THE TEXTS OF AND ARGUMENTS FROM ISAIAH 7:14 IN THE
DIALOGUE WITH TRYPHO

Introduction

Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho* (DT) is the *locus classicus* for Christian and Jewish relations in the mid-second century AD. However, there seems to be a paucity of scholarly works on DT,¹ and most of these works consist of studies on Justin’s LXX or canon or his supposed sources.² However, very few works are extant which exegete or comment on particular passages in DT,³ and even fewer comment on the text and arguments in DT related to Isaiah 7:14.⁴

Therefore this paper will first attempt to provide some of the context of the debate

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² For a fine example in French, see Pierre Prigent, *Justin et L’Ancien Testament*, (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1964), 9, where he clearly introduces the nature of his study, “It is necessary to push the research into two directions and to wonder, 1) If one is able to identify the biblical text of the citation: is the text of Justin good, or is one obliged to suppose that the copyists have corrected it? 2) If the context, which I surrounded the citations, does not reveal the antecedent sources, is Justin assisted by the collections of Testimonia?” Though I was not able to consult this work in time, see also Helmut Koester, *Septuaginta und Synoptischer Erzählungsstoff im Schriftbeweis Justins des Märtyres*, (Heidelberg: Ruprecht-Karl-Universität, 1956) for a very detailed study of the text of Justin. And more recently see Oskar Skarsaune, *The Proof from Prophecy: A Study in Justin Martyr’s Proof-Text Tradition: Text-Type, Provenance, Theological Profile*, Supplements to *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 56, (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 199-203; 380-91.

³ David E. Aune, “Justin Martyr’s Use of the Old Testament,” *BETS* 9.4 (1966): 179-197. Aune has provided a survey of hermeneutical strategies within Justin, which is a helpful start, but he does not interact with either Justin’s or Trypho’s use of Is. 7:14.

regarding Is 7:14 via commenting on the Ancient Versions of Isaiah 7:14 generally and then moving to the issues of Justin’s LXX and Trypho’s alternate reading of Is. 7:14 specifically.

Second, this paper will take up the basic issues of provenance of DT. The composition of DT is most probably dated to c. 160, but the dialogue itself probably took place near the time of the Bar Kochba rebellion c.135. In addition, this paper will argue that Eusebius’ brief comments in Historia Ecclesiae IV.18.6ff regarding the destination of the dialogue and the brief description of Trypho are legitimate and better suited to the virgin birth material than some modern proposals.

Third, this paper will attempt an interpretation of the relevant texts in DT pertaining to Is. 7:14 and the virgin birth. Based on this exegesis, the paper will defend the following thesis: Justin and Trypho use Is. 7:14 in a direct prophecy and fulfillment schema, but with radically different results. These different results obtain because of the different presuppositions that each one held through the course of the dialogue.

Isaiah 7.14 in the Traditions of the Versions

The reference to the הָעֶלְמָה in Isaiah 7:14 divided ancient interpreters and translators over the meaning of the Hebrew text. The Ancient versions indicate the tendency to translate the word as virgin or as young woman.

Isaiah 7:14 in the Aramaic Targum, the Syriac Peshitta, and the Vulgate

The Aramaic Targum represents a clear Jewish reading of the verse: בְכֵין יִתֵּן יוי הוּא לַכוֹן אָתָא הָא עוּלֵימְתָא וּתַכְרֶה שְמֵיה עִמָנוּ אֵל׃ Although the Targum contains a cognate of the Hebrew lemma, according to the Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon (CAL), עָלֵימָתָא means “girl” with no reference to the chaste or unchaste state of the girl, and DT reveals that Jews during the second century AD read Isaiah 7:14 in such a way that the girl is unchaste and

5 Alexander Sperber, The Bible in Aramaic III: The Latter Prophets according to Targum Jonathan, (Leiden: E. J. Brill 1959-73, 1992), 15. The supralinear pointing has been modified to the sublinear pointing for convenience. The Targums are notoriously difficult to date, but Targum Jonathan according to Babylonian tradition is the work Jonathan ben ‘Uzziel, a pupil of Hillel the Elder. See Emmanuel Tov, Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, 2001), 151. A first or second century date for is work is reasonable, though most scholars see this Targum as fourth or fifth century composition, see Paul D. Wegner, A Student’s Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible, (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 2006), 174.
conceives in the natural way.\textsuperscript{6}

The Syriac Peshitta of Isaiah 7:14 reads as follows: 

\begin{verbatim}
ܡܛܠ ܗܢܐ ܢܬܠ ܠܟܘܢ ܡܪܝܐ ܐܠܗܐ
ܐܬܐ܂ ܗܐ ܒܬܘܠܬ
ܐ ܒܿܛܢܛ ܘܝܿܠܕܐ ܒܪܐ܂ ܘܢܬܩܪܐ ܫܢܗ ܥܢܢܘܐܝܠ܂
\end{verbatim}

Syriac ܒܬܘܠܬܐ\textsuperscript{7} certainly means “chaste girl” or “virgin,” and this translation may infer that Christians translated Isaiah, though we cannot be certain of this conclusion.\textsuperscript{8} The second century date of P Isaiah provides another piece of the evidence from the time of Justin’s Dialogue, that others were reading the Hebrew text as virgin and not young girl.

Jerome’s Vulgate has as follows: propter hoc dabit Dominus ipse vobis signum ecce virgo concipiet et pariet filium et vocabitis nomen eius Emmanuhel. Jerome represents the conclusion to the debate, since his version was completed by 405 AD.\textsuperscript{9} He also added a new dimension to the debate, since he was the only Christian to argue from the Hebrew text, who concluded that the Hebrew should be read as virgo, if even in a periphrastic way.\textsuperscript{10}

The evidence from the Targum and the Peshitta sufficiently shows that the debate over the Hebrew text of Is. 7:14’s הָעַלְמָה was wider than the LXX and its recensions (Aquila,

\textsuperscript{6} For this meaning see http://cal1.cn.huc.edu/cgi-bin/hebanalysis.cgi?voffset=51012%2087430, accessed on 05/12/09. See DT 84.3 for this Jewish conclusion.

