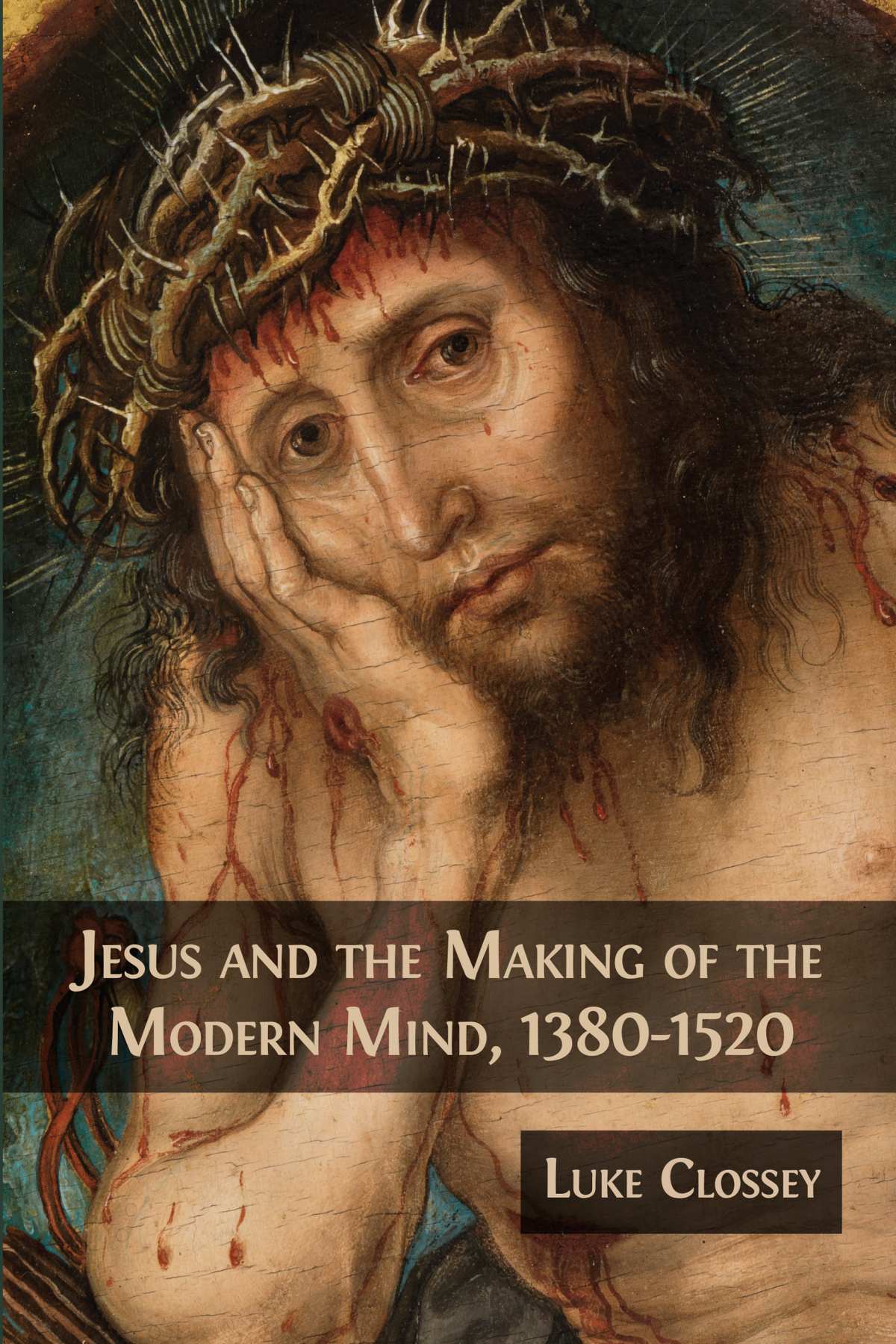

Jesus and the Making of the Modern Mind, 1380-1520

Luke Clossey

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ISBN Paperback: 978-1-80064-818-0

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-78374-957-7

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-80511-001-9

ISBN Digital eBook (EPUB): 978-1-80064-305-5

ISBN HTML: 978-1-80064-307-9

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0371

Cover image: Albrecht Dürer, *Christ as Man of Sorrows* (ca. 1492–93), Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, https://www.kunsthalle-karlsruhe.de/kunstwerke/Albrecht-D%C3%BCrer/Christus-als-Schmerzensmann/4CF6CD9D45DD6B1AC91CECAE9EC57F44/

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4. The Many Lives of Jesus

We moderns like texts. Jesus looms behind that preference. In the fifteenth century, a religious Reformation against the Church began in Christian Bohemia that emphasized looking at the Bible as a source of authority. That focus developed as the Reformation unfolded, eventually influencing both the established Church itself as well as members of the embryonic historical profession. The call of the instructor of a university history course to "cite your sources!" echoes the Bohemian reformers' call to return—*ad fontes!*—"to the sources," to find the most reliable teachings of Christian doctrine.

Jesus cultists collected data about him from a variety of sources. The Italian scholar Cecco d'Ascoli (ca. 1269–1327) had argued that one event in Jesus's life, his birth, could be calculated entirely from his astrological horoscope. This was not a widespread belief—Cecco became the first university don executed after an inquisitional investigation—but suggests the ingenious paths taken in the pursuit of Jesus knowledge.[1] Other scholars used their knowledge of human biology to make conclusions about the physiology of Jesus's gastrointestinal tract after his Resurrection. This, too, annoyed contemporaries such as the Lollards, although it was a Lollard who himself was able to derive all sorts of knowledge about Jesus solely from the fact that he chose fishermen as his disciples.[2] The deep ken could find an entire biography encoded in a grain of information.

The previous chapter offered a consensus narrative of Jesus's life; this chapter examines some of the sources of the Jesus information available to his cultists in 1400. We begin with the Qur'an, to explain both its special nature and its importance for the Jesus cult. Turning beyond canon, we then consider unusual kinds of paracanonical Jesus-related written documents: charters that spoke in legal language, gospel harmonies that blended the four canonical gospels

1 Giovanni Villani, *Nuova Cronica* (Florence: Celli e Ronchi, Gasparo Ricci, 1832), 63–64.

2 John Wycliffe, *Sermons on the Ferial Gospels and Sunday Epistles; Treatises*, in *Select English Works*, ed. Thomas Arnold, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1871), II, 136–37. See Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 218.

 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0371.04

into a single narrative, a passage from a Timurid universal history, and a hostile retelling of the Jesus life from a Jewish perspective.

