

{23} Yehoshua, Yeshua, Jesus and Yeshu

An Introduction to the Names

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My interest in the name of Jesus dates back to 1976-78, when I lived in Jerusalem. A Danish pastor in Jerusalem in those years, I tried to read up on modern Jewish research on Jesus. My attention was caught by various derogatory epithets which were used in diverse Jewish contexts, either in connection with the name of Jesus or as a substitute for it. This in combination with my interest in New Testament Christology made me turn my attention towards the name of Jesus in a Jewish and Hebrew context.

In conversations and sermons in Hebrew a choice had to be made between *Yeshu* and *Yeshua*. I had become used to the former form through Hebrew studies and lectures at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. I met the latter form in Hebrew-speaking Messianic congregations.

An experience at the Western Wall in the autumn of 1976 whetted my curiosity about the problem. Here I witnessed an episode involving a man with an American accent and dressed like a "John the Baptist" who was in a heated argument with some Orthodox Jews about Jesus. This person not only possessed the ability to spit-he also exercised it when he, in English, said "Jesus." Nevertheless, he defended *Yeshua* energetically. Unfortunately, from my position on the fringe of the debating crowd, I was unable to make out what this person thought of this *Yeshua*, except that he strongly emphasized the difference between the English and the Hebrew forms of the name.

Although preliminary inquiries with competent Jewish scholars concerning the relationship in Hebrew between *Yeshu* and *Yeshua* did not cause me to pursue the matter further, my suspicion had been aroused that at least there was a problem. For I did not find their answer very satisfactory: "Jews say *Yeshu*, Hebrew-speaking Christians say *Yeshua*. That's it!"

{24} In this essay I shall begin by sketching the name forms of Jesus of Nazareth which are relevant in a Hebrew-speaking context in Israel today. After that I am going to deal with the question: What was the Hebrew name for Jesus of Nazareth? Finally I shall describe the change from *Yeshua* to *Yeshu*.

But before that, a few theoretical observations about names and our attitude to names.

What's in a Name?

Modern onomastics warns against an approach to this subject which is only interested in the meaning and the etymology of a name. The meaning of a name is conditioned by a number of factors- historical, religious, cultural, sociological, political and social. This applies to the name-giver's motive as well as to the surrounding community's response to the name. Add to this a number of collective and individual emotional, psychological and aesthetic factors, as well as local naming traditions.

We must assume that the same factors were in force in a Jewish context when Jesus was born. While etymology, in a modern context, often plays a very secondary part, there can be no doubt that it was much more important in a Jewish context around the beginning of our era. The rabbis have much to say about this. And yet the etymological and lexical approaches must be supplemented by other approaches.

The name-bearer's history is one of these. The response to a given name is definitely determined by the history of the name-bearer. In May 1945 no child was named "Adolf"! In the case of Jesus, we may assume that His disciples' relationship to him influenced their relationship to His name. It is difficult to argue about emotions, but there is no reason to consider the people of the first Christian Church to be more blunted than others. It is difficult to imagine that the name of Jesus

should have been a neutral name to those who came to faith in him as the resurrected Lord. V. Taylor is undoubtedly right in the point he makes in his book *The Names of Jesus*⁵⁶

From a very early point, a religious quality attached itself to the name, just as in later Christianity it belongs even to the pronouns "He" and "His." In many cases we cannot fail to be conscious of this nuance, even though proof is not possible.

There are two points to consider:

1) The Christological titles may be said to answer the more or less conscious question: Who is (*was*) *Jesus*? While it is possible that the name of Jesus is "neutral" for the questioner, the name may have a specific value in the answer, whether or not it is mentioned directly. So when Christians have answered {25} the *Who is Jesus* question, the accompanying designations of highness or titles may very well have stressed the name of Jesus.

2) But a *Who is Jesus* question is only one aspect of the Christological issue. When Christians at an early time, like Paul in his letters, spoke about *the Lord, Christ, the Son of God*, etc. other questions may have suggested themselves: "*Who is the Lord?*" "*Who is Christ?*" "*Who is the Son of God?*"

While the name of Jesus is implicit but not always explicit in the answer mentioned under 1), the question asked under 2) implies one or more designations of highness; but the name of Jesus acquires a decisive function in the answer.

Although it is difficult to imagine that the name of Jesus should have been "neutral" to a Christian in the first century AD, these observations may serve to focus attention on some aspects of the name of Jesus which have sometimes been ignored in theological research.

Also, the context plays an important part. If it is possible, in the New Testament, to find semantic fields and compounds where the name Jesus appears in a position which, according to the Old Testament's linguistic pattern, is reserved for YHWH, it becomes possible to understand the theological value of the name of Jesus, the Christological overtones which are associated with it in the New Testament, and the connotations in the minds of first-century Christians.

To demonstrate this falls beyond the scope of this essay. The issue to be dealt with here is what Jesus is called in an Israeli context today.