\textsuperscript{7} Robert Payne Smith, Syriac Thesaurus or Thesaurus Syriacus, (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2007), s.v. ܘܽܒܬܠܐ “virgo.”

\textsuperscript{8} Sebastian P. Brock, The Old Testament in Syriac according to the Peshitta Version, Part III. Fasc. 1. Isaiah. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), 12. The OT Peshitta may be dated between 150-200 AD with the Pentateuch being the earliest translation and Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah being the latest. See Michael P. Weitzman, The Syriac Version of the Old Testament: An Introduction, (United Kingdom: Cambridge, 1999), 258, and Sebastian Brock, The Bible in the Syriac Tradition, (Piscataway, NJ: Georgias Press, 2006), 17. The identity of the Syriac translators cannot be known with certainty. Brock’s general conclusion is probably correct, “The links with the Targums in certain books leads us to suppose that at least for these books the translators were probably Jewish, rather than Christian. In other books, however, the evidence perhaps points to Christian translators, though it likely that such people were of Jewish origin, for a knowledge of Hebrew would otherwise be difficult to explain.” Brock, The Bible in the Syriac Tradition, 23.

\textsuperscript{9} Tov, Textual Criticism..., 153.

\textsuperscript{10} Adam Kamesar, “The Virgin of Isaiah 7:14: The Philological Argument from the Second to the Fifth Century,” JTS NS 41.1 (1990): 62-75. Kamesar has provided a helpful resource and reconstruction of Jerome’s philological treatment of Is. 7.14, where he concludes that Jerome believed that almah entails ‘more than virginity’ in the sense of a hidden (abscondita) or cloistered woman, which “necessitates virginity” (63).
Symmachus, and Theodotion) in the second century. The Jews understood the text to refer to a young girl, while the Christians understood the same text to refer specifically to a virgin. In this context, the divergent readings in the LXX and the recensions of Is. 7:14 come into sharp focus, and the disagreement between Justin and Trypho over the text form of this verse bring the controversy to its pinnacle.

Isaiah 7:14 in Justin’s LXX and the Recensions

Justin’s LXX has been the subject of books and articles, and only brief comments can be made here regarding the text of Isaiah 7:10-17 [8.4 inter 16a and 16b].11 For parallel versions of Ziegler’s edition and the text from DT 43.5-6 see Appendix A. The differences in the text between the LXX and Justin’s text show what Barthélemy and others have already observed: Justin uses a revised LXX, not the (O)ld (G)reek itself. However, these differences do not affect the meaning of these verses, since Justin’s text still maintains the reading παρθένος. Perhaps what is more intriguing is that Justin’s text contains an interpolation of Isaiah 8:4 between 7:16a and 7:16b in both places that he cites Isaiah 7.10-17: 43.5-6 and 66.2-4. In addition, Justin’s negative argument that Isaiah 7:14 refers to Jesus Christ and not Hezekiah turns on 8:4 being in

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11 Regarding the Text of the Septuagint to which Justin had access, see Dominique Barthélemy, “Redécouverte d’un Chaînon Manquant de L’Histoire de La Septante,” RB 60 (1953): 18-29. Barthélemy concludes, “I do not want to magnify the importance of this Jewish recension at the end of the first century. It is a question of, we repeat it, a first attempt still groping and full of illogicalities, certainly limited to a few books of the Bible. It is not amazing that the grand recensions of the second century have entirely eclipsed it and that at the debut/beginning of the following century Origen had already, as we today, “rediscovered” it. In the meantime it enjoys in its time an appreciable role: that is it begins the work of the revision of the LXX which had been the grand task of the generations which followed. The labor of the anonymous ancestor of Aquila and of Origen...” At least for the Minor Prophets, Justin is using a text of the LXX, which has been revised, for Justin’s text agrees with a first century AD ms of the LXX and not the OG (19). Barthélemy also shows that the ms cannot be said to agree with any of the Three revisers (25-26), and so it must be a predecessor to these grand recensions of the second century. Barthélemy’s paleological conclusion of the first century CE has been corrected by more recent scholarship and dated to the 1st century BCE. See Natalio Fernández Marcos, The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Versions of the Bible, trans. by W. G. E. Watson, (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 152. For a very good overview of arguments for Justin’s use of a tradition of Testimonia see Oskar Skarsaune, “The Development of Scriptural Interpretation in the Second and Third Centuries—except Clement and Origen,” in Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Interpretation, vol. 1, From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (until 1300), part i, Antiquity, ed. Magne Saebø, 373-442, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 390-410. Specifically regarding the virgin birth material as from a source see Prigent, Justin et L’Ancien Testament, 149, “Justin cites two times a composite text [Is. 7:10-17 interpolated], reworked, in order to serve the Christological interpretation and in order to combat the Jewish exegesis of Is. 7...all these [components of Justin’s text form] make it reasonable to suppose that Justin used a source.”
the text and referring to the offspring of the virgin (DT 77.2-4). Trypho nowhere objects to Justin’s form of the text, which may mean that Trypho has the same text form as Justin or Justin simply does not report Trypho’s objection. These points all lead to the plausibility that Justin used a source, which was based on a revised form of the LXX.

Justin may have been aware of the LXX and its recensions and may have had access to a LXX without recension, but he still used a recension whether he realized it or not, and he became distraught with Trypho and the Jews for removing sections from it (DT 71.2) and he provides Trypho with explicit examples where the Jews have done this (DT 72-73). Although the state of Justin’s LXX cannot be fully known and our knowledge of his awareness of different Jewish and Christian recensions in contradistinction to an unrevised LXX cannot be comprehended fully, Is. 7:14 is one explicit text where two parallel versions are permitted to stand side by side and both Justin and Trypho realize that one text represents the original Seventy, while the other is another attempt to translate or revise the text. It is also the only place where Justin does not accommodate Trypho by using a text on which they can agree, but rather he entrenches himself in defense of this text form for theological reasons indubitably.

