

DRAFT not for publication

Josephus versus Yosippon since World War One

Yosippon, which as we have noticed in prior workshops, began to be challenged by Josephus already in the 19th century, not in terms of demographics but in terms of the new field of *Geschichte*, a challenge already successfully explored in the 16th and 17th centuries.¹ For the previous millennium Yosippon has been the major source for Second Temple history among Jews and Muslims, and until the Renaissance it competed successfully through Pseudo-Hegesippus' *De Excidio Hierosolymitano* among Christians. In the 19th century Yosippon stimulated Jewish nationalism and so reigned supreme among the religious masses of Eastern Europe, while Josephus gained new life among the *Wissenschaft* scholars and the *Maskilim*. This situation lasted until after WWI.

While Yosippon lost its authenticity as an historical source due to the western scholarly discovery of Josephus during the Renaissance, and Pseudo Hegesippus was demoted as a rewritten rhetorical copy of Josephus's Jewish War, a last battle was engaged between two scholars at the beginning of the 20th century. In his highly analytical study on Jesus of Nazareth Joseph Klausner disparaged both Yosippon and the *Toldoth Yeshu* as historical sources for the life of Jesus and the Second Temple period.² Even so, he seems to follow Yosippon's more dramatic Masada interpretation rather than that of Josephus which appears as a standard Greco-Roman paean to 'noble death'.³ Micha Bin Gurion, the champion of Yosippon in whose honor the author changed his name from Berdyczewski, created

¹ By Azariah de Rossi and Sebastian Munster inter alii.

² *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Macmillan, 1925).

³ See Yael Zerubabel, "The Dead of Memory and the Memory of Death: Masada and the Holocaust as Historical Metaphor," *Representations* 45 (Winter 1994), p. 76.

his own library of heroes based on Yosippon's seminal influence upon traditional Jewish readers. He also attacked Klausner in a stinging critique of his western oriented scholarship which seemed to ignore the great Jewish writers and intellectuals of the 19th and early 20th centuries.⁴

Berdyczewski was both right and wrong in his defense of Yosippon as later 20th-century scholarship has shown. Even so Micah Bin Gorion's son reprinted his father's seminal Yosippon-based story *Derekh rehokah* and supported the rightist interpretation of Zionism that was heavily influenced by his father. And now at the beginning of the 21st century both Josephus and Yosippon still vie with each other although in different markets. The study of Josephus is worldwide, serving scholars and students in multiple languages as the major source for Second Temple history; this workshop series and its organizers are a welcome example of such development. Yosippon, on the other hand, has taken a back seat with its own readership and a slowly developing repertoire of scholarship to which we shall soon turn.

But first, let us continue with the rivalry between Yosippon and Josephus in the early years of the British Mandate. The Hebrew translation of Graetz's monumental opus became more available at the beginning of the 20th century with individual volumes already appearing in the last quarter of the 19th.⁵ In Palestine a translation of Josephus's Jewish War appeared in 1923, bringing the flavor of this original source to the young readers of the New Yishuv in tune with the new nationalist spirit of the time.⁶ While the Old Yishuv still read Yosippon in a bevy of

⁴ "Doctor Klausner" in *Kitve M.Y. Bin Gorion (Berdichewski)*. II: Ma'amarim (Tel Aviv, 1960), pp. 234-40. An analysis of Berdyszewski's positive attitude toward both Josephus and Yosippon and its impact on his son Emanuel deserves its own study.

⁵ *Divre Yemei Yisrael*, vol. 3 [Warsaw, 1983], p. 262 and translator's note.