Qur'an

Given its prominence in Islam, the most important Jesus-related book in 1400 might well have been the Qur'an. Unlike the gospels, the Qur'an is not trying to tell the story of Jesus's life, nor is it really intent on telling any story at all. The Qur'an's some 77,000 words are divided into 114 surahs, which are arranged in a rough order by decreasing length rather than by chronology: its deep-ken interest in beauty completely overshadowed any plain-ken priority for narrative. There are few proper names of people or places to root it in a clear temporal setting. We read the names of a half dozen peoples, mostly religious groups (Christians, Jews, Sabians, Magians) but sometimes not (Romans, Quraysh), and not many more place names, usually locations of battle or pilgrimage.[3] The aim is not historical; that is, a narrative might conclude before its climax, which might be in another surah, if at all. For example, when his disciples requested a feast from heaven, Jesus repeated the request to God, who replies, "I will send you down a feast from heaven"—but no shazam-verse "and so God sent down a feast from heaven" is recorded. When God promises action, the reader knows that action will happen, without any explicit report. Similarly, 3:49 explains that God would send Jesus who would do certain miracles, but the Qur'an does not record the completion of those miracles.[4]

Instead, the Qur'an is making an argument from awesome authority. The Qur'an self-identifies as light and as a revelation, a *tanzil*, literally a "sending down."[5] Through prophecy, God makes the unseen visible.[6] The Qur'an preserves the structure of its revelation: when God tells Muhammad to "Say x, y, and z," his prophet does not simply recite x, y, and z, but intones the full "Say x, y, and z." Like a Christian sacrament, an *ayah* is a visible "sign" or "evidence" of an invisible truth, a demonstrative manifestation of divine power. By extension, the word came to refer to verses of the Qur'an, the great and only miracle of Muhammad. A textual *ayah*, like any miracle, reminds the faithful of the truth of

3 Michael Cook, *Muhammad* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983), 69–70.

4 Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "An Introduction to Medieval Interpretation of the Quran," in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam*, ed. Joseph W. Goering, Jane Dammen McAuliffe and Barry Walfish (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), 311–19 (317), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195137279.003.0020

5 Qur'an 4:174, 17:105.

6 Qur'an 3:179, 72:26–27.

God. The Qur'an also distinguishes between first-hand experiential knowledge and revelation: regarding Mary, God told Muhammad, "This is an account of things beyond your knowledge that We reveal to you: You were not present…"[7]

The Egyptian scholar al-Suyuti (1445–1505) contextualized the Qur'an as a miracle in a history of miracles that stretched across the deep-plain-ken divide. The prophet Moses, he explained, miraculously transformed a staff into a snake, but this was a merely plain-ken miracle that occurred at a particular time and place. Because "what is perceived by the eye […] disappears with the disappearance of the person seeing," such miracles had all "disappeared with the disappearance of their times, and so were only witnessed by their contemporaries." In contrast, the miracle of the Qur'an was permanent, and independent of time and space. Anyone, at any time and any place, could verify its truth. Even the standards of miracles changed through history: Moses impressed by performing magical miracles in an era of peak magic. Jesus impressed by performing healing miracles in an era of peak medicine. Muhammad's Qur'an impressed by being a speech-miracle in an era of peak eloquence.[8]

Although the Qur'an values deep-ken truth above plain-ken narrative, it recognizes that such truth was revealed in plain-ken time, and thus the two kens swirl in a complex relation around it. According to al-Suyuti, the Qur'an descended in two stages—first from the highest to the lowest heaven, and then it was given serially to Muhammad. The revelation has deep-ken strength, but, according to al-Suyuti, the process of listeners hearing and understanding a revelation occurred *in history*. The Qur'an knows of the Jewish Torah and the Christian Gospel, which it describes as "full of guidance and light."[9] Al-Suyuti noted that the Torah and the Gospel were also revealed in history, in two one-stage descents, during the month of Ramadan. In our terminology, al-Suyuti recognized a deep-ken revelation revealed in plain-ken circumstances.[10]

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7 Qur'an 3:44. See Daniel Madigan, "Themes and Topics," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Quran*, ed. McAuliffe (New York: Cambridge UP, 2006), 79–96 (85), https://doi.org/10.1017/ccol0521831601.005; Angelika Neuwirth, "Structural, Linguistic and Literary Features," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Quran*, ed. McAuliffe, 97–114 (98), https://doi.org/10.1017/ccol0521831601.006; John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2004), 6–7.

8 Al-Suyuti, *Le parfait manuel des sciences coraniques al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān de Ǧalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī (849/1445–911/1505)*, trans. Michel Lagarde (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 1076–77, 1082.

9 Qu'ran 5:46.

10 Al-Suyuti, *Le parfait manuel*, 105–91, esp. 161–69. See Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 36–37. Mirkhvand also described the Gospel as "sent down" to Jesus. Muhammad b. Khavandshah Mirkhvand, *The Rauzat-us-safa, or Garden of Purity*, trans. E.

In the Qur'an, "Jesus" appears twenty-five times.[11] More frequent are explicit references to the prophets Moses, Abraham, Noah, to Joseph, and to his own mother: Mary, the only woman mentioned by name, occurs thirty-four times. Jesus's name occurs five times as often as Muhammad's. Non-name references to Jesus, by his titles for example, total almost two hundred. This is comparable to the frequency of explicit, named references to Jesus in the Bible, and exceeds the number of those to his mother:

7.57% of chapters of the Bible refer explicitly to "Jesus"
6.14% of chapters of the Qur'an refer explicitly to "Jesus"
0.12% of the verses of the Bible refer explicitly to "Jesus"
0.03% of the verses of the Qur'an refer explicitly to "Jesus"
0.15% of the verses of the Bible refer explicitly to "Mary"
0.50% of the verses of the Qur'an refer explicitly to "Mary"

Such statistics depend on perspective. A plain ken would point out that including Old Testament books is problematic, since Jesus could not have appeared in them. A deep ken would object that restricting the view to "explicit" references ignores the many implicit references to Jesus in the Old Testament before he was born. In any case, from my professional-historian plain ken, Jesus and Mary saturate the Christian canon about as much as the Muslim canon.

In addition, the Qur'an was physically more important to the Muslim subcult than the Bible was to the Christian subcult. An extensive literature (*adab al-Qur'an*) on handling the Qur'an developed, often extrapolating from Muhammad's own practice. Special bookstands were fashioned for displaying the Qur'an, and dedicated wooden boxes for holding canon.[12]

Bible

On the other hand, the Bible was not as important in Christianity in 1400 as it would be in 1800. There was little exposure to the Bible. In his sermons, Jean Gerson (1363–1429), the Chancellor of the University of Paris, rarely referred to Bible passages. He more frequently reinforced his points with reference to miracles and narrative stories. If you wanted to buy a Bible, his university was

Rehatsek, ed. F. F. Arbuthnot, 3 vols. (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1892), III, 161, 178.

11 Qur'an 1–6, 9, 19, 21, 23, 33, 42–43, 61, 112.

12 Colin F. Baker, *Qur'an Manuscripts: Calligraphy, Illumination* (London: British Library, 2007) 106–09; David James, *Qur'āns of the Mamlūks* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1988), 33, 177; Anna M. Gade, "Recitation," in *Blackwell Companion to the Quran*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 481–93 (488).

selling some from its library, which owned more than it needed. Gerson was annoyed by the popular fourteenth-century *Tree of Life of the Crucified Jesus* by Ubertino of Casale (1259–ca. 1329), but not because it went beyond the Biblical canon. Rather, Gerson objected to Ubertino's failure to acknowledge the authors of those extra-Biblical sources: "Often he selects and snatches large parts in his own form, staying silent about the authors' names. We don't know if he wants to be Aesop's crow, decorating himself with other birds' feathers."[13] For Gerson, sources for Jesus's life, Biblical and extra-Biblical alike, were valuable both as "sacred" and "authentic."[14]

Biblical content was less prominent in Bibles than it was in oral public worship, in the liturgy. The Bible was most often consumed during worship, processed in fragments, in liturgical units. Even a reader keen to consult the Bible directly would often be physically handling only one part of it at a time, as its different books were often bound separately, sometimes also the case for Qur'ans. A one-volume Bible, a "pandect," was extraordinary, and used mostly for reference. It was also an exceptional reader who thought of the intertextuality of the various Bible components, or of their relationship to the canon as a whole. The more important Christian books were for the liturgy. In terms of numbers, the thirteenth century saw the missal overtake the gospels. The paramount single Jesus book in Christendom in 1400 was the Book of Hours, which was mostly a tool for oral prayer. Books of Hours were more popular even than the Psalter, itself a key Bible book because of its importance in the liturgy.[15]

We can reinforce this point by looking at estate inventories. At his death in 1416, John, Duke of Berry's (1340–1416) library had fifteen Bibles—but fifty-five liturgical books, and that number would have been even higher had he not recently given eight missals to the Sainte-Chapelle in his Bourges palace.[16] In contrast, the vizier Rashid al-Din Hamadani (1247–1318) had a collection

13 Jean Gerson to Jean Bassandi, in *Oeuvres complètes* [OC], ed. Palémon Glorieux, 10 vols. (Paris: Desclée et Cie, 1960), II, 185–86.