Few scholars have asserted that Trypho’s διδάσκαλοι might be the Jewish revisers of the second century (Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion), but no demonstration of this

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12 Possibly Skarsaune has provided some of Justin’s exegetical warrant for moving 8:4 to 7:10-17. He notes rabbinic texts which move 8:3 and 7:14 together “as sayings about the prophet’s sons, but refers the import of the names to Hezekiah. One cannot know how old this rabbinic haggadah is, but there is a possibility that the interpolated version of Is. 7:10ff known to Justin, derives from a Christian theologian versed in rabbinic exegesis. See Skarsaune, The Proof from Prophecy..., 380-1.

13 See the reference to Prigent in n. 11.

14 Hengel, The Septuagint as Christian Scripture..., 34.

15 DT 71.2a: Καὶ ὅτε πολλὰς γράμφας τέλεων περιείλον ἀπὸ τῶν ἐξηγήσεων τῶν γεγενημένων ὕπὸ τῶν παρὰ Πτολεμαίων γεγενημένων πρεσβυτέρων, ἔξ ἐν διαρρήδην οὕτως ὁ σταυρωθεὶς ὡς ἐπὶ καὶ θεός καὶ ἄνθρωπος καὶ σταυρούμενος καὶ ἀποθνήσκων κεκηρυγμένος ἀποδείκνυται, εἰδέναι ὡς βούλομαι.

16 DT 71.1b: ἀλλ’ αὐτοὶ ἐξηγείονται πειράζοντα. This citation comes after Justin has accused the διδασκάλους of not agreeing with the Seventy, but instead they attempt their own translation.
connection has been made. The failure to give a demonstration of the connection between the revisers and DT might be due to the fact that Joseph Ziegler did not include DT as evidence of o’ in the second apparatus of his Göttingen edition of Isaiah, though he does cite DT in his first apparatus in the same edition. Justin does not attribute the Greek quote to anyone specifically but only refers to them as διδάσκαλοι, which prima facie supports Hengel’s assumption that neither Justin nor Trypho has Aquila or Theodotion in mind. What is the probability that Trypho’s διδάσκαλοι are Aquila and Theodotion or that the teachers are dependent on them? The fact that the quote of the teachers is 1) in Greek and 2) most probably both Justin and Trypho would be dependent on Greek recensions of the LXX and not Hebrew and Aramaic sources directly, and 3) because we only have three names associated with Jewish revisers of the LXX from the second century, the reference to Trypho’s teachers are almost certainly to Aquila and Theodotion. Jewish revisions of the LXX existed before the Three, but their text of

17 L.W. Barnard, “The Old Testament and Judaism in the Writings of Justin Martyr,” *Vetus Testamentum* 14 (1964): 400. Barnard opens the possibility that Justin might have Theodotion in mind in DT 71.1, but he gives no textual warrant for this connection. See also Kamesar, “The Virgin of Isaiah 7:14: The Philological Argument from the Second to the Fifth Century,” 51. Kamesar acknowledges that νεὰνις comes from the Three and their translation of Is. 7:14 and that even Justin and Tertullian are rebutting their reading of this verse, but he provides only a reference to Field’s Hexapla, which does not provide the evidence from DT.


19 Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture...,* 31. He supposes that ἡ νεὰνις, championed by Trypho and his friends, apparently derives from a Jewish recension, which is not that of Aquila’s or Theodotion’s, but from a text that was corrected against the original, since Trypho does not mention Aquila by name.

20 For a complete listing of the evidence of Isaiah 7:14 for Origen’s Hexapla according to the format of the Hexapla Institute (http://www.hexapla.org/), see Appendix B.

21 See below for a short description of Trypho and whether he knew Hebrew or not.

22 The dating of Symmachus to c. 200 AD precludes his translation from the purview of Justin’s sources. Even if Symm. is dated to as early as 161 AD under the reign of Marcus Aurelius, which seems very unlikely, his work would have had insufficient time to circulate and gain a high and noteworthy status in Jewish circles. For the dating of Symmachus, see Natalio Fernández Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Versions of the Bible*, trans. by W. G. E. Watson, (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 125-6. Although Symm. uses ἡ νεὰνις in Is. 7:14, he is probably dependent on Ag. and Th. for his later rendering of the same verse. Aquila’s zenith is dated to 129-130, the 12th year of emperor Hadrian, according to Epiphanius, and this date accords with the evidence that Aquila was a student of R Akiba, who taught from 95-135 AD. Accounting for the necessary time of Aquila’s education and work, he probably finished his work c. 140. For this dating schema see Fernández Marcos,
Is. 7:14 is not known at this time. However, the text of Aquila and Theodotion for this verse is known and their date before 160 AD and their authoritative status in the synagogue during the second century makes them the most probable candidates for Trypho’s teachers and their Greek reading of Is. 7:14.

**Conclusion**

Justin’s text probably depends on a collection of *Testimonia*, which interpolates Isaiah 8:4 between 7:16a and 7:16b, and this reading provides a divine Messianic interpretation of 7:10-17, and as such it supports Justin’s Christological reading of the text over and against Trypho’s application to Hezekiah. Furthermore, Justin’s Septuagint is probably a revised form of the text, since his text deviates from the OG in several places, though these deviations do not affect the overall sense of the passage.

Trypho depends on a Greek reading of Isaiah 7:14, which is the text of Aquila and Theodotion, who both lived and worked prior to the composition of DT. Therefore, Justin is the first Christian apologist to rebut these sanctioned Jewish readings of the text which translate הַעֲלֵהַ with ἡ νεανίς and not ἡ παρθένος.

**The Provenance of the Dialogue with Trypho**

This paper will seek to answer 1) when the Dialogue was written, 2) to whom it was written and for what purpose, and 3) who is Trypho.