⁶ Y.N. Simhoni, tr., *Toldot milhemet hayehudim im haroma'im*. (Tel Aviv, 1923).

editions in both Hebrew and Yiddish, there now began to appear the cantos of a new epic on Masada by Isaac Lamdan that was to enthrall young readers as they traipsed the trails of their newly reacquired ancient homeland. As Yael Feldman has shown,⁷ Lamdan most likely based his work on Yosippon rather than Josephus, the former replete with sacrifice, love of Israel, and a superlative Hebrew style that had already been scoured by Eliezer ben Yehudah during his compilation of a thesaurus for the reborn Hebrew now entering its second generation. David Grún, the leader of the Labor Zionists had already changed his name to Ben Gurion in honor of Yosippon as he reported to David Flusser,⁸ and many of the Zionist groups mentioned in his *Zikhronot* carry heroic names derived from Yosippon.⁹ So Simhoni's Josephus was a source for budding scholars, while Yosippon continued to influence the young and the religious with a new surge of nationalism. As Simhoni stresses in his introduction, Masada as an act of national sacrifice became a major theme in the national educational process.

While Lamdan's classic stirred Palestinian youth and by extension Zionist youth throughout Central and Eastern Europe through World War II, other interwar translations into Hebrew which proved to be familiar with Yosippon included Franz Werfel's *Forty Days of Musa Dagh* and Lion Feuchtwanger's trilogy (in six volumes in translation) were well read and influenced Yishuv readers.

While Josephus was to capture the critical attention of the History Department at the new Hebrew University of Jerusalem, a different set of its scholars were to engage in a scholarly study of Yosippon, bringing it into the modern age. Others

⁷ *Glory and Agony. Isaac's Sacrifice and National Narrative* (Stanford UP, 2010), pp. 118-24 and below note 26.

⁸ Personal communication.

⁹ E.g., Bar Giora, the predecessor of Hashomer. Cf David Ben Gurion, *Memoirs* [Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1971], p. 35.

praised mostly its exquisite style.¹⁰ Outside the university, the masses still read Yosippon as the *ipsissima verba* of Josephus himself which he had indicated having written to his co-religionists in their own language. No one however thought to challenge Yosippon's usage of a beautiful midrashic Hebrew by comparing it to the Aramaic actually spoken by the Jews in Babylonia in Josephus's time. Faithful to this tradition Abraham Hominer began producing his rabbinic scholarly version of Yosippon based on Judah ibn Moskoni's medieval compilation which included all the later interpolations the latter found during his Mediterranean travels that added about a third to the length of the text that Flusser later presented.¹¹ Hominer also invited Rav Abraham Wertheimer, editor of *Isaiah de Trani* and other scholarly texts, to write an introduction to the fourth edition (1967) arguing that Yosippon was indeed the original Josephus text that the author claimed to have written for his own people.

Yitzhak Baer who had emerged as the major historian of late medieval Jewish Spain – his German study of the Jews in Christian Spain was being translated into Hebrew for the students and general public¹² – wrote a seminal article on *Sepher Yosippon Haivri* in which he analyzed the late antique and medieval sources used by the author.¹³ Much of this material had already been discovered by Joseph Scalinger and his protégé Isaac Casaubon in the latter 16th century, but it was buried primarily in Latin scholarly tomes whose depths only a medievalist could plumb and whose fruits only a sensitive scholar could prune.¹⁴ In any case, Baer's article, although somewhat buried in a *Festschrift*, proved to be seminal for

¹⁰ E.g., Hayyim Schirmann.

¹¹ H. Hominer, *Josiphon of Joseph Ben Gorion ha-Cohen* (Jerusalem, 1967).

¹² Baer began teaching at the HUC in 1930 and his Hebrew study appeared in 1945.

¹³ "Sepher Yosippon haivri" in *Sepher Dinaburg* (Jerusalem, 1949), pp 178-205.

¹⁴ Cf. Joanna Weinberg and Anthony Grafton, *"I have always Loved the Holy Tongue"* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2011).

scholars and marked a new stage in the appreciation and understanding of this semi canonical book. At the same time a young Czech scholar fluent in Latin and Greek – he had been trained before the war by the Jesuits – was studying medieval history with Baer for his PhD. Already in 1940 David Flusser put forth a prospectus for a critical scholarly edition of Yosippon based on extant manuscripts. That project with a voluminous commentary took him 40 years -- a full biblical generation-- and therein lies a piece of oral history.