What is Jesus of Nazareth Called Today in Hebrew?

The answer to that question depends on whom you ask. This already suggests that there may be a problem and that there are several current forms of the name. This is first and foremost a problem to non-Messianic Jews. Most Messianic Jews use the form *Yeshua*, and if there are individuals who use the form *Yeshu*, they are the exceptions that prove the rule.

If one takes the lexicographical approach and consults easily accessible dictionaries, the tendency is the following: If one looks up "Jesus" in a non-Hebrew language, the Hebrew definition is *Yeshu*. If one chooses the opposite approach, i.e. from Hebrew to another language, some dictionaries refer the reader from *Yeshua* to *Yeshu*, others from *Yeshu* to *Yeshua*. An example is in the appendix to *Milon Hadash*.⁵⁷

When it comes to school books, the answer depends on whether one settles for Pinchas Lapide's article "Jesus in Israeli School Books"⁵⁸ or whether one {26} examines the school books oneself. Lapide says:

⁵⁶ Lord V. Taylor, *The Names of Jesus*, London, 1953, p. 8.

⁵⁷ Under the heading "Names and their Meaning", Jerusalem, 1958, p.182, A. Even-Shosan writes: "Yeshua, that is Yeshu HaNotzri ..." Then follows an explanation of the name of Jesus here spelled with an ayin: "Jeshuai'im."

⁵⁸ Pinchas Lapide, "Jesus in Israeli School Books," In *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 1973, pp. 515-531.

Seven books call the Nazarene "Jeshu," which is both historically and philologically correct and also corresponds to the contemporary usage in Israel for the name Jesus. The effect is to "associate" Jesus with, and place him on the edge of, Judaism. Only three books call him "Yeshua," which not only corresponds to the then current biblical name of "Josua," but also is as good as identical with "Jehoshua," a popular name in Israel today.⁵⁹

A first-hand examination of the material does not give the result 7-3, which Lapidé maintains, but rather 10-0-for *Yeshu*. The form of *Yeshua* is mentioned in five books, but in none of them is it used generally - *Yeshu* is. It is not clear what Lapidé means when he says that *Yeshu* is "both historically and philologically correct." In practice the form *Yeshu* dominates the school books, even if it is mentioned that there is another form, *Yeshua*.

Yeshu is not written with abbreviation signs: it is not regarded as a *Roshei Tevot* word, where the three consonants are meant to form the formula: *Yimach Shemo Uzikhro*, i.e. "May his name and memory be blotted out" - a curse known from, for example, the so-called *Toledoth Yeshu* literature. This spelling (with abbreviation signs) is still found in some but not all Ultra Orthodox newspapers. Generally speaking this explanation is not known in Israel and does not appear in school books. The form *Yeshu* is not in itself negative. According to an Israeli statistics of names, which I consulted in 1979, no one bore the name of *Yeshu*, which was hardly to be expected, but 29 persons were called *Yeshua*!

It can be noted that in New Testament quotations, either from Delitzsch's translation or from translations which rely on it, the school book material has examples of *Yeshua* being replaced with *Yeshu*.

The same is often the case in David Flusser's work in Hebrew when he quotes from the New Testament, although the form *Yeshua* does appear. The difference does not seem intended. But it does not change the fact that *Yeshu* is the preferred form in Flusser's work in Hebrew. When Flusser writes in a non-Hebrew language - or is translated into one - that language's form of Jesus is used, of course. In his *Jesus in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*,⁶⁰ Flusser says about the name that "Jesus" is the common Greek form of the name Joshua, and that in Jesus' time the name was pronounced *Yeshua*, and so we often find Jesus of Nazareth named in ancient Jewish literature. There He is also often named *Yeshu*. That, almost certainly, was the Galilean pronunciation, according to Flusser. We shall return to this later. The English translation by Ronald Walls' has a blatant mistake. The sentence, "There (i.e. in ancient Jewish literature) he is also often named *Yeshu*," has {27} disappeared. Consequently, Ronald Walls⁶¹ translation says that *Yeshua* was the Galilean pronunciation! Which is nonsense. And which was not what Flusser wrote.

When Joseph Klausner wrote in Hebrew, he also used the form *Yeshu*. Considering the influence of Klausner's book *Yeshu HaNotzri*,⁶² it is hardly going too far to say that if Klausner had dared to restore the form of *Yeshua* -which he did not do-today, the form of *Yeshu* would only be used by some of the Ultra-Orthodox.

In his prolegomena to *Thesaurus Totius Hebraicitatis*,⁶³ Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, the father of Hebrew, deals with the name of Jesus. Here the name of Jesus is mentioned explicitly at least eight times, and every time the form *Yeshua* is used.

So generally speaking, *Yeshu* - the historically incorrect form of Jesus put forward by Klausner, the historian and theologian-defeated *Yeshua*-the correct form of Jesus, supported by Ben-Yehuda, the linguist.