**The Dating of DT**

Because the martyrdom of Justin is dated to c. 165, the date of DT is certainly before this time. DT 1.3 contains a self reference of Trypho, in which he describes himself as fleeing

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The Septuagint in Context..., 112. Theodotion is notoriously difficult to date since patristic testimony dates him to the early second century, although there are Theodotionic texts which are historically prior to the Theodotion of the patristic testimony. See Fernández Marcos, The Septuagint in Context..., 143-4. Peter Gentry has concluded from his study of the Job materials that true Theodotion should be dated to the early part of the first century AD, which would place his work prior to Aquila’s at least for Job. Peter J. Gentry, The Asterisked Materials of the Greek Job, Septuagint and Cognate Studies, 38, (Atlanta: Scholars, 1995), 497-8.

the recent or “just now happened war.” · Most commentators have interpreted this war to be the Bar Kochba rebellion dated at 132-135 AD. Therefore the dialogue with Trypho occurred circum 135 AD. However, there is evidence of Justin’s I Apology 26.3 in DT 120.6, which indicates that DT was probably composed after I Apology. And since I Apology may be dated between 151-155 AD, one may posit a date of c. 160 for DT.

In conclusion, the dialogue with Trypho occurred c. 135, but Justin probably did not compose the Dialogue with Trypho until after he wrote I Apology, until c. 160 AD.

The Destination of the Dialogue

There is no more perplexing question related to DT than its destination, since DT nowhere informs the reader to whom it is written. Some have advocated that the Dialogue was aimed at non-Christian Gentiles, who did not know the difference between Judaism and Christianity. Others have advocated for a Christian destination for DT. On this view, the occasion for DT is the Marcionite controversy.

The classical view of the destination of DT is that it is written to be anti-Judaica and this paper believes that this view still accounts best for the destination of DT. This view is as old as Eusebius’ Historia Ecclesiae where in Book IV.18.6 he says of Justin: καὶ διάλογον δὲ πρὸς Ἰουδαίους συνέταξεν, ὃν ἐπὶ τῆς Ἐφεσίων πόλεως πρὸς Τρύφων τὸν τότε Ἑβραίων ἐπισημώτατον πεποίηται. Eusebius says the dialogue takes place in Ephesus, which is otherwise unknown. On a minimum reading of this text, Eusebius says that Justin composed the dialogue with the Jews, but one may also interpret the πρὸς preposition plus the accusative

24 DT 1.3 φυγὼν τὸν νῦν γενόμενον πόλεμον


26 For this date for I Apology, see Justin Martyr, St. Justin Martyr the First and Second Apologies, trans. by Leslie William Barnard. Ancient Christian Writers, 56, (Paulist Press, 1997). 11.


as an adversative, “against the Jews.” Indeed in Book IV.18.7, Eusebius says: ἵστορεῖ δὴ ἐν ταύτῃ περὶ Ἰουδαίων ὡς κατὰ τῆς Χριστοῦ διδασκαλίας ἐπιβουλὴν συσκευασμένων, αὐτὰ ταύτα πρὸς τὸν Τρύφωνα ἀποτεινόμενος. The verb ἀποτείνω in the middle voice plus πρός and the accusative has the meaning “inveigh against.” Thus Eusebius’ comment about the destination of the Dialogue in the previous verse should be understood adversatively; therefore, Eusebius understood that Justin composed the dialogue against the Jews. Is this thesis able to be defended from internal evidence?

A full defense of this thesis cannot be provided now, but the virgin birth material itself seems to require a dialogue against a real Jew and real Jewish exegesis and argumentation. The virgin birth argument in DT is markedly different from that in I Apology 33, which is clearly directed toward a pagan audience. The former is directed to meet two Jewish objections, while the latter was a simple presentation of the orthodox faith to the pagan world. The arguments for the anti-Marcionite destination also do not account for the virgin birth arguments within DT. First, in DT 71.2, Justin clearly says that he is arguing based upon the texts ἐκ τῶν ὁμολογομένων ἐτι παρ’ υμίν. If he is arguing against Marcion, he cannot uphold this standard, since he has argued from texts which Marcion would not confess to be in the word of God. Second, the argument over a virgin birth or a natural birth has no place in the anti-Marcionite argument, since Marcion denies the generation of the Messiah Jesus in the first place.

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30 And in the same book, he tells concerning the Jews how they formed a plot against the teaching of Christ [and] he inveighs these very things against Trypho...

31 LSJ s.v. ἀποτείνω.

32 This is an old observation. See Skarsaune, “The Development of Scriptural Interpretation in the Second and Third Centuries—except Clement and Origen,” 404.

33 See Irenaeus Against Heresies Book I.27.2, where it is reported that Marcion mutilates the Gospel of Luke, removing all that is written respecting the generation of the Lord...
Although a full demonstration cannot be given, the classical view has the evidence of antiquity and it still is able to account for the internal evidence, including the presence of the virgin birth argument.

**The Identity of Trypho**

Trypho’s identity has been an enigma for scholars and this paper will attempt to defend the statements of Eusebius in *Historia Ecclesiae* IV.18.6. Eusebius says concerning Trypho: πρὸς Τρύφωνα τῶν τότε Ἑβραίων ἐπισημότατον. Eusebius says the dialogue was against Trypho, *who was very distinguished* of the Jews in that day. One need not necessarily read a true superlative for ἐπισημότατον. Eusebius’ use of the elative and not the superlative is completely consistent with what we observe of Trypho in DT, though this grammatical point has confused some. Therefore, Trypho was a real Jew and more importantly he was a real opponent of Justin, not some straw man that Justin erected. Although Trypho is a Jew, there is evidence that he is probably not from the strictest sect of Judaism in Palestine, but that his Judaism reflects a Hellenized form. Seen in this light, Trypho is a worthy Jewish opponent of Christianity during Justin’s day. The attempts to mar Trypho’s status as a worthy dialogue

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34 The superlative in Hellenistic Greek is in decline and came to be used with elative force, B-D-F §60. Therefore Kirsopp Lake’s translation, “the most distinguished Jew of the day” is unwarranted since Trypho cannot stand up to that reputation according to the material of DT itself. Eusebius. *The History of the Church*, 371.

