

Evidence of Innocence Sought in Vain

This is one of the (few early) passages that Goldstein judges to be a possibly authentic reference to Jesus. He identifies two difficulties: the details do not fit well with the gospel accounts, and Yeshu / Yeshua / Yeshoshua (all forms of the same name) was an extremely common name. In its favor, the fact that this Yeshu is executed around Passover, as was Jesus, makes it less likely that it intends some other Yeshu/a. Differences in detail probably simply reflect a tradition widely divergent from the Christian gospels. There is, as with many of these stories, the strong possibility that stories about other Yeshu/as or accused magicians have mingled with authentic Jesus traditions to create a new story. The story is hard to date with any confidence, but it cannot be later than about 220, CE ([Goldstein:29](#)). The italicized section is Amoraic, 4th c. at the earliest. [AH]

Baraita Bab. Sanhedrin 43a
The translation is informed by both [Goldstein:22,109ff](#) and [Mead:178f,210f](#).

There is a tradition (in a Baraita): They hanged Yeshu on the Sabbath of the Passover[1]. But for forty days before that a herald went in front of him (crying), "Yeshu is to be stoned because he practiced sorcery and seduced Israel and lead them away from God[2]. Anyone who can provide evidence on his behalf should come forward to defend him." When, however, nothing favorable about him was found, he was hanged on the Sabbath of the Passover[1].

Ulla[3] commented: "Do you think that he belongs among those for whom redeeming evidence is sought? Rather, he was a seducer [of whom] the All-merciful has said: 'Show them no pity... and do not shield them.' (Deut 13.8b NRSV)[4] In Yeshu's case, however, an exception was made because he was close to those who held [political/religious] authority."

Jesus' Students/Disciples

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This is in the same larger context. Who, exactly, these disciples are is not clear. Mattai is likely to be Matthew. For the others scholarship has resorted to what is, at best, educated speculation. The fact that there are five rather than twelve suggests that we look elsewhere than Christian tradition to solve the problem. It may not be coincidence that both Yohanan b. Zakkai and Akiba each have five students ([Goldstein:32](#)). The italicized section is Amoraic, and, incidentally, contains several bad etymologies (Mattai/mathai, Nakki/naki, bunnibeni). [AH]

There is a tradition (in a Baraita): Yeshu had five students[4]: Mattai, Nakkai, Netzer, Buni, and Todah.

When Mattai was brought to trial, he said to the judges, "Should Mattai be executed? But scripture says, 'When [mathai] shall I come and behold the face of God?'" (Ps 42.2b RSV) They replied, "Yes, Mattai should be executed, for scripture says, 'When will he die, and his name perish?'" (Ps 41.5b RSV)

When Nakkai was brought, he said to them, "Should Nakkai be executed? But scripture says, 'Do not slay the innocent[naki] and righteous.'" (Ex 23.7b RSV) They replied, "Yes, Nakkai should be executed, for scripture says, 'in hiding places he murders the innocent.'" (Ps 10.8b RSV)

When Netzer was brought, he said to them, "Should Netzer be executed? But scripture says, 'a branch[netzer] shall grow out of his roots.'" (Is 11.1b RSV) They replied, "Yes, Netzer should be executed,

for scripture says, 'you are cast out, away from your sepulchre, like a loathed **branch**.'" (Is 14.19a RSV)

When Bunni was brought, he said to them, "Should Bunni be executed? But scripture says, 'Israel is **my firstborn son[beni]**.'" (Ex 4.22b RSV) They replied, "Yes, Bunni should be executed, for scripture says, 'behold, I will slay **your firstborn son[benkha]**.'" (Ex 4.23b RSV)

When Todah was brought, he said to them, "Should Todah be executed? But scripture says, 'A psalm for **Thanksgiving [todah]**.'" (Ps 100.heading RSV) They replied, "Yes, Todah should be executed, for scripture says, 'He who brings **thanksgiving** as his sacrifice honors me.'" (Ps 50.23a RSV)

[1] 'Sabbath of the Passover'. alt: 'on the eve of the Passover.' One ms. reads "on the Sabbath on the eve of Passover.'

[2] See the same charge in [Sanhedrin 107b](#) and [Sota 47a](#).

[3] Ulla. Late 3rd / early 4th c. CE ([Goldstein:109](#)).