⁵⁹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 516-517.

⁶⁰ David Flusser, *Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*, Reinbeck bei Hamburg, 1968, p. 13-14.

⁶¹ David Flusser, *Jesus*, New York, 1969, p. 13.

⁶² Joseph Klausner, *Yeshua HaNotzri*, 1922, Ramat Gan, 1969.

⁶³ Elizer BenYehuda, *Thesaurus Totius Hebraicitatis*, Jerusalem, 1940, pp. 215-216.

With names there are always exceptions, but generally speaking the form *Yeshu* is the one used in Hebrew today. And that leads to another observation, namely that the so-called Jewish *Heimholung* of Jesus, the scientific attempt to bring Jesus back to the Jewish people, does not generally include a reclamation of the name of *Yeshua*. But as already mentioned there are exceptions where Hebrew-writing Jewish scholars use the form *Yeshua*, e.g. Joseph Hagar⁶⁴ and Zalman Heyn.⁶⁵ Jewish scholars affiliated to the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research do not appear, however, to have restored the Hebrew name of Jesus, *Yeshua*, when they write about Him in Hebrew.

Let us leave the historians and theologians for a moment. Without going into details it is possible for us to demonstrate that several Jewish novelists use different forms -*Yehoshua*, *Yeshu*, *Yeshua*-to indicate the attitude of their characters to Jesus of Nazareth. This is the case of the following novelists who all write in languages other than Hebrew: Franz Werfel,⁶⁶ Max Brod,⁶⁷ and Louis de Wohl.⁶⁸ Among those who write in Hebrew, some use *Yeshu* (e.g., A. Hameiri, Ch. Hasas, J. Mosinson), others use *Yeshua* (e.g., N. Bistrizki). In Scholem Asch's *The Nazarene*, both in the Yiddish original and the Hebrew translation,⁶⁹ the form *Yeshua* is used. *Yeshu* does not occur. {28} However, in Asch's introductory reflections another form is used: "If you insist on knowing the name, I will pronounce it: Yeshua of Nazareth, he who is called Jesus Christ" (in Hebrew transcribed "Yezus Kristos").⁷⁰ In translations into other languages the Hebraicized form *Yeshua* is kept. It may be noted that Chaim Lieverman's refutation of Asch's book uses "Jesus" in the English original,⁷¹ while the Hebrew translation⁷² has *Yeshu*. In a New Testament quotation, verbatim after Delitzsch's translation, *Yeshua* has been replaced by *Yeshu*. Technically this is no different from what, for example, David Flusser sometimes does and what happens in schoolbooks. But since one's response to a name to a very large degree depends on the context of that name, we have to consider this when we want to appraise the change from *Yeshua* to *Yeshu*.

However, it would be jumping to conclusions if we simply said that the more polemic the text, the greater are the efforts to hide the fact that Jesus' original Hebrew name was *Yeshua*. An example of this can be found in Jakob Zurischadaj's *Habrit*⁷³ from the traditional Jewish refutation literature. The procedure in this book is first to adduce a New Testament quotation and then to refute it. In the quotations from the New Testament the form *Yeshua* occurs about fifty times, and only once the form *Yeshu* occurs, which may be a lapse. Zurischadaj himself uses *Yeshu*. The play on words in Matthew 1:21 is rendered correctly: "Yeshua ... yoshia" (Jesus ... will save). M. Bazes' book *Jesus the Jew - The Historical Jesus: The True Story of Jesus*⁷⁴, written in English, also belongs in the refutation group. He concedes that Jesus' historical name was *Yeshuah*. But Christianity's "deification of Jesus"⁷⁵ influenced the relationship of Jews to the name of Jesus. Bazes writes: "It is no wonder that Jews considered the Christian belief as simple idolatry and felt obligated to apply the Law in Exodus 23:13 ("Make no mention of the name of other gods") to the name, Jesus. Naturally, the name of one of the truest and best Jewish teachers had to be shunned."⁷⁶

On the basis of this - as well as other circumstances - one may infer that Jewish refutation literature today, and down through the ages, has helped to preserve, among Jews, the memory that Christianity's Saviour was called *Yeshua*. While the polemic literature has primarily used the form

⁶⁴ Joseph Hagar, *Behinot Historiot*, Tel-Aviv, 1951.

⁶⁵ Zalman Heyn, *Drahim LeShamayim*, Tel-Aviv, 1972.

⁶⁶ Franz Werfel, *Paulus unter den Juden*, Berlin, Wien, Leipzig, 1929.

⁶⁷ Max Brod, *Der Meister*, Gütersloh, 1952.

⁶⁸ Louis de Wohl, *Longinus der Zeuge*, Olten und Freiburg im Breisgau, 1978.

⁶⁹ Scholem Asch, *The Nazarene*, translated by David Zion, Jerusalem, 1953.

⁷⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁷¹ Chaim Lieverman, *The Christianity of Sholem Asch*, New York, 1953.