35 Nilson, “To Whom is Justin Martyr’s Dialogue with Trypho Addressed,” 545. Nilson has to say that Eusebius is wrong in his testimony that Trypho is the most prominent Jew of his day. However, if the form is an elative, then there is no problem with Eusebius’ testimony of the person of Trypho.

36 Demetrios Trakatellis, “Justin Martyr’s Trypho,” *HTR* 79.1-3 (1986): 289-297. Trakatellis seems to understand Trypho as a real person and he gives extensive evidence from DT to make his case.


38 In DT 1.3 Trypho says: εἰμι δὲ Ἕβραῖος ἐκ περιτομῆς.

39 See Barnard, “The Old Testament and Judaism in the Writings of Justin Martyr,” 398. Barnard comments are worth citing in full, “Trypho was a Hellenistic Jewish layman who combined the culture and enquiring spirit of the hellenistic world with a knowledge of traditional Jewish exegesis and haggadah. He has no knowledge of the Hebrew language but knows accurately the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. His is not however the Judaism of Philo and Alexandrian hellenistic Judaism, nor that of Palestinian Rabbinic schools. Trypho represents a mediating Judaism, perhaps having Palestinian roots, which cannot be strictly classified.”
partner of Justin Martyr can only be done if one holds Trypho to the standard of what is known of strict Palestinian Judaism in the early second century. Trypho is not the most distinguished Jew of his day, but rather he is a very distinguished Jew in the context of Hellenistic Judaism, who utilized the Septuagint and Aquila and Theodotion and their sanctioned Greek synagogue readings and exegeses for his objections.

**Conclusion**

The DT was written c. 160 and it was written against the Jews. Trypho was a real Jew and a worthy opponent of Christianity and Justin’s proofs for the Christian faith. In particular, Trypho raises very significant objections to Justin’s argument for the virgin birth of Christ, to which we now turn.

**The Virgin Birth Arguments in DT**

This section devotes attention to Justin’s virgin birth argument in DT. First, Justin’s basic argument of the proof from prophecy and fulfillment regarding the virgin birth will be presented. Second, the Trypho’s rebuttal to this argument will be taken up. At this juncture, the paper will consider Justin’s own account of the Jewish rebuttals to his argument. In other words Trypho’s objections combined with Justin’s account of the Jewish rebuttals will need to be examined in order for the reader to grasp the whole Jewish objection to Justin’s argument. Third and finally, this paper will examine Justin’s response to Trypho’s rebuttals. The relevant chapters in DT are as follows: 43, 66, 67, 68, 69-70, 71, 77-78, 84, since these are the chapters which quote or refer to Isaiah 7:10-17 [8:4 inter 16a and b]. Of course there are references to the virgin extra these chapters in DT, but these chapters do not contribute to the arguments over Is. 7:14.

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40 These chapters are photocopied from Justin Martyr, *Iustuni Martyris Dialogus cum Tryphone*, ed. by Miroslav Marcovich, Patristische Texte und Studien, 47, (New York/Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997) and are placed at the end of the paper for the reader’s convenience. All translations from DT are my own.

41 There are 37 occurrences of παρθένος in DT. Of these 37 only one is in the plural παρθένοι and has no relevance to this study. The other occurrences outside of this study are found in 23; 45; 48; 50; 57; 63; 75; 85; 87; 100; 101; 105; 113; 120; 127. DT 100 has a reference to Eve being a virgin. DT 67 and 70 have a reference to the Greek myth of Perseus being born from the virgin Δανάη. Otherwise the other 33 references are to Mary, who is the virgin of Isaiah 7:14.
Justin’s Argument of the Proof from Prophecy in DT

Justin’s argument for the virgin birth takes place in the context of explaining the mystery of the generation of the Messiah (Is. 53:8). He understands “Who can tell his generation” in Is. 53:8 as indicating that the Messiah has no generation for he is pre-existent. However, τὸ προφητικὸν πνεῦμα through Isaiah himself reveals the manner (τρόπος) of his coming into the world and then Justin quotes Isaiah 7:10-17 [8:4 inter 16a and 16b]. Justin concludes, “Therefore, indeed it is evident [φανερὸν] to all that in the family of Abraham according to the flesh no one at any time has been begotten from a virgin nor has one been begotten from a virgin been reported except this Christ of ours.” Justin accepts this reading as from the Spirit of prophecy and it should be evident to all that this prophecy refers to Jesus Christ, since a virgin birth has not happened at any time nor has it been claimed by anyone except in the case of Jesus.

In DT 77.4-78-10a, Justin argues positively from the prophecy to the fulfillment that Jesus is the Christ. The context of these verses consists of Justin’s response to the Jewish interpretation that the son of the young woman is Hezekiah. We will return to Justin’s prior negative argument infra. In DT 77.4 Justin identifies Herod as the king of Assyria of Isaiah 8:4 διὰ τὴν ἄθεον καὶ ἄνομον αὐτοῦ γνώμην. And then he provides his ground for this connection in a typological-prophetic hermeneutic: Ἐπίστασθε γὰρ τοιαῦτα, ἔφην, ἐν παραβολαῖς καὶ ὁμοιώσει πολλάκις λαλοῦν τὸ ἀγιόν πνεῦμα, οὗν πεποίκε καὶ πρὸς τὸν λαὸν ἀπαντᾷ τὸν ἐν ἴεροσολύμοις, πολλάκις φησάν πρὸς αὐτοὺς: οἱ πατήρ σου Ἀμαρραίος καὶ ἡ μήτηρ σου Χετταία. It is prophetic because the Holy Spirit (i.e. the spirit of prophecy) speaks such things. The text is also typological because the Spirit speaks in parables and likenesses frequently, just as he has done with the people in Jerusalem when he said that your father is a Gomorrite and your mother a Hittite. Justin has employed a typological-

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42 DT 43.4-6

43 DT 43.7
prophetic exegesis. Herod is not an Assyrian, but his character was like that of the Assyrians of the OT. Therefore Isaiah was not speaking of the literal Assyrian king except on the level of type, but rather the one like the Assyrian king, i.e. Herod the antitype.

