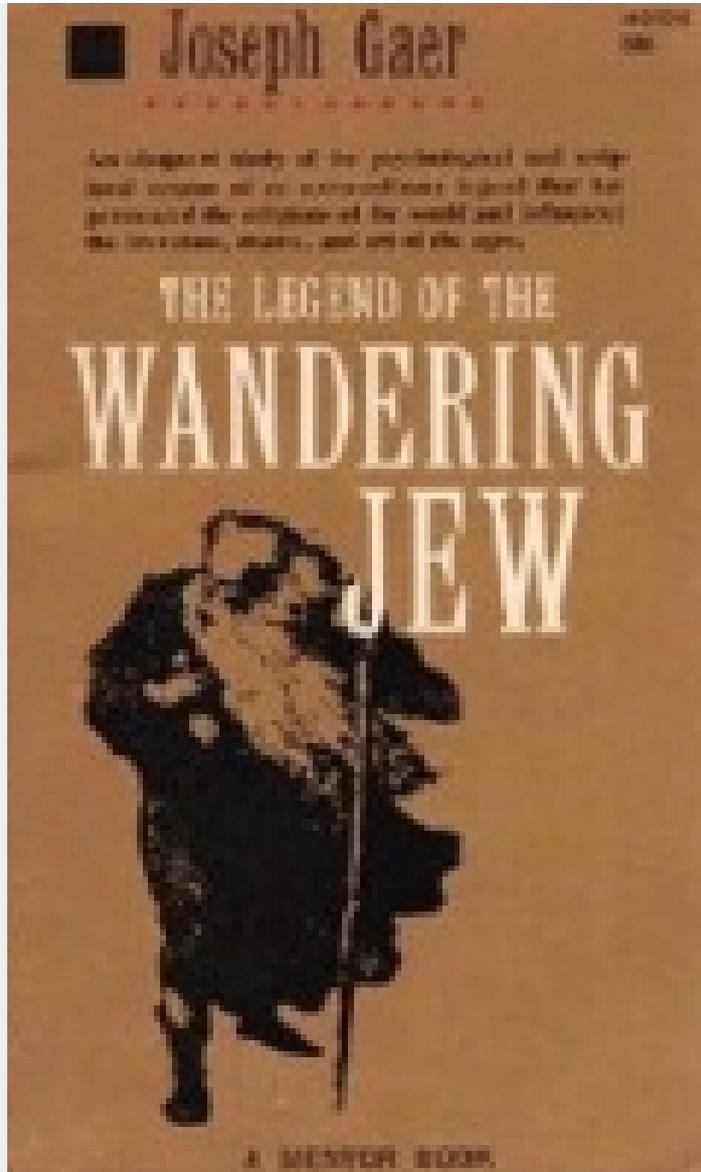


ARMENIAN ARCHBISHOP REVIVES THE WANDERING JEW SAGA

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The first written account of the Legend of the Wandering Jew was chronicled at the great monastery of St. Albans, an English abbey famous for its historians. In 1228, a number of bishops and other church dignitaries gathered at the Abbey of St. Albans to authenticate additions to its collection of relics and to discuss, among other church problems, the then highly controversial topic of the widespread traffic in relics.

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Among the foreign visitors at this gathering was an Archbishop of Greater Armenia, young-looking and soft-spoken. Though he spoke only through an interpreter, he captured the attention of all those present, and they listened to him with interest, for he had traveled far and had participated in many events. His mind was a storehouse of pertinent facts, which he knew how to sort and display as if they were jewels. And he had the gift of telling what his listeners already knew as if he were revealing new knowledge for which they had long hungered; and when he spoke of new and startling things, they sounded like revelations.

During a discussion on relics, he spoke glowingly of the relics of all kinds that had been seen in many places and vividly described them--from the tasseled girdle of Mary's that fell from the sky during the Assumption as witnessed by the Apostle Thomas, to the feather from the wing of the Angel Gabriel.