⁷² Chaim Lieverman, *Natzruto Shel Shalom Asch*, Tel-Aviv, 1954.

⁷³ Jakob Zurischadaj, *Habrit*, Jerusalem, 1970.

⁷⁴ M Bazes, *Jesus the Jew - The Historical Jesus: The True Story of Jesus*, Jerusalem, 1976.

⁷⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 46.

⁷⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 47.

Yeshu, there has all along been an awareness that this was not Jesus' original Hebrew name. Maimonides appears to have used the form *Yeshua* in several writings, e.g., in his *Epistle to Yemen*, even if the tradition of the text also has the form *Yeshu*, which has to be regarded as the secondary form.⁷⁷ Subsequent Jewish authorities refer specifically to Maimonides and claim that Jesus' original name was *Yeshua*, and then go on to explain why they, none the less, do not use it. Whatever reservations one might have towards J.A. Eisenmenger's book *Entdecktes Judenthum* from the beginning of the eighteenth {29} century, it cannot be denied that he gives a good summary of the reasons why Jews do not use *Yeshua* but have cut off the letter *ayin* and call him *Yeshu* instead. This does not imply that all Jews always and everywhere thought that they smeared the name of Jesus by using the form *Yeshu*. In different Jewish sources, there is evidence for Eisenmenger's assertions.⁷⁸ He adduces five explanations:

1. Jews do not recognize that Jesus is *Moshia* (Saviour); therefore they do not say *Yeshua* but *Yeshu*.
2. Jesus was not able to save Himself; therefore the *ayin* is left out.
3. Jews are not only permitted to mock false gods; they are commanded to change and defame their names.
4. With a reference to Exodus 23:13 Jews are forbidden to mention the names of other gods.
5. With a reference to the *Toledoth Yeshu* literature, *Yeshu* is interpreted as *Yimach Shemo Uzikhro*. The pronunciation Yi instead of the expected *Ye(shu)* is designed to clarify the connection to *Yimach*.

If again we turn to Israel and examine the forms of the name in newspapers, we shall see that *Yeshu* is the most commonly used form, but *Yeshua* does appear. Occasionally Messianic Jews are quoted for having used the form *Yeshu*, but that should be taken with a grain of salt-it may be a reflection of the interviewer's terminology. In articles written in Hebrew by Christians there are a few examples of *Yeshu*. In sections of the Orthodox press *Yeshu* without abbreviation signs is used. The organization Jews for Jesus is normally referred to as *Yehudim Lema'an Yeshu*. On television *Yeshu* is most often used but *Yeshua* does appear. In concert programmes for Christian classics there is the same alternation between *Yeshu* and *Yeshua*- sometimes both forms can be found in the same programme. And if the name of the conductor happens to be Jesus Lopez-Cobos, his name is not transcribed with *Yehoshua*, not with *Yeshua* and not with *Yeshu*, but with *chet* as the initial letter *Chesus* -which gives it the right Spanish pronunciation. The examples are legion.

In summary, the form *Yeshu*, rather than *Yeshua*, enjoys a special position in Israel today. To non-specialists, i.e. to the Israeli in the street, *Yeshu* is the name of the founder of Christianity. Most people do not know the imprecation formula *Yimach Sherno Uzikhro*. In various ways the awareness that Jesus of Nazareth has a name other than *Yeshu* is kept alive. Also modern Hebrew refutation literature keeps it alive. One's response to the name can at best be described as a negation: It is the absence of the potentially positive overtones of the form *Yeshua*. The response to the name-be it *Yeshu* or *Yeshua*-is usually determined by the context in which it appears, whether negative or positive.

{30} As mentioned before, it is noteworthy that the section of Israeli research which attempts to reclaim Jesus has not reclaimed Jesus' Hebrew name, *Yeshua*. In this respect they generally follow the Jewish tradition and use the form *Yeshu*.

Yehoshua/Yoshua - Yeshua - Yeshu

The following is a brief sketch of the relationship between the forms *Yehoshua/Yoshua* and *Yeshua*, and after that the relationship between *Yeshua* and *Yeshu* in the centuries before and after the beginning of our era.

⁷⁷ Cf. A.S. Halkin (ed.), *Moses Maimonides' Epistle to Yemen*, New York, 1952, p. 12.

⁷⁸ J.A. Eisenmenger, *Entdecktes Judenthum*, Königsberg, 1711, Vol. I, pp. 64-67.

