.
- 24 Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, ed. Th. Graesse, Dresden and Leipzig, 1846, p. 527.
- 25 de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, pp. 504–27.
- 26 Ludmila Wratislaw-Mitrovic and N. Okunev, "La Dormition de la Sainte Vierge dans la peinture médiévale orthodoxe", *Byzantinoslavica* 3 (1931), pp. 134–180; Schäfer, *Mirror of his Beauty*, pp. 179–91.
- 27 Armenian Guide, in John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades*, rev. ed., Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 2002, p. 166; Epiphanius the Monk, in Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, p. 212; *Vitae Willibaldi et Wynnebalidi auctore sanctimoniali Heidenheimensis*, ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores*, 15:1 (1887), pp. 97–8. For later periods see for example the account by Niccolo da Poggibonsi (1346–1350): Fra Niccolo da Poggibonsi, *Libro d'Oltramare (1346–1350)*, eds. A. Bacchi della Lega and B. Bagatti, Jerusalem, 1945, pp. 40–1.
- 28 Shmuel Safrai, "The Jewish Community in Galilee and the Golan in the Third and Fourth Centuries", in Zvi Baras et al. (eds), *Eretz Israel from the Destruction of the Second Temple to the Muslim Conquest*, Jerusalem, 1982, pp. 144–79 (in Hebrew).
- 29 Antoninus, *Itinerarium*, 5, ed. P. Geyer, *CCSL* 175, Turnhout: Brepols, 1965, pp. 13–131; English translation: John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, p. 132.
- 30 For local Galilean rituals see Elchanan Reiner, "Between Joshua and Jesus: From Biblical Story to Local Myth (A Chapter in the Religious World of Jews in Galilee)", *Zion* 61 (1996), pp. 281–317 (in Hebrew); a typical example of Marian ritual shared by adherents of different religions may be found in Sa'idnaya, near Damascus. See Benjamin Z. Kedar, "Convergences of Oriental Christian, Muslim, and Frankish Worshippers: The Case of Saydnaya", in Yitzhak Hen (ed.), *De Sion exhibit lex et verbum domini de Hierusalem. Essays on Medieval Law, Liturgy and Literature in Honour of Amnon Linder*, Turnhout: Brepols 2001, pp. 59–69; Bernard Hamilton, "Our Lady of Saidnaya: An Orthodox Shrine revered by Muslims and Knights Templars at the Time of the Crusades", in R. N. Swanson (ed.), *The Holy Land, Holy Lands and Christian History*, Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2000, pp. 207–15; Daniel Baraz, "The Incarnated Icon of Saidnaya Goes West: A Re-examination of the Motif in the Light of New Manuscript Evidence", *Le Muséon* 108 (1995), pp. 181–91; See also: Ora Limor, "Sharing Sacred Space: Holy Places in Jerusalem between Judaism, Christianity and Islam" (forthcoming).
- 31 For example, the Tomb of the Virgin in the Valley of Jehoshaphat; see Poggibonsi, *Libro d'Oltramare*, p. 51; Amikam Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship: Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage*, Leiden: Brill, 1999, pp. 138–41.
- 32 See, for example, Arnold von Harff's account, describing the ecumenical belief in the sanctity of the ground in the cave of St Mary near Bethlehem: *The Pilgrimage of Arnold von Harff*, trans. and ed. Malcolm Letts, London: Hakluyt Society, 1946, p. 189.
- 33 Despres, "Immaculate Flesh", p. 56.
- 34 For the Jerusalem tradition see Michel van Esbroeck, "Le culte de la vierge de Jérusalem à Constantinople aux 6e–7e siècles", *Revue de Études Byzantines* 46 (1988), pp. 181–90 (= *Aux origins de la Dormition de la Vierge*); Mimouni, *Dormition et Assomption*, pp. 632–44; Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, pp. 521–2.
- 35 Wenger, *L'Assomption de la Vierge*, pp. 110–39, 293–311; Norman Baynes, "The Finding of the Virgin's Robe", *Annuaire de l'Institute de Philologie et d'Histoire orientales et slaves* 9 (1949), pp. 87–95 (= Byz-

antine Studies and Other Essays, London: Athlone Press, 1955, pp. 240–47). My summary here is based mainly on Wenger. See also Limor, “Christian Sacred Space and the Jew”, pp. 66–9; Averil Cameron, “The Virgin’s Robe: An Episode in the History of Early Seventh-Century Constantinople”, *Byzantion* 49 (1979), pp. 42–56 (= *Continuity and Change in Sixth-Century Byzantium*, London: Variorum, 1981). On the role played by devotion to Mary in Byzantine Constantinople, see: Vasiliki Limberis, *Divine Heiress: The Virgin Mary and the Creation of Byzantine Constantinople*, London: Routledge, 1994.