14 These key terms occur throughout his writings, but see, for example, OC, VIII, 113, 380–81 and OC, X, 142, 186, 215.

15 G. R. Evans, *Language and Logic of the Bible: The Road to Reformation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1985), 69, https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511555237; Raphael Loewe, "The Medieval History of the Latin Vulgate," in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. G. W. H. Lampe, 3 vols. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1992), II, 102–54 (108–09); Francis Wormald, "Bible Illustration in Medieval Manuscripts," in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. Lampe, II, 309–37 (321–26); Jesse Keskiaho, "Bortom fragmenten: Handskriftsproduktion och boklig kultur i det medeltida Åbo stift," *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland* 93 (2008): 209–52.

16 Raymond Cazelles and Johannes Rathofer, *Illuminations of Heaven and Earth: The Glories of the Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (New York: Abrams, 1988), 86, 203.

of exactly one thousand Qur'ans mentioned in his will.[17] Note that the round number one thousand would arouse suspicion in a modern, plain-ken-inclined historian, but would have inspired a deep-ken sense of appropriateness in the vizier himself.

Paracanon

Jesus material was also available outside the Bible and the Qur'an canons. We can find it prominently spoken in the liturgy, memorized by celebrants,[18] in commentaries, in religious drama, in visual art, in quotations or paraphrases preserved in ancient texts by the Church Fathers—such as the *Diatessaron*, a gospel harmony written by the Assyrian Tatian (ca. 120–80), which survived into our period in a variety of translations, in medieval English, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Persian, Latin, Syriac, Greek, Armenian, and Coptic.[19] The vast majority (90%) of extant medieval parodies concern the Church or the Bible, a fact only partially explained by many of their authors being churchmen.[20]

Let us consider some accounts of Jesus outside the canon. In general, these either summarize the canonical information, or provide richer (deep ken) or local (plain ken) context. The German poet-musician Oswald von Wolkenstein (1376/77–1445) crafted a version of the Crucifixion in which the soldier Longinus was a blind spear, who regained his sight when blood and water spurted from Jesus's side wound into Longinus's eyes. This might have resonated especially with Oswald, who had lost his own right eye. Oswald deepened the gospel story by presenting Longinus as both Jewish, to show the deeper truth of the Jews' treachery, and blind, to show the deeper truth of the possibility of revelation. That poem ends with a Latin curse, meaning "May all be confounded who persecute us." Oswald elsewhere presented Jesus as a prince, reflecting a deeper truth than the humble origins reported in the Gospel.[21]

17 James, *Qur'āns of the Mamlūks*, 127–28.

18 Jean Leclercq, "From Gregory the Great to St. Bernard," in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. Lampe, II, 183–97 (196); Beryl Smalley, "The Bible in the Medieval Schools," in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. Lampe, II, 197–219 (207–08).

19 Harvey McArthur, *The Quest Through the Centuries: The Search for the Historical Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1966), 40; Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (New York: Oxford UP, 2005), 91.

20 Martha Bayless, *Parody in the Middle Ages: The Latin Tradition* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 12, https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.14561

21 Oswald von Wolkenstein, *The Poems of Oswald von Wolkenstein*, trans. Albrecht Classen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 192–96, 207–09, 222–23, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230617179

Paracanonical new information could also come from a plain-ken sensibility. In the fifteenth century, there surfaced in Toledo a letter, ostensibly written in the first century, revealing that local, Toledan Jews had in fact *opposed* the Jerusalem Jews' execution of Jesus.[22] Thus a historical document, valuable in the plain-ken outlook, proved that the Toledo Jews should be spared any punishment appropriate for the Jerusalem Jews. A modern historian might be suspicious of such a convenient discovery; that same plain-ken suspicion is a descendant of the Toledan Jews' enthusiasm for, or fabrication of, this putatively historical document.

The paracanonical accounts appeared in a variety of genres and formats, even if we restrict our gaze to the Muslim subcult. Some manuscripts collected hadith, in which Jesus made appearances, often giving teachings or performing miracles. *Qisas al-Anbiya* [Stories of the Prophets] included Jesus along with the other prophets; these were especially influential in the Persianate world, perhaps because of an earlier Buddhist tradition of lives of saints.[23] The Life of Jesus, with his miracles in the spotlight, found its way into the world history *Mujmal-tawarikh* [Compendium of History] of Hafiz-i Abru (d. 1430), which had been commissioned by the Timurid prince Shah Rukh (1377–1447).[24] Jesus also appeared in a supporting role in the various texts known as *Mi'rajnama* [Book of the Night Journey], which recount Muhammad's ascent into the heavens, and probably influenced the *Divine Comedy* of Dante (ca. 1265–1321).[25]

22 "Carta que fiz traducir de caldeo en latin e romance el noble Rey Don Alfonso que la vila de Toledo conquirio e yaze en el armario del aiuntamiento de Toledo," in *Colección de privilegios concernientes a Toledo*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, MS 838, fol. 3rv. See Adam G. Beaver, "Nebuchadnezzar's Jewish Legions: Sephardic Legends' Journey from Biblical Polemic to Humanist History," in *After Conversion: Iberia and the Emergence of Modernity*, ed. Mercedes García-Arenal (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 21–65, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004324329_003; David Nirenberg, "Mass Conversion and Genealogical Mentalities: Jews and Christians in Fifteenth-Century Spain," *Past & Present* 174 (2002): 3–14, https://doi.org/10.1093/past/174.1.3

23 Miriam Y. Perkins, "Islamic Images of Isa/Jesus in the Chester Beatty Manuscript Collection: Visual Art as Framework for Comparative Christology," *Religion and the Arts* 16 (2012): 488–506 (500), http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/15685292-12341236

24 Detached folio from a *Mujmal-tawarikh*, 1426; r: Jesus and Sam; v: text, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery S1986.132, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, DC, https://asia.si.edu/object/S1986.132/. Some of the content derives from the *Jami'al-tawarikh* [Compendium of Chronicles] of Rashid al-Din Hamadani (d. 1318). See Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision: Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century* (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989), 99.

25 Bridget Pupillo, "Sotto `l velame: The *Commedia*, The *Kitab al-Mi'raj* and Apocalyptic Tradition" (PhD thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 2012).

Gospel Harmonies

Over the long term, the most influential paracanonical accounts of Jesus were the "Gospel Harmonies" that sought to consolidate the four gospels into a single biographical narrative of Jesus's life, a plain-ken motivation which anticipated a more modern historical sensibility. The thirteenth century saw the composition of several such Lives that remained popular in 1400, when a new, but smaller, wave began, including Gerson's (ca. 1400) and the scholarship of al-Biqa'i (1407–80), who synthesized the Christian gospels in the course of his critique of Christian doctrine.