Flusser spent the war years in Jerusalem and at war's end was planning to return to his home in Czechoslovakia. At this point Gershom Scholem took him for a walk and putting his arm around Flusser's shoulders explained that there was a desperate need for a scholar of the Greek and Latin Christian materials to teach at the Hebrew University. Flusser, inter alia, answered, "But can I still work on the Middle Ages?" Scholem smiled and responded, "In your spare time." And thus Flusser became the Jerusalem expert on Christianity, the master of every manuscript relating to the early (and later) church. While somewhat sidetracked by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls to which he devoted an inordinate amount of time and effort, he continued to study Yosippon and gather the manuscript remains and the Genizah fragments to produce his scholarly edition in 1978 and commentary in 1980, subsequently revised in 1981.¹⁵ Flusser, while mastering Josephus, nonetheless was able to show that the author of Yosippon, in addition to editing and translating Pseudo Hegesippus's *De excidio hierosolymitano* (long known since the 16th century) for a Hebrew audience, also used a Latin translation of Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews* – he apparently had only Books 1-16 (but then the missing books rehearsed the period covered in the Jewish War) – and Latin versions of I and II Maccabees alongside the New Testament, Apocrypha and

¹⁵ *The Josippon. [Josephus Gorionides]. Ed. With intro., Commentary and Notes* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1978, 1980; vol 2 revised ed. 1982)

Pseudepigrapha to produce a scholarly history of the Second Temple period that was not superseded until the 20th century. As a true history according to Flusser, Yosippon still promises insights into the period by a competent scholar however limited he was by a restricted body of sources, i.e., the same corpus available to scholars until the end of the 19th century and the discovery of Genizah material and the 20th-century discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Flusser argued that his work on Yosippon was not final since there did not exist as yet a scholarly edition of the Arabic Yosippon. Incidentally the Syriac versions of Yosippon have not been studied or edited let alone discussed by modern scholars. Yet there exists in the Syriac tradition a fifth book of the Maccabees that turns out to be a version of Yosippon known to that church.¹⁶ The Syriac Yosippon was translated into English in the early 19th century from an Arabic translation that was already centuries old. Julius Wellhausen had written a major study on the Arabic Yosippon¹⁷ that was basically ignored by Jewish scholars until it was resurrected and made the basis of Shulamit Sela's argument that an Arabic version preceded the Hebrew version that Flusser had edited. In her Tel Aviv University dissertation written under the direction of Moshe Gil she also added the Arabic Genizah fragments of Yosippon – these had been collected by Gil and bequeathed to her to edit and translate to Hebrew as part of her thesis. She also included a photocopy of a late Arabic version of the Yosippon. She argued for the ancient separation of an Arabic Book of the Maccabees and the Arabic Book of Yosippon. Her revised

¹⁶ "A Syriac translation of book vi. of the 'Jewish War' is contained in the Peshitta manuscript of the Ambrosianus in Milan, where it is called 'The Fifth Book of Maccabees.' The complete text-a photographic reproduction of the manuscript-was issued by Ceriani (Milan, 1876-83), republished with German translation by H. Kottel, Berlin, 1886. See also Henry Cotton, *The five books of Macchabees in English with notes and illustrations* (Oxford UP, 1832). Yosippon is also canonical in the Ethiopic church.

¹⁷ "Der arabische Josippus" in *Abhandlungen der koeniglichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Goettingen*, Philologisch-Historische Klasse, Neue folge Bd. 1, Nr. 4 (Berlin 1897).

thesis was published by TAU press posthumously and without the Genizah fragments.¹⁸

Sela's general approach to the Arabic Yosippon which she translated into Hebrew was a literary one. Needless to say Flusser and Bonfil rejected her thesis out of hand. Flusser argued that the names were all derived from Pseudo Hegesippus, that is from the Latin; Bonfil from his own historical studies of the Yosippon.¹⁹ It is interesting to note that neither of these two Jerusalem scholars knew Arabic while Sela's Doktorvater, Moshe Gil, was the dean of Arabic studies at Tel Aviv University whose monumental studies are all based on a thorough knowledge of medieval Arabic. By way of a side track it should be noted that an Arabic version of Yosippon was published in Cairo in 1906. What relationship it has to the numerous citations of Yosippon in medieval Christian and Muslim Arabic literature is unfortunately beyond my competence.