[4] Deuteronomy 13.6-9 command that those who lead Israel to worship other gods are to be executed:

If anyone secretly entices you... saying, "Let us worship other gods",... you must not yield to or heed any such persons. Show them no pity or compassion and do not shield them. But you shall surely kill them; your own hand shall be first against them to execute them, and afterwards the hand of all the people. [NRSV].

[5] 'Students': or 'disciples'. Heb: *talmidim*. See the discussion in the introduction above..



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Simeon b. Azzai finds a Genealogy

This brief passage is the only presumed reference to Jesus in the Mishna. That it refers to Jesus depends on the supposition that *peloni*, 'so and so,' is a veiled reference to Jesus. There is reasonable evidence that in later Talmudic literature this is often, perhaps exclusively, the case. It is problematic in this case, though. In the later literature the Rabbinic authors may have had good reason to be careful about overt negative references to Jesus, but no such constraint hindered the compilers of the Mishna. There is, of course, the possibility that the text was originally explicit, and that *peloni* was substituted for *yeshu* when it became politically expedient. It seems more likely however that the referent was someone with more political clout on whom the Rabbis take a subtle delight in finding 'dirt'. See [Goldstein](#) for a fuller discussion.

B. Yebamoth 49a, M. Yebamoth 4.13
Translation, quoted from [Mead](#).

Simeon ben Azzai has said: I found in Jerusalem a book of genealogies; therein was written: That *so and so* is a bastard son of a married woman.



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Yeshu and Joshua b. Perachiah

This story cannot be directly connected with any of the traditional events in the life of Jesus, and it is set about 100 years before Jesus presumably lived. Yeshu/Yeshua is not an uncommon name, and it may be that we simply have a story about a Jewish 'bad boy' whose name happens to be the same as Jesus'. But as the last sentence (only in the Sanhedrin version) demonstrates, whatever the original intent of the story, it came to be connected with the Yeshu/Jesus traditions in the early medieval period. Even the historical setting -- the reign of Jannai (Alexander Jannaeus, reigned 103-76 BC) -- seems to have stuck, and is clearly embedded in the [Toldoth](#) traditions.

Sanhedrin 107b || Sota 47a (except for the last sentence)

This is mostly a somewhat modernized version of A.M. Streane's translation, quoted in [Mead](#), pp. 137f. My modernization has been informed by [Goldstein's](#) translation of the same text (pp. 73f)

The Rabbis taught: The left should always be used to push away, and the right, on the other hand to draw nearer. But one should not do it as Elisha who pushed Gehazi away, nor as R. Joshua ben Perachiah, who pushed away Yeshu with both hands. What was the problem with R. Joshua ben Perachiah? When King Jannai ordered the extermination of the Rabbis, R. Joshua ben Perachiah and Yeshu fled to Alexandria. When it was safe to return, Rabbi Simeon ben Shetach sent him a letter:

From me, Jerusalem the holy city, to the Alexandria in Egypt, my sister. My spouse tarries in your midst, and I sit desolate.

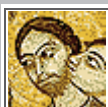
Joshua set off at once. During the trip they happened upon an inn in which they treated him with great respect. Joshua commented, "How fair is this inn^[1]." Yeshu replied, "But Rabbi, she^[1] has unattractive eyes."^[2] Joshua replied, "You godless person, do you fill your mind with such things?" Then he had 400 trumpets sounded and anathematized him. Yeshu often came and said to him, "Receive me back." Joshua paid no attention. One day, while Joshua was reciting the Shema, Yeshu came to him, hoping for a reprieve. Joshua made a sign to him with his hand. ^[3] Yeshu misunderstood, thinking he had been repulsed, so he went away set up a brick and worshipped it. Joshua said to him, "Repent!" Yeshu replied, "I learned this from you: 'Anyone who sins and causes the people to sin, is not allowed the possibility of repentance.'"

[The Teacher said: "Yeshu practiced sorcery and corrupted and misled Israel."]

[1] *akhsanya* can mean either 'inn' or 'hostess'. Joshua intends one meaning, Yeshu hears another. On the subject of word plays, it may not be accidental in this story that 'Yeshu' is a diminutive form of 'Joshua'.

[2] Or perhaps "she is near-sighted".

[3] Presumably the hand sign meant that Yeshu should wait until Joshua had finished the Shema.



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