Other works took their own idiosyncratic approaches. In his *De gestis Domini Salvatoris* [Concerning the Deeds of the Lord and Saviour] (ca. 1338–48), Simone Fidati (ca. 1295–48) declined to use apocrypha and preferred to linger on Jesus's speeches rather than his deeds. Fidati's version in its day was quite popular, copied from Holland to Austria.[26] Isabel de Villena (1430–90), the aunt of Queen Isabella I of Castile (1451–1504), wrote a Life of Christ that abandoned a great deal of chronological narrative, as well as the centrality of Jesus, who was repeatedly upstaged by the various women in his life. In terms of format, particularly striking is Guido de Perpignan's (ca. 1270–1342) *Quattuor Unum—Hoc Est Concordia Evangelica* [Four From One, that is Agreement of the Gospels] (1300), which found and displayed its harmony's text in parallel horizontal rows.

A highly influential synthesis was the *Meditations on the Life of Christ* long attributed to Bonaventure (1221–74). Although now often linked to a fourteenth-century Franciscan named Johannes de Caulibus, I follow the more cautious approach of describing its author as "Pseudo-Bonaventure." His understanding of the gospels and the historical world behind them leaned towards the deep ken. Because multiple gospels reported Jesus expelling money changers from the Jerusalem Temple, Jesus must have in fact expelled them multiple times. He ignores Jesus's longer speeches "because these expositions do not always seem to benefit meditations." In general, he adopts a sophisticated attitude to the gospels, interested in their application rather than the trivialities of some impossible "historical truth," the plain-ken playing out of how actions happened to happen. Instead, he works out how Jesus's actions *should* have happened—what actions best consonate with each other, with the true nature of Jesus, and with the needs of the reader. In his prologue, he advises the reader:

26 Simone Fidati, *De gestis domini salvatoris in quatuor evangelistas* (Cologne: Eucharius Cervicornus, 1540).

> You must not believe that all things said and done by Him on which we may meditate are known to us in writing. For the sake of the greater impressiveness I shall tell them to you as they occurred or as they might have occurred according to the devout belief of the imagination and the varying interpretation of the mind [...] Thus when you find it said here, "This was said and done by the Lord Jesus," and by others of whom we read, if it cannot be demonstrated by the Scriptures, you must consider it only as a requirement of devout contemplation. Take it as if I had said, "Suppose that this is what the Lord Jesus said and did" and also for similar things.

This disinterest in a narrow plain-ken historical truth allowed beauty to resonate throughout the work. Taking evidence from a reference in the Psalms (45:2 [44:3]), Pseudo-Bonaventure explains that Jesus is most "beautiful in form above all sons of men." His teachings were "beautiful things," and his sermon "very beautiful and generous"—because, the text explains, it came from his mouth, itself beautiful as well. Some four dozen examples of the word "beauty" (*pulchritudo*, in various forms) appear in the text.[27]

Some of his deep-ken logic gets Pseudo-Bonaventure into difficulties, or at least convolutions. First, he sees a problem with Jn 5:19 ("the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing"). If Jesus Christ, the Son, does what the Father does, and the Father has the Son, then the Son has the Son, which is absurd. Bonaventure avoids the absurdity by deciding that "having a Son" is more a relationship than an activity, and so the Son need not copy the Father. That this is even a problem may seem odd to us, an odd use of a context-blind logic, and we might place his solution somewhere between common sense and an equally uncommon logic. Such arguments, imported into theology from geometry, were thought to be particularly valuable because they were particularly reliable. Geometry, like theology, refers to deep-ken truths, so this interdisciplinarity makes sense. Second, Bonaventure tries to reconcile Jn 6:2 ("a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed") with Jn 6:26 ("Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill"): perhaps the first verse refers to some people, and the second to

27 Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, trans. Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1961), 5, 41, 151–55, 277. The Latin is at Iohannis de Caulibus, *Meditaciones vite Christi olim S. Bonaventuro attributae* (Brepols: Turnhout, 1997), 10, 36, 101, 265. See *Instrumenta lexicologica Latina. Series A, Formae, Fasc. 93, Iohannes de Caulibus Meditaciones vite Christi* (Brepols: Turnhout, 2000), 85.

others, or perhaps they each refer to different times.[28] That is, where the deep ken gets stuck, the plain ken can reconcile the contradiction by imagining a wider historical context.

Indeed, Pseudo-Bonaventure does some historical analysis, despite his assertions of a relaxed attitude towards history, as when he concludes from the absence of information about Jesus's life from age twelve to twenty-nine that nothing important happened then. He also shows his authorities, although accepting a broader range than a modern biography would accept: "I do not intend to affirm anything in this little book that is not asserted or said by Holy Scripture or the word of the saints or by approved opinion."[29]

In contrast, Ludolph of Saxony (ca. 1295–1378) sometimes assumed that two gospels' separate narratives of similar events were in fact the same event, a plain-ken perspective that envisioned a single historical reality behind the text. He made use of apocryphal texts, but considered them less authoritative and flagged them as such.[30]

Nicholas Love (d. ca. 1424) was the prior of the Carthusians' Mount Grace Charterhouse in the 1410s. His enduring fame rested on his *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ.* The inspiration for this work came from Pseudo-Bonaventure's *Meditations* on the life of Jesus, meditative teachings sorted into seven days of the week. While Ludolph expanded the *Meditations*, Love mostly abbreviated them, adapting them for the "symple creatures" of his intended audience. Love praised the Lives of Christ genre for being "plainer" in some passages than the gospels themselves.[31]

We have an unusual opportunity to understand the process of creating a Life in the reflections of Gerson. His goal was to reduce the variety of the gospels into a single unitary Life. Indeed, he mused, the most appropriate of all unities was the true Gospel. Gerson admitted that he could not create a properly historical, synthetic gospel; the best he could do was to make what he called a "probable collation."[32] (See Chapter 12.)

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28 Bonaventure, *Commentarius in Evangelium Ioannis*, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 10 vols. (Florence: Quaracchi, 1893), VI, 310, 326. See Evans, *Language and Logic*, 118–20.

29 Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Meditations*, 94–102, 317–20; de Caulibus, *Meditaciones*, 64–72, 252–55.

30 Ludolphus de Saxonia, *Vita Jesu Christi*, ed. L. M. Rigollot, 4 vols. (Paris: Palmé, 1878).

31 Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, ed. Michael G. Sargent (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), 10.

32 Jean Gerson, "Monotesaron," in *L'oeuvre Doctrinale*, OC, IX, 246–48. See Marijke H. De Lang, "Jean Gerson's Harmony of the Gospels (1420)," *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis* 71 (1991): 37–49; Mary Raschko, "Re-forming the Life of Christ," in *Europe after Wyclif*, ed. J. Patrick Hornbeck II and Michael van Dussen (New York: Fordham UP, 2017), 288–308.