If I may insert a personal note at this chronological point, I met Flusser during a post doctoral year at the Hebrew University since I had already decided to translate his *Sepher Yosippon* and wanted his guidance and benediction. Over the next 25 years we met whenever I was in Jerusalem and discussed inter alia my project. Since I was also working on the Shoah in Greece, also begun in 1978, I must admit that working on the Yosippon was an exercise in exploring Zionism *avant la lettre* and somewhat of a counter to the horrors of the Greek experience during the tragic years of World War II. Now that the books on Greece are out on their own, I am able to devote more time to the problems of Yosippon and its translation project.

Unexpectedly however the two projects intersected one day in 2007. Yael Feldman called me and excitedly related her recent discovery. Abba Kovner, well known as

¹⁸ *The Arabic Josippon* (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2009), 2 vols.

¹⁹ Personal communications.

a key figure in the rise of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust and a literary figure as well as fighter in postwar Israel, is known for his alleged responsibility for introducing the phrase “ (not) like sheep to the slaughter” in his call for resistance in Vilna Ghetto. She had discovered a very similar phrase in a 1911 eulogy for 2nd Aliya pioneers killed in Palestine, authored by Yitzhak Ben Zvi.²⁰ Not familiar with Abba Kovner at the time, I remarked that the phrase sounded familiar and recalled a passage in Yosippon wherein Matityahu raises the call for revolt against the ‘Greek’ kingdom in Damascus to the effect that the time for weeping and prayer is over and that the Jews must fight for “we shall not go like sheep led to the slaughter” [Flusser’s edition p. 76 line 10]. Whether Kovner cited Yosippon directly – most Jewish males and especially the Zionists knew the text directly and many Jewish women knew it as well directly or indirectly – or drew his recall from the 19th- and early 20th-century Hebrew and Yiddish self-defense discourses is unknown. But Yosippon is clearly the earliest author to write this call to fight – he conjoins two biblical texts to form his unique clarion call - in the 10th century and was read by myriads of Jews for the next millennium.²¹

In the United State, scholarly work on Yosippon continued in other languages than Hebrew. Louis Feldman has been busy collecting centuries of bibliography on Josephus and inter alia on Yosippon and translating one volume of the Loeb project

²⁰ Her subsequent study of the phrase throughout the Hebrew press of the 19th century is “‘Not as Sheep Led to Slaughter’? On Trauma, Selective Memory, and the Making of Historical Consciousness” in *Jewish Social Studies*, 19.3 (Spring/Summer 2013), 139-169.

²¹ See my "Greek Responses to the Nazis in the Mountains and in the Camps" [chap. 10] in Patrick Henry, ed., *JEWISH RESISTANCE TO THE NAZIS* (Catholic University Press, 2014) and “Freedom and Death. The Jews and the Greek Andartiko” in *Jewish Histories of the Holocaust: New Transnational Perspectives* (Berghahn Publ, October 2014 in press). The conjoining of biblical texts is already biblical and was practiced by 10th-century Byzantine Biblicists as well.

on Josephus that Thackery had initiated. Martin Cohen's three rabbinical students in the 1960s prepared a very rough translation of Baron David Günzburg's *Josippon*, based on Judah ibn Moskoni's text, published just prior to WWI for their respective theses. At the end of the 19th century Moses Gaster had translated the first portion of the Chronicles of Yerahme'el up to the end of the Maccabees.²² As flawed as it was nonetheless it brought scholarly attention to the massive volume of the *Sepher Zikhronoth* manuscript recently acquired by the Bodleian Library, which inter alia contained the text of *Yosippon*. In 1971 a reedition of Gaster's translation with an extensive bibliographical introduction of commentary and bibliography by Hayyim Schwartzbaum that updated the scholarly tools including the American dissertations on *Yosippon* that had appeared in the 20th century.²³