- 36 The brothers were Arians, but later went over to Catholicism.
- 37 In Baynes’ version, taken from an eleventh-century *Monologium*, the fact that the Jewess, like all previous guardians of the robe, was a virgin is emphasised. The same version also describes her in glowing terms, not found in Wenger’s earlier version: “Her age and white hair made her reverend, and she was rendered much more radiant by the beauty of her virtues. It was she who had been constituted guardian of the Virgin’s robe and how should this have been if she had not been adorned by virtues and purity of soul? And yet the woman was a Jewess – for the truth is precious – and one would have said that, though her soul was unilluminated, it was ready and completely fitted to receive the light” (Baynes, “The Finding of the Virgin’s Robe”, p. 241).
- 38 In Baynes’ version, the woman divulges the secret of her own accord, after the brothers remonstrate with her, since she was the last virgin left in her family. According to this version, all the guardians of the robe were virgins. The old lady who gave the brothers lodging was the last virgin in her family, this being the justification for divulging the secret. Moreover, in Baynes’ version the woman at first attributes the sanctity of the robe to a divine revelation that took place there, that is, to a Jewish source, but the brothers are not convinced (Baynes, “The Finding of the Virgin’s Robe”, p. 242).
- 39 Wenger, *L’Assomption de la Vierge*, p. 135.
- 40 Baynes, “The Finding of the Virgin’s Robe”, p. 245. For theft of sacred relics in the early Middle Ages, see Patrick J. Geary, *Furta Sacra: Theft of Relics in the Central Middle Ages*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978.
- 41 Judaism was frequently compared to an old woman in Christian anti-Jewish polemics; see, for example, “Disputatio Ecclesiae et Synagogae”, in Edmund Martène and Ursin Durand (eds), *Thesaurus Novus Anecdotorum*, vol. V, Paris 1717, cols. 1500–1.
- 42 Baynes, “The Finding of the Virgin’s Robe”, p. 245.
- 43 For icons in early Christianity, see Ernst Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images in the Ages before Iconoclasm”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954), pp. 83–150. For the connection between Jews and the cult of images, see pp. 129–30. An earlier story than the one quoted here, concerning an attempt by Jews to damage an icon of Jesus, is brought by Gregorius Turonensis, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, 21, ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH, SRM, 1, 2, Hannover 1885, p. 51.
- 44 *Adamnan’s De Locis Sanctis*, 3,5, ed. Denis Meehan, Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1958, pp. 118–19.
- 45 W. H. Worrell (ed.), *The Coptic Manuscripts in the Freer Collection*, New York: Macmillan, 1923, pp. 359–79.
- 46 However, even before he converts the bishop declares that the merciful God would forgive the Jew, for the Holy Virgin Mary was of the Jews (*The Coptic Manuscripts*, p. 373).
- 47 Peter Brown, “A Dark Age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy”, *English Historical Review* 88 (1973), pp. 1–34.

- 48 Norman H. Baynes, "The Icons before Iconoclasm", *Harvard Theological Review* 44 (1951), pp. 93–106; Vincent Déroche, "L'Apologie contre les Juifs de Léontios de Néapolis", *Travaux et mémoires* 12 (1994), 45–104. For the cult of images in Jewish-Christian polemics see, for example, Ora Limor, *Die Disputationen zu Ceuta (1179) und Mallorca (1286): Zwei antijüdische Schriften aus dem mittelalterlichen Genua* (= Quellen zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 15), Munich: Monumenta Germaniae Historica, 1994, pp. 289–92.
- 49 For example, *Nizzahon Vetus*, Chap. 88 (Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate*).
- 50 Recall that the Talmud relates that Jesus was condemned to be tortured in hell in boiling faeces (Bab. Talmud, Gittin 57a). See Christoph Cluse, "Stories of Breaking and Taking the Cross: A Possible Context for the Oxford Incident of 1268", *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 15 (1995), p. 418; Israel J. Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians*, Tel Aviv, 2000, p. 210 (in Hebrew). One should also recall the story of Judas Iscariot, who hanged himself in his remorse at having betrayed Jesus; the New Testament relates that "falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out" (Acts 1:18).
- 51 Gavin I. Langmuir, "The Knight's Tale of Young Hugh of Lincoln", *Speculum* 47 (1972), pp. 459–82.
- 52 Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, ed. A. Kent Hieatt and Constance Hieatt, New York: Bantam, 1964, p. 377.
- 53 Christoph. Cluse, "'Fabula ineptissima': Die Ritualmordlegende um Adam von Bristol nach der Handschrift London, British Library, Harley 957", *Aschkenaz – Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur der Juden* 5 (1995), pp. 293–328; Robert C. Stacey, "From Ritual Crucifixion to Host Desecration: Jews and the Body of Christ", *Jewish History* 12 (1998), pp. 11–28.
- 54 For the veneration of the Virgin Mary in the context of Jewish-Christian relations in the Middle Ages, see William Chester Jordan, "Marian Devotion and the Talmud Trial of 1240", in Bernard Lewis and Friedrich Niewöhner (eds), *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992, pp. 61–76. For synagogues being converted to churches in Mary's honour, symbolic of her triumph, see Hedwig Rockelein, "Marie, L'église et la Synagogue: Culte de la Vierge et lutte contre les Juifs en Allemagne à la fin du Moyen Âge", in Dominique Igona-Prat, Éric Palazzo and Daniel Russo (eds), *Marie: Le Culte de la Vierge dans la Société Médiévale*, Paris: Beauchesne, 1996, pp. 513–31.
- 55 It is no accident that the libel of the desecration of the Host appeared around the time of the definitive, binding formulation of the doctrine of transubstantiation: Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews*, New Haven: Yale UP, 1999, pp. 95–6.
- 56 The legend of the wandering Jew is later than the period discussed here but nevertheless worth of mentioning in this context: Galit Hasan-Rokem and Alan Dundes (eds), *The Wandering Jew: Essays in the Interpretation of a Christian Legend*, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986.
- 57 Gregorius Turonensis, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, 9, pp. 44–5; Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, pp. 7–39.
- 58 Stacey, "From Ritual Crucifixion to Host Desecration", p. 18.
- 59 Fredric C. Tubach, *Index Exemplorum*, Helsinki: Folklore Fellows Communications, 1969, p. 221, no. 2806; Michele Tarayre, *La vierge et le miracle. Le Speculum historiale de Vincent de Beauvais*, Paris: H. Champion, 1999, pp. 91–4; Johannes Herlot, *Miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, trans. C. C. Swinton Bland, London: Routledge, 1928, pp. 35–6; Despres, "Immaculate Flesh", p. 58.
- 60 *Nizzahon Vetus*, chap. 6, in Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, p. 44.