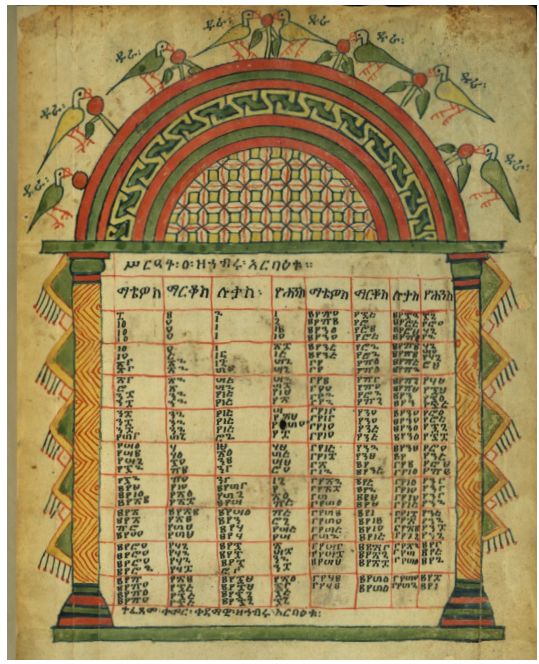

Fig. 4.1 Ethiopian canon table (ca. 1400), Walters MS 1.838, fol. 1r, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, https://www.thedigitalwalters.org/Data/WaltersManuscripts/html/W838/description.html

The most powerful representation of an underlying unity behind the four gospels was visual and analytical. Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339) had developed a series of ten tables that linked each passage to its parallels in the other gospels. This canon table (Fig. 4.1), from a ca. 1400 Ethiopian gospel manuscript, lists passages common to all four gospels. The eight columns are actually a repeated set of four, labelled Matthew (ማቴዎስ), Mark (ማርቆስ), Luke (ሉቃስ), and John (ዮሐንስ). The first line, in the first red-bordered row of four lines, gives the number of the passage in each gospel that links John the Baptist to the "voice in the wilderness" passage from Isaiah (40:3): Matthew's #8 (፰), Mark's #2 (፪), Luke's #7 (፯), and John's #10 (፲). Those numbers are noted in the margins of the text itself, corresponding to passages we identify today as Mt 3:3, Mk 1:3, Lk 3:3-6, and Jn 1:23. Other tables list passages common to triplets (e.g., Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but not John) and to pairs of gospels. A reader could use these tables to jump between parallel passages, like the hyperlinks in today's digital Bibles.[33]

33 See Matthew R. Crawford, *The Eusebian Canon Tables: Ordering Textual Knowledge in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2019); Martin Wallraff, "A

A different approach to synthesizing the gospels' variety was the Jesus genealogy, which existed in many formats. One ca. 1460 manuscript, produced in Slovakia, of a fourteenth-century Italian world chronicle includes just such a genealogy chart for Jesus (see Fig. 4.2).[34] It attempts to represent the complexities of the clues of the gospels in a clear form. Some of the extra-biblical connections it signals are explained by ancient tradition; others might be deduced logically from the importance of the people involved. Jesus Christ is at the bottom-centre, beneath the Virgin Mary, in turn beneath her father Joachim, who is beneath his wife Anne, at the chart's centre. Joseph floats to the left of Mary, but is linked neither to her nor to Jesus. His own ambiguous paternity (Luke's and Matthew's accounts differ) is indicated: one line, in red, links back to Heli and beyond to Matthan, and a second to Jacob. An ancient descent line debated by Celsus and Origen finds Joachim's ancestors in Barpanthera, son of Panther, son of Levi.[35] Two other Biblical Marys, Mary of Clopas and Mary mother of the sons of Zebedee, and their families flank the Virgin on either side.

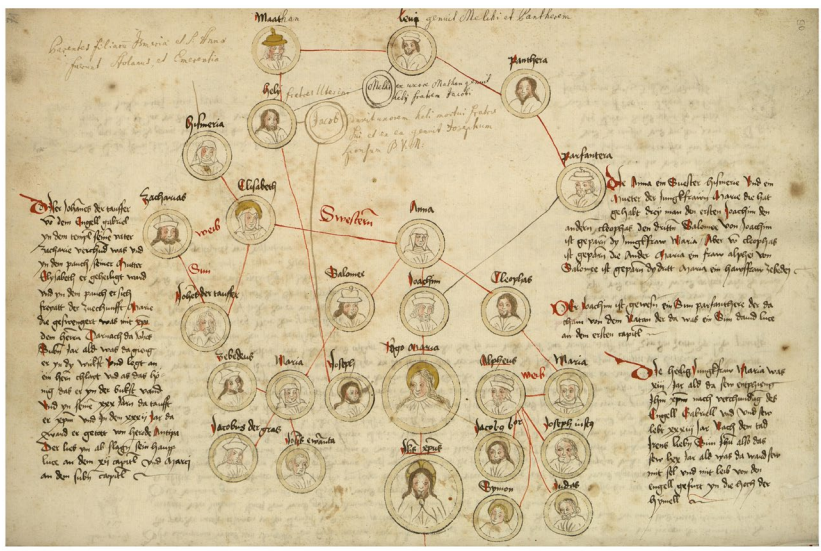

Fig. 4.2 *Genealogy of Jesus* (1458–62), Giovanni da Udine, *Weltchronik*, Slovenská národná knižnica, MS J 324, p. 50, World Digital Library, https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcwdl.wdl_14218/?sp=60

List in Three Dimensions: The Case of Eusebius's Canon Tables of the Gospels," *Synopses and Lists: Textual Practices in the Pre-Modern World*, ed. Teresa Bernheimer and Ronny Vollandt (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2023), 191–214 (195–201), https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0375.07

34 Giovanni da Udine, *Weltchronik*, Slovenská národná knižnica, MS J 324, p. 50.

35 See Johann Nepomuk Sepp, *Das Leben Christi*, 7 vols. (Regensburg: Manz, 1843), I, part 2, 288–90.

Two unusual Lives were composed in Iberia. The Carthusian Juan de Padilla (1468–1522) wrote a long Dantesque poem called the "Retablo de la vida de Cristo" [Altarpiece of the Life of Christ], a tangle of unguents and tears, cleaning and kissing, hair and feet, in octets of thirteen-syllables lines (*tridecasílabo*) of an unaccented syllable followed by four dactyls.[36] The "Carajicomedia" [Prick Comedy] (ca. 1504), allegedly created by a Franciscan translator of Ludolph of Saxony's *Life of Christ*, as a form of recovery after his literary exertions, takes language from the *Life* and reapplies it to an account of sexual escapades. The result is a mash-up of the devotional and the erotic. One sex worker quotes Jesus (Jn 6:37's "whoever comes to me I will never drive away"); another, given counterfeit money, recreates Peter's denial of Christ in Mt 26:74. It uses the language of Jesus's Resurrection to describe bodily risings of a less holy variety. With this text the deep ken hears dissonance, perhaps deepening the salaciousness, between the Jesus language and the bawdy subject.[37]

Drawing from Ludolph of Saxony and Pseudo-Bonaventure, the Devout (see Chapter 20) wrote their own Lives of Jesus. The most famous example of this scholarship was the anonymous Latin manuscript *De Imitatione Christi* [The Imitation of Christ] (ca. 1418–27), attributed to Thomas à Kempis (ca. 1380–1471), a Brother of the Common Life. This work built on the reader's love of God to create a personal, mystical relationship. The manuscript inherited its title from that of its first chapter, "The Imitation of Christ and Contempt for the Vanities of the World." It emphasizes silence, solitude, rejecting external temptations, and "taking up the Cross" which is "always in readiness for you and everywhere awaits you." The text describes this engagement in three-dimensional spatial terms: "Gaze upwards and downwards, look inside you and outside you and everywhere you will find the cross." Only the first of four pamphlets of the *Imitation of Christ* were written by ca. 1420, but it was printed in the 1470s, and almost a thousand copies of the *Imitation* from the fifteenth century survive today.[38] By 1500, over a hundred editions had been printed, in

36 *Retablo dela vida de Cristo fecho en metro por un devoto frayle de la cartuxa* [Altarpiece of the Life of Christ Composed in Meter by a Devout Friar of the Carthusian Order].

37 Frank A. Domínguez, ed. and trans., *Carajicomedia: Parody and Satire in Early Modern Spain* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2015), https://doi.org/10.1017/9781782046974. See Ryan D. Giles, *The Laughter of the Saints: Parodies of Holiness in late Medieval and Renaissance Spain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 25–32.