Yehoshua/Joshua vis-à-vis Yeshua

Yehoshua is formally a theoforic name with the abbreviated tetragrammaton YHW as its first element. The first man to bear the name is ben Nun, who was first called *Hoshea*. The change from *Hoshea* to *Yehoshua* (Num. 13:16) was easily effected; it only took the prefixing of the little *yod*. With a stroke, the letter *yod* was given satisfaction: When the name Abram became Abraham (Gen. 17:5) and Sarai became Sarah (Gen. 17:15), the letter *yod*,¹⁰ in the Hebrew numerical system, was split up into two *he's* (fives), about which the letter *yod* complains to God (according to Midr Gen R XLVII, 1). But with the name *Yehoshua*, *yod* gets satisfaction: "Hitherto thou wast in a woman's name and the last of its letters; now I will set thee free in a man's name and at the beginning of its letters." The story is sweet and gives us an example of the rabbis' work with and interest in names. Apart from ben Nun, a few others in the biblical tradition bear the name of *Yehoshua*, among them Jozadak's son who, together with Zerubbabel, returned to Judah from Babylon. Both are positive figures in the biblical tradition-and therefore their names are also "good." Both these *Yehoshuas* are mentioned by the long forms of the name, *Yehoshua*, in the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, while Ezra and Nehemiah use a short form, namely *Yeshua*; and what is most remarkable is that in Nehemiah 8:17 the short form *Yeshua* is used about ben Nun, which is clear evidence that the long form *Yehoshua* is being replaced by the short form *Yeshua*. In times to come this short form was to become the dominant one.

In my judgment we have reason to believe that in New Testament times the short form *Yeshua* replaced the long form *Yehoshua*. I dare not claim that the long form cannot have been in use as a personal name in New Testament times. Inscriptions and discoveries of ossuaries from Palestine show that the form *Yeshua* was a common personal name, and that this *Yeshua* corresponds to the Greek *Iesous*. Philo is familiar with the factual meaning of the Greek form, which he renders *soteria kyriou* (the Lord's salvation). In Josephus this Greek form is used about ben Nun as well as about 20 people from the end {31} of the era of the Second Temple. I have not been able to trace an inscription from New Testament times which has the long form *Yehoshua*.

The literary name *Yehoshua* was not forgotten by those who were familiar with the biblical scriptures. But in this connection it may also be mentioned that the Qumran scrolls have examples of ben Nun's name being rendered *Yeshua* (e.g. 4QT Testimonium 21). If we move on to the time of Bar Kokhba, the rediscovered correspondence material shows that several of the leading people among Bar Kokhba's followers bore the name of *Yeshua*. One of the less known is *Yeshua ben Yeshua*.⁷⁹

Taken together, our evidence clearly indicates that the name of Jesus of Nazareth was *Yeshua* and not *Yehoshua*. The name had an *ayin* at the end. Further, it is worth noticing that over the first hundred years after *Yeshua* of Nazareth it is not possible to demonstrate any significant change of the Jewish nomenclature as to the use of *Yeshua* and the corresponding Greek *Iesous*. Later, after the middle of the second century AD, a change occurred resulting in a return to the long form *Yehoshua*-but that is a matter which cannot be dealt with here. But the return to a situation when Jews begin to use the long form *Yehoshua* again might be explained by the fact that Christianity's Saviour was called *Yeshua*, though other factors may also have been relevant. If these suppositions are right, it follows that there may be doubts whether those people mentioned in Mishnah and Talmud whose names are written *Yehoshua* and who lived before the time of Bar Kokhba, were really called by that name by their contemporaries, or if it is not more probable that their name was *Yeshua*.

Yeshua vis-à-vis Yeshu

A very hypothetical possibility that the form *Yeshu* existed as a personal name in the first century can be supported by an inscription published by E.L. Sukenik in 1931.⁸⁰ The missing *ayin* may be explained through lack of space, a hypothesis mentioned by Sukenik himself, although he also says that perhaps this is an instance of the short form which is otherwise found in talmudic literature. Side by side with this uncertain *Yeshu* is the name *Yeshua* -with an *ayin*.

⁷⁹ Y. Yadin, *Bar Kokhba: The rediscovery of the legendary hero ...*, Jerusalem, 1971, pp. 270-271; 222-253.

⁸⁰ E. L. Sukenik, *Jüdische Gräber Jerusalems um Christi Geburt*, Jerusalem, 1931, p.19.

*Yerushalmi Fragments from the Genizah*⁸¹ mentions a few unique examples of the disappearance of the final *ayin*, referring to one "R[abbi] Yeshu, the southerner." E.Y. Kutscher⁸² tries to explain this as a linguistic weakening of *ayin*. But then it is interesting that the form *Yehoshua* with the *ayin is* found in the same context.