Justin’s next proof that Jesus is the Christ who fulfills Isaiah 7:10-17 comes in DT 78.1-2 and this text depends on the historicity of the events concerning the Magi who came from the East, i.e. ἐκ Ἀρραβίας to worship the Christ at Bethlehem in Matthew 2:1-6 and the prophecy in Micah 5:2[1]. The prophecy and its fulfillment constitute proof that Jesus is the referent of Isaiah 7:10-17 not Hezekiah. The detail about the Magi coming from the Arabia or the East will be resumed infra.

That the virgin birth of Jesus the Christ in Bethlehem is the main argument in this section is confirmed in DT 78.3-6. In this section Justin is principally dependent on the gospel accounts; although, he does introduce the detail of Jesus being born in a cave, which is not in the gospel accounts, but Isaiah predicted it (DT 78.6; 70.3). He has two concerns: 1) Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit, even when Joseph thought she had conceived by intercourse, that is immorality (78.3) and 2) the census in Luke 2 caused Joseph and Mary to move from Nazareth to Bethlehem where Jesus was born in a cave near the village, thus Justin buttresses the claim that Jesus was born in Bethlehem since not only did the Magi arrive there according to Matthew 2, but Joseph and Mary themselves went there for the census (DT 78.4). The detail regarding the cave is intriguing not only because it is not in the gospel accounts but also because Justin seems to mention it only because of the cult of Mithra (DT 78.6). Justin has already encountered Trypho’s objection where he claims that Christianity has mimicked pagan myths, particularly regarding the virgin birth (69-70), and he clarifies again that Isaiah predicted the Messiah would be born in a cave (Is. 33:16). As to the words of Mithra regarding a cave, Justin maintains that the words of those who hand down the mysteries of Mithra were stirred up by the devil to say that they were initiated by them in a place being called by them a cave (DT 78.6).

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44 One could dispute whether Justin is in the bounds of the NT employment of typology in this instance.
In DT 78.7-8 Justin introduces his third proof which entails Herod’s command to kill all the children in Bethlehem. Justin then quotes Jer. 38[31]:15 and the voice and the weeping. Justin seems to parse the voice from the weeping in the text. He says, “Therefore, because of the sound which was about to be heard from Rama, that is Arabia..., weeping was about to come upon the place, where Rachel, the wife of Jacob, who is called Israel, the holy patriarch, was buried, that is Bethlehem while the women weep for their own slaughtered children and are not having comfort because of what has happened to them.” It is not clear how Justin understands the “sound from Rama,” but apparently there is a causal relationship between the sound coming from Rama and the weeping overtaking Bethlehem, Rachel’s burial place. The sound from Rama that is Arabia may have to do with the coming of the Magi, since Justin asserts the Magi came from Arabia. They gave voice or sound to Herod concerning the Messiah, and his birth place in Bethlehem. And according to Justin, because the sound came from Arabia, the weeping must also come to Bethlehem, the burial place of Rachel. In essence Justin argues that the sound has come from Arabia and the weeping has overtaken Bethlehem as a result of Christ’s first advent. Therefore, Jesus is the Christ, the one born from the virgin.

One finds the fourth and final proof from prophecy and fulfillment that Justin offers Trypho in DT 78.9-10. It is the proof from the fact that a great evil was undone at the birth of Christ. Justin says, “For even that which Isaiah said, “he will capture [λήψεται] the power of Damascus and the spoils of Samaria” (Is. 8:4) was signifying that the power of the evil demon, which lives in Damascus is about to be overcome at the same time Christ was born, which indeed is shown as having happened.”45 According to Justin, the son born from the virgin will capture the power of Damascus at the time of his birth. How did Christ do this at his birth? Justin says, “For the Magi, who having been spoiled, were equipped with all evil deeds, which were being worked by that demon, who came and worshipped the Christ, were shown as revolting against that power which spoils them, which the Word in a mystery was signifying to us that it dwelt in

45 DT 78.9a
Justin says that Christ’s birth alone broke the power of the demon of Damascus and the proof lies in the fact that the Magi were once in bondage to the demon, but when they came to worship the Messiah at his birth they revolted against the demon. Regarding the spoils of Samaria, Justin says, “Now it rightly calls that power which is sinful and unjust in parable, Samaria. And no one of you is able to deny that Damascus was and is of the land/region of Arabia (although it is now assigned to what is called Syrophonecia).” Therefore, according to Justin, Isaiah 8:4 refers to an act of the Messiah which happened at the time of his virgin birth. Since neither Hezekiah nor any other son of Abraham has fulfilled this prophecy, except Jesus Christ, he must be the Messiah and he must have been born from the virgin of Isaiah 7:14.

In conclusion Justin’s argument that Isaiah 7:14 must refer to Jesus Christ and not Hezekiah is based on a typological-prophetic and fulfillment hermeneutic. Justin then argues from the context of Isaiah 7:14 and the fulfillments in the gospel accounts. If Isaiah 7:14 refers to Hezekiah, then the whole of 7:10-17 [8:4 inter 16a and 16b] must refer to him also. This paper will return to Justin’s specific rebuttals to Trypho’s objections in the third section infra but now moves to Trypho’s arguments and objections to Justin’s overall thesis: Isaiah 7:14 refers to a virgin birth and Jesus is the referent of the prophecy.