When the discussion turned on the magnificence of the Abbey of St. Albans in which they were gathered, and some wondered when it had been founded, and what it had looked like at that time, the Archbishop of Greater Armenia recalled the martyrdom of St. Alban in 303, and the humble church that had been built upon the spot. Almost five hundred years later, he related, King Mercia found the relics of the martyr and founded a Benedictine monastery in the saint's honor on that hill facing the River Ver. Then the Archbishop told them of the circumstance that led to the building of the new abbey, the most magnificent and important Norman structure in England, if not the world. The structure was dedicated in 1115, said the Archbishop, and he foretold that what had happened at the Abbey of St. Albans in the past would be surpassed by the great events still to take place at the Abbey of St. Albans in the future.

The bishops and the other guests at the convocation sought him out during their free moments and plied him with questions on many topics, and he invariably rewarded them with memorable replies.

As the Armenian Archbishop was completing his description of Noah's Ark, preserved, he said, on one of the Armenian mountains he had climbed, he was asked whether in his travels he had ever come across or heard anything of the man who, it was claimed, had witnessed the Crucifixion of Christ and was doomed to wander until the Last Judgment.

After a long pause, the Archbishop said: "Strange that you should ask this of me. For shortly before I left Armenia, this man, Joseph by name, dined with me."

The bishops and monks looked at each other in consternation. And then they all tried to ask questions at the same time, and no one could be heard. When the hubbub subsided, this is the story the Archbishop told.

"The name of the Wanderer at the time of the meeting with the Archbishop was Joseph, and he had been wandering for nearly twelve centuries. In the days of Jesus his name was Cartaphilus, and had been a Roman porter in the hall of Pontius Pilate. After Pontius Pilate sentenced Jesus to be crucified, and as Jesus left the Hall of Justice, Cartaphilus struck Him on the back, shouting in mockery: "Go faster, Jesus, go faster! Why do you loiter?" Jesus looked at him and said: "I am going, but you shall wait until I return."

And since that day Cartaphilus has waited for His return. At the time of the Crucifixion, Cartaphilus was thirty years old. Ever since that time, he grows older until he reaches the age of one hundred years; then he awakens one day to find himself again the same age he was at the time he struck Jesus.

"If his name was Cartaphilus," the Archbishop was asked, "Why then did you say he was called Joseph when you saw him?"

The Archbishop explained that not long after the Crucifixion Cartaphilus suffered remorse and was baptized by Ananias--the same Ananias who had baptized the Apostle Paul. And at that time Cartaphilus was renamed "Josephy."

The Archbishop stated that he had seen Joseph on several occasions, at which time he had carefully interrogated him to determine whether there was truth in him, and had found him to be without fault. Joseph was a man of few words; he did not speak unless spoken to, and he spoke on religious topics only. He told of all he had witnessed after that day in Pilate's court; he described the suffering of Jesus the Crucifixion; and told of the Resurrection itself. He also related in detail the dispersion of the Apostles to spread the Good Tidings.

Some of the Archbishop's audience still suspected that Joseph might be one of the impostors who claimed to be the Antichrist so that they might grow rich on the generosity of the credulous. To lay these doubts at rest, the Archbishop added: "He refused all gifts offered to him, and is content with the little food and clothing. And he places his hope of salvation on the fact that he sinned through ignorance."

This account by the Archbishop of Greater Armenia is given in part, in the "Chronicle of St. Albans Abbey" kept by Roger de Wendover, one of the monks at St. Albans. When Roger de Wendover died in 1236, another Benedictine monk, Matthew Paris, completed and extended the "Chronicle."

Apparently, however, the story told by the Archbishop of Greater Armenia began to gain currency. For even before the "Chronicle" of Paris was completed, the Bishop of Tournai, Philippe de Mousket, composed in 1243, a rhymed version of the appearance of the Wandering Jew, based on the story told by the Armenian Archbishop.

The Armenian Archbishop's version was accepted by many without question. With some variations in the telling and retelling, the story began to circulate and travel. It reached France and Germany and the Low Countries, and the farther the story traveled, the more it was believed, and the richer became the elaborations with which it was embellished.