Various explanations have been offered as to why Jesus is called *Yeshu* in the rabbinic tradition. In passing it may be mentioned that *Yeshu is* not the sole form: Tosefta Hullin 2,22.24, for example, has *Yeshua*. Also D. Rokeah {32} thinks that the original version of bSanh 43a reads *Yeshua*, which he bases on the fact that MS Temani has *Yeshua*.⁸³

It is characteristic of most of the modern solutions offered in explanation of the development from *Yeshua* to *Yeshu* that they are of a philological nature. S. Krauss says that *Yeshu* instead of *Yeshua* is an example of the most natural development in the world.⁸⁴ Often the development from *Josef* to *Jose is* mentioned as an example that illustrates the development from *Yeshua* to *Yeshu*. In J.Z. Lauterbach's work *Jesus in the Talmud*, however, there are nuances of meaning. He does not commit himself on the issue, but his comments on it are valuable.⁸⁵

Among the different hypotheses which have been put forward, only one will be mentioned, and probably the one which has met with most sympathy as an explanation of the development from *Yeshua* to *Yeshu*. It is connected to David Flusser's name, but A. Neubauer⁸⁶ is entertaining the same idea when he says that the orthography of *Yeshu* in the Talmud and early rabbinical writings is according to the pronunciation, in which the guttural *ayin* was not pronounced. Hugh J. Schonfield is expressing something similar when he says that *Yeshu is* actually the north-Palestinian contraction of the Hebrew *Yeshua*, where the letter *ayin* was not sounded.⁸⁷ J. Jeremias⁸⁸ is among those who agree with Flusser that *Yeshu is* the Galilean pronunciation of *Yeshua*. This is the explanation in Flusser's *Jesus*.⁸⁹ In *Jewish Sources in Early Christianity*⁹⁰ he writes the following:

The Hebrew name for Jesus, Yeshu, is evidence for the Galilean pronunciation of the period, and is in no way abusive. Jesus was a Galilean, and therefore the a at the end of his name, Yeshua, was not pronounced. His full name was thus Yeshua. In the Talmudic sources, which are from a later period, there is reference to a Rabbi Yeshu, who is not to be confused with Jesus.

Flusser's hypothesis is that the final *ayin* was not pronounced in Galilee. E.Y. Kutscher draws attention to the fact that in most places in Galilee and the rest of Palestine Jews were able to pronounce the gutturals even if these gutturals, in a few places such as Haifa, Beisan and Tibon, were not pronounced.⁹¹ Thus Flusser may be right but his hypothesis should not be put forward as

⁸¹ Edited by L. Ginzberg, New York, 1909.

⁸² E. Y. Kutscher, *Studies in Galilean Aramaic*, Jerusalem, 1976, pp. 80-81. D. Rokeah, *Tarbiz*, 1969-70, p. 11.

⁸³ D. Rokeah, *Tarbiz*, 1969-70, p. 11.

⁸⁴ S. Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach Jüdischen Quellen*, Berlin, 1902, p. 250.

⁸⁵ L. Z. Lauterbach, "Jesus in the Talmud;" *Rabbinic Essays*, Cincinnati, 1951, pp. 473-570. In a comment on the baraita Sanh.107b he says (p. 482):

"The name *Yeshu* by which Jesus is here mentioned is probably merely a shortened form of the name *Yeshua* (the abbreviation sign on top is a later addition). But since such an abbreviated form of the name is not used in any other case of a person named *Yeshua* or *Yehoshua*, but persistently and consistently used when the name refers to Jesus, it may be assumed that this shortening of the name was probably an intentional mutilation by cutting off part of it. The rabbis mention other instances of the names of persons being shortened because of their misconduct, but here in the case of the name *Jeshua* there may have been an additional special reason for shortening it into *Jeshu*."

⁸⁶ A. Neubauer, "Jewish Controversy and the 'Pugio Fidei'," in *The Expositor*, no. 7, 1888, p. 24.

⁸⁷ Hugh J. Schonfield, *According to the Hebrews. A New Translation of the Jewish Life of Jesus (The Toldot Jeshu), with Inquiry into the Nature of its Sources and Special Relationship to the Lost Gospel according to the Hebrews*, London, 1937.

⁸⁸ J. Jeremias, *Neutestamentliche Theologie*, Gütersloh, 1973, vol. I, p. 13.

⁸⁹ David Flusser, *Jesus*, English translation, p. 13.

⁹⁰ David Flusser, *Jewish Sources in Early Christianity*, Tel-Aviv, 1989, p.15.

⁹¹ E. Y. Kutscher, *op.cit.*, pp. 67-70; 80; 89-96.

self-evident. He does not place this question in a larger context, e.g. Christians' interpretations of the name of Jesus and speculations over it. Such interpretations and speculations appear as early as in the Epistle of Barnabas, and there are many instances of them in early Christian writings. The form *Yeshu* might be a reaction to such speculation.

Flusser does not comment on the relationship between pronunciation and written fixation. In my opinion this is the greatest weakness of Flusser's {33} hypothesis. Irrespective of what was pronounced, it may be assumed that what is not pronounced is still written - at any rate in the initial phase. Add to this the observation that the names *Yeshua* and *Yehoshua* in contemporary sources were written with the final *ayin* in contemporary sources when the names referred to everybody else but Jesus. Thus Flusser's hypothesis seems to crumble.