38 Thomas à Kempis, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Henricus Sommalius, 3 vols. (Cologny: Bousquet, 1759), I, 29; Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. Joseph N. Tylenda (New York: Vintage, 1998), 3, 66–68. The title is *De Imitatione Christi et contemptu omnium vanitatum mundi* [On the Imitation of Christ and the Contempt of All the Vanities of the World]. The reference is to Jn 8:12: "Whoever follows Me will not walk into darkness." A motto associated with Thomas à Kempis, but

five languages. It remains one of the most-translated books today. The Devout's influence was felt even in the fifteenth century; their students included Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64) and Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536).

Charters

Perhaps the least modern paracanonical genre is the charter, a formal legal document defining two parties' rights, which, in its Jesus form, was particularly popular in the lands around the Irish Sea.[39] Christians drew up these charters to consonate with Jesus's role as the charter that granted salvation. The early-fifteenth-century "Short Charter of Christ" exists today in twenty-four manuscript copies, including most famously BodL MS Ashmole 61 (ca. 1500). It is related to similar texts, such as the "Carta dei" and the "Long Charter of Christ." A charter had tremendous authority in contemporary England, and the "Short Charter" is a legal presentation of the Jesus's Passion, complete with legal language and seals. It may be a manifestation of the interpretation of Jesus's last words to his disciples (Mt 28, Mk 16, Acts 1) as a kind of will. Most of the manuscripts end with something like

> And for more security
> The wound in my side, the seal it is
> This was given at Calvary
> Dated the first day of the great mercy.

Ashmole 61 has a drawn seal, "a heraldic shield bearing four suns in each corner and a fifth in the centre," suggesting the five wounds of Jesus.[40] Similar charters

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not known to be recorded before the eighteenth century, runs, "In all things I sought peace, but did not find it, except in nooks and books." The first half was in Latin, and the "except" clause, appropriately, in the Dutch vernacular. See Koen Goudriaan, "Empowerment through Reading, Writing, and Example: The *Devotio moderna*," in *Christianity in Western Europe, c.1100–c.1500*, ed. Miri Rubin and Walter Simons, Cambridge History of Christianity 4 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2010), 407–19 (412–16); John Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 9, 80.

39 On charters, see Salvador Ryan, "'Scarce Anyone Survives a Heart Wound': The Wounded Christ in Irish Bardic Religious Poetry," in *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture*, ed. Larissa Tracy and Kelly DeVries (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 291–312 (300–02), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004306455_015

40 BL MS Ashmole 61, fol. 106r has the seal. See Robert R. Raymo, "Middle English Works of Religious and Philosophical Instruction," in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English: 1050–1500*, ed. Albert E. Hartung, 10 vols. (New Haven, CT: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1986), VII, 2343–44; Mary Caroline Spalding, *The Middle English Charters of Christ* (Bryn Mawr:

exist in Irish, including a ca. 1462 prose translation of the English-language "Long Charter." In some Irish versions, the number of wounds inflates to 5460 or 6666. The Irish also adapted the text to local society by describing Jesus's death in terms of *éiric*, "blood-price," a reference to the traditional Gaelic principle of compensation.[41]

This followed an older tradition of understanding Jesus's wounds as the "true" seals. A preacher's handbook from a century earlier explains:

> Notice that a charter that is written in blood carries with it extreme reliability and produces much admiration. Just such a charter did Christ write for us on the cross when he who was "beautiful above the sons of men" stretched out his blessed body, as a parchment-maker can be seen to spread a hide in the sun. In this way Christ, when his hands and feet were nailed to the cross, offered his body like a charter to be written on. The nails in his hands were used as a quill, and his precious blood as ink. And thus, with this charter he restored to us our heritage that we had lost.[42]

The visible, material seal drew its power through consonance with the perfect eternal seal. Thus, Jesus's blood shed centuries earlier in the deep ken reinforced the authority of this charter as a legal document.

We can see this process visually in a heart illustrating a Jesus charter in a fifteenth-century English manuscript. Jesus here displays a legal document stipulating the terms of the contract between himself and humanity: repent your sins, love God, and love your neighbour, and heaven will be yours. Jesus's heart appears on the seal that authorizes the agreement.[43]

This same legalistic approach to Jesus's life underlies verse Passion retellings of the Irish poet Tadg Óg Ó hUiginn (ca. 1370–1448). In each retelling, he presents the Passion story to one key person or object from the story itself.

Bryn Mawr College, 1914), 12; George Shuffelton, ed., *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008), 512, 522–24, https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/shuffelton-codex-ashmole-61 and https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/shuffelton-codex-ashmole-61-short-charter-of-christ-introduction

41 Andrew Breeze, "The Charter of Christ in Medieval English, Welsh and Irish," *Celtica 19* (1987): 111–20 (116, 119).

42 Siegfried Wenzel, ed., *Fasciculus Morum: A Fourteenth-Century Preacher's Handbook* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1989), 213.

43 BL Add. MS 37049, fol. 23r. See Francis Wormald, "Some Popular Miniatures and Their Rich Relatives," in *Miscellanea Pro Arte: Hermann Schnitzler zur Vollendung des 60. Lebensjahres am 13. Januar 1965* (Dusseldorf: Schwann, 1965), 279–81; Nigel Morgan, "Longinus and the Wounded Heart," *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 46–47 (1994): 507–18 (515).

In each case, a fear of punishment motivates him to seek the protection of his addressee. He tells John the Apostle how much Jesus loved him ("He gave thee His secrets; His knee was thy pillow"), in order to acquire a "warrant" (or spokesman) from him against Jesus's wrath at Judgment. He pleads for John the Baptist's support, while repeatedly stressing John's kin relations with potential advocates. Anxious about his own sins, themselves facilitated by the five senses "betraying" him, he even asks the cross to defend him at Judgment: "Remember, we beseech thee, the back of the hand fixed to thy blood-stained wood, the foot pouring blood, the pierced body stretched on thee." The cross, he explains, is a sealed charter offering legal protection.[44]

A Timurid Synthetic History

One Islamicate world history contains a synthetic Jesus Life that drew from an even broader collection of sources. In Timurid Herat, the historian Mirkhvand (1433/34–1498) began composing what would become the multi-volume *Rawzat al-Safa* [Gardens of Purity].[45] Islamicate history writing was then at a crossroads. Mainstream medieval Muslim tradition, taking its cues from Aristotle (384–322 BC), thought history too dependent on singular, particular, impermanent occurrences—rather than on universal patterns—to be a theoretical science. History was, that is to say, too oriented towards the plain ken. Some historians used the deep ken to recover, buried beneath the particulars of history, precisely those universal patterns.[46] Indeed, Mirkhvand refers to *qibla*, mosque, and Islam, but all of these are contemporary (to Muhammad) ways of expressing phenomena present at the time of Jesus: the *mizrah*, the temple, and true religion.

44 Tadg Óg Ó hUiginn, *Dán Dé: The Poems of Donnchadh Mór Ó Dálaigh and the Religious Poems in the Duanaire of the Yellow Book of Lecan*, ed. L. McKenna (Dublin: Educational Company of Ireland, 1922), 69–70, 72–74, 88–89. See John E. Murphy, "The Religious Mind of the Irish Bards," in *Féilsgríbhinn Eóin Mhic Néill*, ed. John Ryan (Dublin: At the Sign of the Three Candles, 1940), 82–86.