**Trypho’s Objections to Jesus as the Christ**

Trypho has four objections to the virgin birth of Jesus Christ from different quarters. First, he objects to Justin’s conclusion on the grounds of his teachers’ reading of Isaiah 7:14. Second, Trypho asserts that his teachers’ interpretation of this text is correct when they say Hezekiah is the fulfillment of the prophecy, not Jesus. Third, Trypho may invent his own

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46 DT. 78.9b
47 DT 78.10.
48 DT 67.1a contains Trypho’s wording of the objection, while Justin’s anticipation of the objection of Trypho’s teachers is found in DT. 43.8 et al.
49 DT 67.1b.
objection or perhaps he learned it from his own Hellenistic education, which he based on the parallels from Greek mythology. This objection intends to ridicule Justin’s view of the virgin birth by comparing it to the ridiculous Greek myths of the past. Fourth and most interesting, Trypho objects to the virgin birth of the divine Messiah on the basis of rationalism wrapped in an incomplete reading of Scripture. This objection strikes at the center of the Christian faith since it denies the incarnation, the pre-existence of the Son, and therefore the Trinity, though neither Justin nor Trypho uses this word.

Trypho does not expand or defend his first two objections beyond the primary claims, since they are meant to be persuasive prima facie. However, the Dialogue does provide the fundamental reason or hermeneutic of Trypho for these interpretations. Justin’s comment is worth citing in full:

For whatever statements appear explicitly in the Scriptures showing their [Trypho’s teachers] foolish and vain opinion, these they dare to say have not been written so; but whatever they are able to draw, with which they are accustomed to harmonize with human acts, these they say are not to be interpreted with reference to our Jesus Christ himself, but with reference to whom they attempt to interpret. Like also regarding this Scripture concerning which is the present discussion [Is. 7:14], they also taught you, saying that it refers to Hezekiah, which indeed, as I have maintained, I will show they are lying/false.

According to Justin, Trypho and his teachers employ a naturalistic hermeneutic in order to deny

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50 On Trypho’s education from Korinth the Socratic see DT 1.2.

51 DT. 67.2. This paper will not interact with this objection or Justin’s reply, except to point the reader to Justin’s response to this specific accusation in DT 69-70. At the risk of simplification of Justin’s rebuttal, Justin replies to this charge by saying that the devil creates counterfeits of the true essence, which is found in Christianity. Any seeming parallel between Christianity and the myths is compared to the genuine article in contrast with the counterfeit. Justin’s response to the Mithra cult and the cave is an example of what he applies to the rest of the supposed parallels between Christianity and mythology. See p. 13 supra.

52 DT 68.1, 5.

53 The implications of this argument are clear to both parties, since what is under review is whether the Jews think that any other is worshiped and being called Lord and God in the Scriptures except the one who made everything and Christ, who through so many Scriptures was shown to you as becoming man (DT 68.3). Trypho’s reply is clear: How are we able to confess this, when we have made so great an enquiry whether there is even any other save the Father alone (DT 68.4).

54 DT 68.8
that these texts speak about Jesus Christ. They then argue that the text must not be speaking of a supernatural virgin birth but to Hezekiah who was born in the natural or human way. This naturalistic hermeneutic contradicts Justin’s hermeneutic of the prophetic Spirit who speaks in parables and types. Justin continues:

But whatever Scriptures we speak to them, which explicitly prove Christ as having suffered and been worshiped and [was] God, which also I recited to you, because compelled they agree that these were spoken with reference to the Christ, but they dare to say that he is not the Christ, but they confess another one will come and suffer and rule and be worshipped as God; which [opinion] indeed I will likewise show is ridiculous and unreasonable.\(^{55}\)

This second objection is an entailment of the first. Here, Justin reports that the Jews agree that the texts he uses speak of the Messiah, but they deny that Jesus is the actual fulfillment of the texts themselves. Justin answers this subsidiary objection when he argues positively that Jesus is the Christ.\(^{56}\)

The fourth objection of Trypho begins with a rationalistic skepticism, “You are attempting to prove an incredible and nearly impossible thing—that God would endure to be born and to become a man.”\(^{57}\) This skepticism leads him to affirm strict monotheism where no other being is able to be worshipped rightly as God.\(^{58}\) However, Justin has argued diligently from the Scriptures that no one can tell of the generation of the Messiah, therefore he must be divine and worthy of worship as God.\(^{59}\) And at this point Justin has compelled Trypho to retreat to the Scriptures and he quotes from a complex of texts based on Ps 131 (132):11b and 2 Sm 7:12-16. Trypho says, “Therefore how does the Word say to David that from his loins God will take for himself a son and he will set up the kingdom for him and he will seat him upon the

\(^{55}\) DT 68.9

\(^{56}\) See the exegesis of DT 77 and 78 supra.

\(^{57}\) DT 68.1

\(^{58}\) DT. 68.4a

\(^{59}\) DT 68.4b
throne of his glory.\textsuperscript{60} Trypho has quoted a relevant text, but he stops short of affirming the full nature of the Messiah, David’s son. Justin will synthesize the divine pre-existence of the Messiah with his human descent from the lineage of David in response to this objection.

In conclusion, Trypho’s objections to Jesus as the Messiah are both textual and theological. In the first place he denies that Justin has the word of God on the matter and therefore he has misinterpreted the referent of the prophecy as Jesus and not Hezekiah. Trypho does not share Justin’s presupposition of the importance of the tradition of the LXX, and therefore he chooses a different text. Furthermore, his presupposition of strict monotheism which allows for no other divine persons to receive worship causes him to reject Justin’s interpretations of Scripture. This presupposition combined with his incomplete reading of the Scriptural evidence regarding the Messiah is the reason he objects to Justin’s argument concerning the virgin birth of Jesus, the Christ.

Justin’s Response to Trypho’s Reading of Isaiah 7:14

Justin’s response to Trypho takes a positive form and a negative form. The positive arguments continue to defend that Jesus is the Messiah of Isaiah, while the negative argument shows that neither the Jewish teacher’s text form nor the Hezekiah interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 fits the wider context of the verse.