My own hypothesis is not indisputable.⁹² The issue is far too complex for that, and we lack some historical data before we can draw a conclusion.

I do not imagine, of course, that the rabbis should have dictated the spelling for the name of Jesus of Nazareth-not because the rabbis were not interested in Jesus, but because other mechanisms are at work. Nor do I imagine that a written change of name should have taken place already at the time of the New Testament. In any case, there are no sources to support an understanding like this. It is, however, not impossible that the beginning of the name change, which was not effectuated in writing until later, may have been there already at the time of the New Testament. This means that we shall have to consider a rather long process.

By using *Yeshu* it became possible to stamp out some soteriological connotations of the form *Yeshua*.

In the first oral phase of this process I assume that some sneered at the name of *Yeshua*. Such sneer is in itself a common phenomenon which cannot be ignored even if it is difficult to prove on the basis of written material. This sneer was not registered in writing at once. It may have been there already at Jesus' time and may have accelerated concurrently with the Christians' emphasis of the meaning of the name of Jesus. Furthermore, it is possible that some of Jesus' Galilean followers did not pronounce the name *Yeshua* with an "a," i.e. they pronounced it *Yeshu*, but none the less wrote it with an *ayin*. When religious leaders who did not believe in Jesus sneered at His name, it is natural to imagine that they used exactly this form. By using a dialectal pronunciation like *Yeshu*, the religious leaders and others who did not themselves have difficulties with the gutturals were able, thanks to a discreet psychological device, to distance themselves from the Galilean Messiah pretender: *Yeshu -just a man from Galilee*.

By using *Yeshu* it became possible, at the same time, to stamp out some soteriological connotations of the form *Yeshua*. Matthew 1:21 is evidence that there were such connotations. It is a generally accepted assumption that {34} underlying the Greek text there is a Hebrew play on words which does not come out in the Greek rendering.

It is difficult to say when this alleged oral sneer was fixed in writing. If I am right in presuming that we are dealing with a process, it is quite probable that both spellings -with and without the *ayin*- existed side by side. As mentioned earlier *Yeshua* is used in *Tosefta Hullin*. In Talmud it is most often written *Yeshu*. I therefore assume that the oldest written fixation of the name for Jesus of Nazareth, in the rabbinic material, was *Yeshua* and that the written form of *Yeshu* is later. Later on the form *Yeshu* became the dominating one.

On the basis of such and other observations I conclude that generally speaking the *Yeshu* form is not a good Jewish name and that it can hardly be considered a neutral name in a Jewish context in its written form. While the oral form may have been the normal pronunciation of *Yeshua* in a few places in Galilee, the form *Yeshu* did not only undergo a change of value in its written form but also in its oral form, if, as I presume, non-Galileans sneered at it. Furthermore, when the Tosefta material uses the form *Yeshua* and when the major part of the manuscript tradition and the printed editions of Talmud passages which contain the name of

⁹² See Kai Kjaer-Hansen, *Studier i Navnet Jesus*, Aarhus, 1982, pp. 152-173.

Jesus evidence the form *Yeshu*, then the attentive Jewish reader has been informed, in his own scriptures about Jesus' original Hebrew name. This may have influenced his response to the form *Yeshu* even if it has not been accompanied by a negative explanation like the one which is found in certain *Toledoth Yeshu* versions.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with the *Toledoth Yeshu* literature. Suffice it here to say that in several versions Jesus is given the name *Yeshua* or *Yehoshua* at His birth. After His mother has declared Him a bastard, the rabbis, according to this literature, dictate a change of name to *Yeshu* and let the following explanation accompany it: *Yimach Shemo Uzikhro*. In other words: Even this polemic genre preserves the memory of Jesus' historical name *Yeshua*.

What Does all This Have to Do with Jewish Evangelism?

Since Jesus has quite a lot to do with Jewish evangelism (sic), I suppose His name also has!

Matthew 1:21 and the nature of the salvation Jesus brings

Above I have referred to Matthew 1:21 a couple of times and to the underlying play on words: *Yeshua ... yoshia* (Jesus ... will save) This verse is crucial to an understanding of who Jesus is and what His work is. To Matthew the name of *Jesus* remains a personal name, but it is a personal name with {35} soteriological connotations. Therefore, I think, it must be included in the New Testament Christology, although it is not a Christological term as such.

Here I just want to make the following observation: Matthew's interpretation of the name of Emmanuel (Matt. 1:23) is, philologically and etymologically, more accurate than his interpretation of the name of Jesus. He does not just say: Jesus will save, or: *Yeshua* means the one through whom the Lord saves. He makes an important addition. *Yeshua* is going to save His people from their sins. It is my belief that the interpretation of the name of Jesus is superior to the interpretation of Emmanuel. When Matthew does not restrict himself to giving an etymological or philological interpretation of the name *Yeshua*, but makes an addition, this must be considered important. By his addition Matthew defines the nature of the salvation which Jesus brings. From the very beginning of his Gospel Matthew makes it clear that as the Lord in the past took away the sins of His people and through the forgiveness of sins created a new relationship between Himself and the people through the covenant, so will Jesus realize this in the new era.