45 Mirkhvand, *The Rauzat-us-safa*, II, 149–84.

46 Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 102–17; Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin, 2004), 3–6 (Alpha 1). See Ali M. Ansari, "Mīrkhwānd and Persian Historiography," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 26 (2016): 249–59, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186315000474; Pedro Moura Carvalho, *Mir'āt Al-Quds (Mirror of Holiness): A Life of Christ for Emperor Akbar* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 63; Stephen Frederic Dale, *The Orange Trees of Marrakesh* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2015), 1–10, https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674495807; Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History: A Study in the Philosophic Foundation of the Science of Culture* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 138–39; Christopher Markiewicz, "History as Science: The Fifteenth-Century Debate in Arabic and Persian," *Journal of Early Modern History* 21 (2017): 216–40, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/15700658-12342525

For Mirkhvand, history was the accumulation of experience and wisdom. If "ignorant persons" should condemn history as "mere fictions and fables of the ancients, commingling truth with falsehood and right with wrong," Mirkhvand answers that we can rely on past historians, who were too "virtuous" to "have taken fiction and untruthfulness as their motto." Historians must be honest and pious, as their salvation depends upon it. Thus "everything handed down to posterity by them is free from defects and imperfections." Nevertheless, he notes that even false histories could potentially have "great advantage and profit," and concludes by consigning ultimate knowledge of true and false to a higher power, for "Allah, however, is most wise!"[47]

What does a Jesus Life synthesized by a pious historian look like? Mirkhvand's Jesus was clearly in the ascetic tradition. He wore wool, was always travelling, and remained mindful of death and the impermanence of worldly things. He never planned ahead about lodging or food, but when night came would sleep wherever he was, with the darkness his canopy, the earth his bed, and a stone his pillow. The stone-pillow he finally gave up, throwing it at Satan who mocked the stone as a token of Jesus's still-too-luxurious lifestyle. Eventually his disciples won his permission to purchase a mount, but planning for that animal's food and water was too distracting for Jesus, who gave him back: "I stand not in need of a thing that attracts my heart…"[48]

The asceticism powered the ability to heal. Jesus's trademark miracle was resurrecting the dead, but often that demonstration of power did not end well. The cases with animals were the most successful: he asked herders for a sheep and a cow, both of which he resurrected and returned after eating them. In Syria, he reluctantly resurrected the son of an oppressive king. However, the locals, fearing a prolongation of the royal family's tyranny, revolted and killed father and son. Jesus resurrected another man to assuage his mother's grief, but the "agonies of death" were so great to the son that Jesus agreed to let him die again. A similar episode occurred in the Kingdom of Nusaybin, to which Jesus dispatched his disciples Thomas and Simon to prepare his way. After outraging local authority by declaring Jesus the "spirit of Allah, and His word, His servant, and His messenger," Thomas was arrested, blinded, mutilated, and then dumped on a dunghill. Simon went to interview Thomas, asking his reasons for making such a declaration, and refuting them. Jesus heals the blind? So do physicians. He animates clay birds? So do sorcerers. Only Thomas's mention of Jesus's Resurrections seems to impress Simon as persuasive. Simon then arranged for Jesus to appear before the king to do a series of miracles, starting with healing Thomas and correctly guessing what the king's attendants had

47 Mirkhvand, *The Rauzat-us-safa*, I, 25–31.
48 Mirkhvand, *The Rauzat-us-safa*, II, 163, 177.

eaten the previous evening. Jesus then asked his audience to choose a kind of bird, any kind, and they, maybe trying to stump him, selected the bat, "because it is a strange bird." Jesus shaped clay into a bat, and breathed life into it. Finally, Jesus resurrected Shem, the son of Noah, who had been dead for four millennia. Shem, however, did "wish not for this miserable life," and convinced Jesus to let him remain dead.[49]

Mirkhvand's account takes terse details from the Qur'an, and fills them out, using the traditions of extrapolations found in other historians' works and even Christian sources. Consider the elaborations on the Qur'an's account of Mary's pregnancy. As in 19:18, Mary modestly or fearfully warns the beautiful Gabriel to stay back "if you are pious." Mirkhvand then explains that "some have asserted that in those days" Mary was speaking to a local womanizer named, with tongue in cheek, Pious. Then Mirkhvand gives two opinions on Jesus's conception: Gabriel breathed on Mary, but "some say" on her sleeve, and some say into her womb. Mirkhvand includes an account of the reaction of Joseph, here Mary's cousin. When she became pregnant, he courteously engaged her in a philosophical discussion, with a hidden agenda. Can a harvest come without a seed? Can a tree grow without water? Can a child be born without a father? Mary wisely explains that God could do or has done all these, as when he created the parentless Adam. Joseph then boldly asked after her pregnancy, which she confirmed was also from God.[50]

Mirkhvand expands on the few relevant Qur'anic verses to paint a human picture of the child John the Baptist, who upset his parents by cultivating a most unchildlike asceticism. John declined to play with neighbourhood kids ("We have not been created for play"), dressed like a monk, and ate so little that "his full moon became a crescent, and his body like a toothpick." He wept frequently, and his father learned not to mention hell within earshot, lest it provoke panic and more penitence. Eventually, his parents stopped fighting him, and decided to let him "live as he likes," as an ascetic. As adults, Jesus and John compared attitudes: Jesus said to John, "I see thee always with a distressed mind; perhaps thou has despaired of the mercy of God." John retorted, "I see thee always smiling; perchance thou are sure of not incurring the displeasure of the Lord?" A later revelation made it known to both that Jesus's optimism had been the correct attitude.[51]

Mirkhvand also offers a major elaboration of the Qur'an in his account of a particular miracle. In that revelation (5:112–15), the disciples asked for a table

49 Mirkhvand, *The Rauzat-us-safa*, II, 165–69, 173–74.
50 Mirkhvand, *The Rauzat-us-safa*, II, 157–58.
51 Mirkhvand, *The Rauzat-us-safa*, II, 150–51.

of food to descend from heaven, as a sign of Jesus's legitimacy. Allah agreed, but warned that he would visit an innovative punishment on any who continued to doubt. Mirkhvand elaborates this four-verse account into three pages. He describes the spread of food precisely: a fish, "all kinds of vegetables except onion and leeks [...] five loaves of bread, on each of which there were a few olives, five pomegranates, and five dates." The disciples followed Jesus's lead in not eating anything, but crowds gathered to partake in the feast. Miraculously, sick eaters became healed, and the amount of food never diminished. At one point a revelation specified that the food was only for the poor, which prompted the rich to protest that injustice and raise doubts about the entire affair, thus triggering the threatened punishment: four hundred social elites were transformed into hogs, who went to weep repentantly before Jesus. Each nodded as Jesus acknowledged their human names, and after three days they died hideously.[52]

Although Mirkhvand offers his readers a unitary narrative, he frequently makes plain the points of irreconcilable divergence in his sources. The *Rawzat al-Safa'* as a whole synthesizes the work of dozens of previous histories. The Jesus passage, too, draws on multiple sources, mostly historians, but also the poet Hafiz (see Chapter 20) and at least one of the Christian gospels.[53] However, his list of disciples overlaps imperfectly with biblical information: Thaddaeus-Judas and Simon the Canaanite are missing; instead we find Fattrus, Nakhas, and Sarhus.[54] Mirkhvand includes other historians' variant assertions as to whether the disciples were fullers or dyers—indeed, dyers astonished when Jesus miraculously pulled clothes newly dyed in different colours from the same vat. He tells two stories with the same plot and twist: newly rich men murder each other out of their greed to be the sole possessor of the wealth. Some poison the others' food, who then slay the poisoners before eating and dying. After one telling, Jesus reflects, "it is thus that the world deals with those who are addicted to it." Mirkhvand authoritatively notes that Jesus lived thirty-three years on earth, or forty-two.[55] This is a presentation of Jesus's life that does not, perhaps could not, paper over the messiness of conflicting historical sources.