Justin’s response begins in DT 68.6, and he immediately demonstrates that the Messiah is both God (via Is. 53.8) and a man from the loins of David (via Ps. 131:11; 2 Sm 7:12-16). Because Isaiah speaks about the virgin birth with reference to the house of David, there is no difficulty with reconciling these two aspects of the Messiah’s nature. Justin also introduces the hermeneutic that later prophets explain former prophecies.\textsuperscript{61} Thus Nathan spoke the oracle in 2 Sm 7, but Isaiah came later and explained how the Messiah who has an untold generation will

\textsuperscript{60} DT 68.5

\textsuperscript{61} ε ἐ μήτι τούτῳ οὐκ ἐπίστασθε, ὃ φίλοι, ἔφην, ὅτι πολλοὺς λόγους, τοὺς ἐπικεκαλυμμένους καὶ ἐν παραβολαῖς ἢ μυστηρίοις ἢ ἐν συμβολαῖς ἑργῶν λεγεμένους, οί μετ’ ἕκεινος τοὺς εἰπόντας ἢ πράξαντας γενόμενοι προφῆται ἐξηγήσαντο.
sit on David’s throne: God will be born a man from the house of David through a virgin. Only in this way is Is. 7:14 able to be called a σημεῖον.

Justin’s second positive response to Trypho regards the word σημεῖον in Is. 7:14.

Justin says:

For unless this one was about to be born from a virgin concerning which Isaiah speaks, to whom does the Holy Spirit cry: “Behold the Lord himself will give to you a sign, behold the virgin will conceive and she will give birth to a son?” For if this one was about to be born from intercourse in like manner will all other firstborns, why then would God say that he would make a sign which is not common to all firstborns? But that, which is truly a sign and was about to become trustworthy to the race of men, that is the firstborn of all deeds became a child truly made flesh through the virgin womb, anticipating it through the prophetic spirit it predicted as I repeated to you one way after another, so that when it happens by the power and will of the Maker of all things, it might be known as having happened, as also Even came from one side of Adam, and just as in the beginning all other living things were begotten by the Word of God.\(^62\)

Justin makes the case that a “sign” must be distinguished from the ordinary manner of things. The virgin birth of the Messiah, “the firstborn of all deeds,” became a child through the virgin’s womb. If a νεκριζ gave birth in the normal way, then this would be no prophetic sign for subsequent generations to recognize. However, if the παρθένος gives birth in the unnatural way of things, then the prediction of this act and its fulfillment would constitute a sign which would reveal the divine nature of the act.

Justin begins his negative argument by criticizing Trypho for forsaking the reading of the Seventy in Isaiah 7:14. He says:

I am not persuaded by your teachers who have not agreed that what was interpreted by the seventy elders along side King Ptolomy who was in Egypt was right, but they themselves attempted to interpret these things. And I wish for you to see that they have completely removed many Scriptures from the interpretations having come about under the elders who were with Ptolomy, from which this very one who was crucified is proven explicitly that he has been preached as God and man and crucified and died.\(^63\)

Justin first accuses Trypho of abandoning the reading of the Seventy. It is difficult to know if Justin believed the Seventy were inspired or not. It seems he appeals more to the tradition of the

\(^{62}\) DT 84.1-2

\(^{63}\) DT 71.1-2a
authority of the LXX rather than divine confirmation of its inspiration.\textsuperscript{64} The second point is a bit harsher. Justin accuses Trypho and the Jews of removing many scriptures which would prove that the Messiah Jesus was crucified... Justin enumerates a list of texts in DT 72-76 to oblige Trypho’s request for proof. Justin has accommodated his argument to Trypho by appealing only to the texts with which they agree, but Justin cannot yield on his reading of Is. 7:14. Only the virgin birth explains the wider context of Isaiah, and the wider context coheres only if the supernatural virgin birth remains intact.

The last segment of Justin’s argument consists of his negative review of Hezekiah as the prophetic fulfillment of Isaiah 7:10-17 [8:4 inter 16a and 16b]. Justin demands, “But show to me first that it is spoken with reference to Hezekiah that, “before he knows to call father or mother, he captured the power of Damascus and the spoils of Samaria before the King of Assyria.”\textsuperscript{65} Justin further explains his demand, “for as you wish to explain it will not be conceded to you: that Hezekiah waged war against the ones in Damascus and Samaria before the king of Assyria.”\textsuperscript{66} Justin will not capitulate to the Hezekiah interpretation because of Isaiah 8:4. He says:

\begin{quote}
For before the child knew to call father or mother, says the prophetic Word, he will capture the power of Damascus and the spoils of Samaria before the king of Assyria. For except the prophetic Spirit said with this addition [προσθήκη]: before the child knew to call father or mother, says the prophetic Word, he will receive the power of Damascus and the spoils of Samaria before the king of Assyria, but he has only said: and she will give birth to a child and he will capture the power of Damascus and the spoils of Samaria, you would be able to say: since God foreknew that he was about to receive these things, he has spoken them beforehand. But now [as it is] with this addition the prophecy has spoken: before the child knew to call father or mother, says the prophetic Word, he will receive the power/army of Damascus and the spoils of Samaria.
\end{quote}

Justin is very clear that without the “addition” (i.e. Is. 8:4) Trypho would have a point to make against his reading. But according to Justin, the spirit of prophecy has spoken with the addition

\textsuperscript{64} Hengel, \textit{The Septuagint as Christian Scripture}, 27-8

\textsuperscript{65} DT 77.2a

\textsuperscript{66} DT 77.2b
in place, and therefore Hezekiah is not able to be the fulfiller of these prophecies.

**Conclusion**

Although Justin did not know Hebrew, he had an arsenal of material with which to combat the objections of Trypho. He used the LXX, which is an ancient and reliable translation of the Hebrew. He appealed to a source of *Testimonia*, which was probably a Christian exegetical tradition of reading certain OT texts together with coherence. Most importantly Justin read the Bible contextually. He argued soundly that Isaiah 7:10-17 could not refer to Hezekiah because the wider context prohibits it and that same reading which forbids Hezekiah to be the fulfiller actually indicates that Jesus has fulfilled the prophecy.