This has something to do with Jewish evangelism!

Communication

The wish to have a historical basis for what one says has also got something to do with Jewish evangelism. Irrespective of what one might think of the hypotheses about the development from *Yeshua* to *Yeshu*- my own included -it is reassuring to know that there are good arguments for the form *Yeshua* being the Hebrew name for Jesus of Nazareth. It is not those who use the form *Yeshua* who have a problem. Problems arise when one attempts to describe the change from *Yeshua* to *Yeshu*, not when it comes to determining what was His Hebrew name.

In a Hebrew context, where the name *Yeshu* is dominant, a believer who uses the form *Yeshua*, in conversation with a non-believer is faced with a choice. Should the believer oblige the other person- and if so, how much? I am sure there is much to say about this question. Allow me to give a few key words. I can see no reason why the Jewish believer in Jesus should renounce the form of *Yeshua*. It carries with it good connotations of salvation. But an analysis like the one above gives an insight which forbids him to claim that the other person's use of the form *Yeshu* should contain the imprecation formula *Yimach Shemo Uzikhro*. The fact that the two of them use different names about the same person provides the Jewish believer with a fine opportunity to explain, in a natural way, why he uses *Yeshua* and not *Yeshu*. In that way it becomes relatively easy to tell him what is central in our faith in Jesus. I have a personal experience of how a person I talked to, in the course of the {36} conversation, changed from *Yeshu* to *Yeshua* without the other person coming to faith in Him. Let that serve as a reminder that faith is something different and more than being able to say the name of Jesus in Hebrew!

As will be generally known, it has become more and more common for Jesus-believing Jews in a diaspora context to use a Hebraicized form such as *Y'shua* or *Yeshua* in one's diaspora language. There are many good -and understandable -reasons for that. And if Jesus-believing Jews are attacked for this, I am going to defend them. But I would like to add two things. I fear that an exaggerated use of this and similar terms towards gentile believers and the Church may be counter-productive, or perhaps seen as a linguistic abnormality. I call in question whether Jewish believers using Hebraicized terms when addressing gentile believers succeed in communicating what they intend.

My second addition is that the use of the form of *Yeshua* is no guarantee that what is said about Him is biblically sound and that it is understood correctly. One example is Morris de Jonge's book, *Jeschuah, der klassische Jüdische Mann*, in which there is a description of a Jewish writer who rediscovers the Jewish form of the name, which he writes *Jeschuah*, and where he contrasts "the classical Jewish man" with "Kirche-Jesus" ("Church Jesus"). Having given a caricature of various people's views of Jesus, Morris de Jonge says:

*Jesus? What does that mean? John, the apostle, might have asked these confessors. Was my dear master Jeschuah a Roman whose name was declined according to the fourth declension: Jesus, Jesu, Jesum, Jesu? No! He was a Jew! Jeschuah was his name! And as certainly as the first Jeschuah, little Jeschuah ben Nun, was honoured, loved and respected as the leader of his people and therefore was able to lead his people into the Promised Land, as certainly also Jeschuah the Great, the Only One, will be recognized as the Master and the One who leads into the Promised Land of recognition of God, if he is introduced to his people as a Jew!*⁹³

Although his book is a curiosity, it does remind us that the correct Hebrew form for the name of our Saviour is no guarantee that what is said about His person is biblically sound.

The other example is taken from Moishe Rosen. The example is not only a humorous one, it also shows that the use of *Yeshua* can lead to problems:

*The fallacy of using a formula was brought home to me early in my ministry. I was then always careful to use only the prescribed language I had been taught in a certain Jewish evangelism class. I always referred to the Saviour as Yeshua Hamashiach (the Hebrew translation) rather than "Jesus Christ", and the hymnal we used in our meetings was in Yiddish, with English translations on the opposite pages. One lady was very faithful in attending our weekly meetings over a period of six months. {37} She loved singing the Yiddish songs, but I don't think she ever read the English translations. She even stood up in the meeting and told how much she loved Yeshua. Then one day she found out that Yeshua meant Jesus, and she never came back! Now, I am not against using the name Yeshua as a missionary technique, but the Jewish person must understand that we are talking about Jesus!*⁹⁴

Exactly! In Jewish evangelism we are talking about Jesus of Nazareth-the friend and Saviour of sinners. That is what his name -*Yeshua*-means, and that meaning- when explained- can become clear even if one uses *Jesus* in a diaspora language. Anyway, *this is what* Matthew believed.

⁹³ Morris de Jonge, *Jeschuah, der klassische jüdische Mann*, Berlin, 1904, p. 441.

⁹⁴ Moishe Rosen and W. Proctor, *Jews for Jesus*, Bristol, 1974, p. 30.