52 Mirkhvand, *The Rauzat-us-safa*, II, 169–71.

53 Mirkhvand quotes Zechariah 13:7, predicts Simon Peter's triple betrayal, and mentions the crown of thorns. These three details are all found only in Matthew (26:31, 26:34, 27:29) and Mark (14:27, 14:30, 15:17).

54 Mirkhvand lists eleven disciples and Judas as the thirteenth in *The Rauzat-us-safa*, II, 178–79.

55 Mirkhvand, *The Rauzat-us-safa*, II, 162–64, 175–78.

Toledot Jesus

The most unusual written Life of Jesus in this period was a Jewish text, the *Toledot Jesu*. Its origins are obscure. It probably took form early in the second millennium, but might encode a tradition going back still earlier; its defence of Mary's virginity and account of Jesus animating clay birds might have even influenced the Qur'an. Indeed, there were a number of parallels between it and the Islamic Jesus traditions, such as 'Abd al-Jabbar's (935–1025) treatment of Paul. It might even have been a direct parody of an apocryphal gospel no longer extant.[56]

The *Toledot* existed in a bewildering number of manuscript versions. In 1415, both Pope Benedict XIII (1328–1423) and King Ferdinand I of Aragon (1380–1416) condemned a Hebrew work, and copies of it were destroyed. The title in the papal-condemnation document is difficult to identify ("Mar mar Jesu"), but this could be the *Toledot* or a cousin of it. Francesc Eiximenis (d. 1409) condemned the *Toledot* in his ca. 1400 *Vida de Jesucrist* [Life of Jesus Christ].[57]

In the *Toledot*, the evil Joseph Pandera raped the pious Mary. She gave birth to a boy named "Yehoshua," whose name eventually shortened to "Yeshu," Jesus. The adolescent Yeshu disrespected Judaism: he went before the elders with his head uncovered, and argued that Moses was not the greatest prophet. The elders discovered the disreputable circumstances of his birth, and Yeshu fled to Galilee.

Later, Yeshu smuggled the Name of God out of the Jerusalem Temple by writing it on parchment which he placed inside a wound on his thigh. He then revealed his Messiahship, using Isaiah 7:14 ("Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son") and his own ability to work miracles—actually performed with the Name, and therefore constituting sorcery rather than "authentic" miracles.

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56 Morris Goldstein, *Jesus in the Jewish Tradition* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1984), 148–54; Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1902), 2–7, 165–72, 194–200; Gabriel Said Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: 'abd Al-Jabbār and the Critique of Christian Origins* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 90–91, 98–105; Hugh J. Schonfield, *According to the Hebrews: A New Translation of the Jewish Life of Jesus (the Toldoth Jeshu), with an Inquiry Into the Nature of Its Sources and Special Relationship to the Lost Gospel According to the Hebrews* (London: Duckworth, 1937), 167–70. I base the version told in this chapter on Goldstein and on Krauss.

57 Yitzhak Baer, *Die Juden im christlichen Spanien*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Akademie-verlag, 1929), I, 828; Manuel Forcano i Aparicio, "Els antievangelis jueus: Les caricatures jueves de Jesús de Natzaret," *Enrahonar* 54 (2015): 11–31 (16); H. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, 11 vols. (Leipzig: Ries'sche Buchdruckerei, 1864), VIII, 134–35. For the actual bull, see Julio Bartoloccio De Celleno, *Bibliotheca magna Rabbinica*, 3 vols. (Rome: Propaganda Fide, 1683), III, 734.

Yeshu accepted the elders' invitation to Jerusalem, which he entered on a donkey to fulfil Zechariah's (9:9) prophecy ("Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey..."), but they seized him and surrendered him to secular authority for execution as a sorcerer. The Jewish elders and Yeshu cited prophecy to argue against each other about his Messiahship, but it was his ability to raise the dead, using the Name, that convinced Queen Salome to release Yeshu. He continued to work miracles and gathered a larger public following.

To oppose him, the Jews recruited a man named Judas, and taught him the Name of God. Then, when Yeshu next appeared before the queen, and flew towards heaven, Judas was able to replicate the miracle. In the ensuing aerial struggle between the two men, both lost the ability to use the Name.

Yeshu was arrested, beaten with pomegranate staves, bound to a pillar, given vinegar to drink, and crowned with thorns, but some of his followers created a disturbance that allowed him to escape.

On the eve of the Passover, Yeshu returned to Jerusalem, again on a donkey, to re-acquire the Name. Judas informed the Jewish elders, who were able to seize Yeshu in the Temple when his followers betrayed his identity by bowing at him. The elders attempted to execute him by hanging him from a tree, but Yeshu had outsmarted them: he had previously used the Name to make himself immune to precisely that death. The elders found a loophole by hanging him from a carob stalk, which was more plant than tree. Yeshu died, and his body was buried outside Jerusalem.

On Sunday, his followers came to the queen to report that his grave was empty, which was quickly confirmed. His followers rejoiced that their master had ascended to heaven. Furious, the queen ordered that the body be presented to her within three days. Under such pressure, investigation revealed that a rabbi had stolen the body and re-buried it in a garden to prevent Yeshu's followers from themselves disappearing it to prove his ascension to heaven. The Jews dragged the body to the queen, who thus understood that Yeshu was not the Messiah.

This did not end the conflict among the Jews about his true identity. Therefore, the elders recruited Paul ("Simeon Kepha") to claim to be Yeshu's disciple, to use the Name to work miracles as proof, and to give the pro-Yeshu faction a new set of laws and customs. Thus, the Christian religion was created as a way of ending the dispute among the Jews. In some versions, the idea of "turning the other cheek" was included among the dozen or so characteristics of Christianity, most of which relate to diet or calendar.[58]

58 Joseph Jacobs, Kaufmann Kohler, Richard Gottheil, and Samuel Krauss, "Jesus of Nazareth," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 12 vols. (New York: Funk and Wangalls 1925), VII, 171–72.

The exact motivations of the author(s) of the *Toledot* are difficult to discern. Is this humour? Is this a defence of Judaism? The Castilian Bishop Alonso de Espina (ca. 1410–64), who might have been a converted Jew himself, considered (ca. 1464) the *Toledot* presentation of a sorcerer Jesus to be motivated by a strategy to release the Jews from any obligation to accept him as the Messiah. The Bishop thus took a plain-ken perspective to look at the human psychology of the authors, to explain a motive that for many Christian readers might appear as gratuitous blasphemy.[59]

Envoi

The contents of these variant Lives are extraordinary. In some, Jews were further villainized, Jesus elevated, and an execution becomes an act of a notary public. In others, the Jews became the protagonists battling an evil, deceitful Jesus. These elaborations and elisions of the canonical material reveal the priorities and values of the societies that first created and then repeatedly repeated them. They also show a range of approaches, from the poetic and deep-ken recognition that those who choose not to see were literally blind, to the fifteenth-century discovery or manufacture of a first-century Jewish text speaking directly to an imagined audience that thought with the plain ken.

This chapter concludes by zooming in on a single detail. The fraudulent Jesus of the *Toledot Jesu* proved his Messiahship by faking miracles through the use of the Name of God. When the Jews recruited Judas to defeat him, they armed their champion by teaching him the Name of God. In Jewish tradition, the name of God had long held a special status. This was one example of a traditional attitude towards names, and towards words in general, an attitude largely fallen from the modern mind, except for special cases like the "n-word" which must not be written out (see Chapter 17).

59 Alonso Espina, *Fortalitium fidei* (Lyons: Guillaume Balsarin, 1487), book 3. See Robert Chazan, *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 38–48.