A scholarly edition of *Sepher Zikhronoth* was published by Eli Yassif recently; however, he did not include the *Yosippon* since, as he put it, Flusser had already edited the *Yosippon* in his 1978 scholarly edition.²⁴ This was an unfortunate lacuna since there are interesting differences on the one hand and, to be noted and emphasized, Flusser's text is an eclectic composition. Yerahme'el's edition of the late 11th or 12th century is thus an early witness despite its survival in a 14th-century text that may have been corrupted by its medieval compiler. Jacob Reiner in his dissertation and subsequent article in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* (1969) carefully compared Yerahme'el's text of *Yosippon* to Judah ibn Moskoni's text and critiques the *Sefer Zikhronoth* accordingly. The latter he claims is a mixture of Ibn Daud's version and Judah ibn Moskoni's mid 14th-century version (published in 16th-century Constantinople). The complexity of *Yosippon* thus becomes even murkier

²² Moses Gaster, ed. and tr., *The Chronicles of Jerahmeel* (London, 1899).

²³ Moses Gaster, ed. and tr., *The Chronicles of Jerahmeel* (New York: Ktav, 1971).

²⁴ *The Book of Memories, that is the Chronicles of Jerahme'el* (Tel Aviv, 2001).

and it would be a help to have an edited version of Yerahme'el's Yosippon available so that scholars would not have to work only from the manuscript of Sefer Zikhronoth.

In the meantime women scholars have begun to predominate the world of Yosippon.²⁵ In addition to Shulamit Sela, discussed above, recently five women, three of them German, contributed to the dissemination of Sepher Yosippon to both general and scholarly audiences. In 1983 Elena Loewenthal presented her dissertation at the University of Torino entitled “La storiografia ebraica altomedievale Il Sepher Josippon, l'Italia meridionale e la storia romana” which deals primarily with an Italian translation of the first part of Yosippon up to the end of the Maccabees and introduces a brief history of Oria. She conveniently presents Yosippon's sources and parallels with accompanying translation in Josephus, Hegesippus and other early Roman and Christian sources such as Maccabees, Livy, Eusebius, Jerome, etc. against the background of Roman-Jewish relations during the Second Temple period.²⁶ Three scholars from Germany have made new contributions to the study of Sepher Yosippon. Saskia Dönitz finished her German dissertation shortly after the turn of the 21st century and subsequently published it in a fine scholarly edition that systematically and critically reads Flusser's edition and summarizes a wide variety of Modern Hebrew scholarship on Yosippon and its reception by medieval and modern scholars.²⁷ It should stimulate considerable interest among European scholars. Two senior German scholars recently published an edited text of Yosippon with a German translation that should be a useful aid to

²⁵ Cf. Liza Ulman's recent modern Hebrew translation of Josephus's *Bellum Iudaicum* [Yosef Ben Matityahu – [Titus] Flavius Iosephus, *History of the Jewish War against the Romans*, (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2009)] which was well acclaimed of Israeli scholars.

²⁶ My thanks to Professor Mauro Perani for making this study available to me.

²⁷ Saskia Dönitz, *Überlieferung und Rezeption des Sefer Yosippon* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

those scholars who do not read Hebrew.²⁸ We have already mentioned the work of Shulamit Sela on the Arabic Josippon. The most recent text to discuss Yosippon is in the published dissertation of Katja Vehlow who edited and translated the unpublished portions of Abraham ibn Daud's *Dorot Olam*.²⁹ Abraham ibn Daud has a truncated version of part of Yosippon that has had its own career since the Renaissance and a long life in English language translations. Gershon Cohen had already edited and translated part of the *Dorot Olam* in his *Sefer HaQabbalah*.³⁰ Interestingly he came to several erroneous conclusions about *Sefer Yosippon* since he did not distinguish the later interpolations from the original text, a general problem of Jewish scholarship which was more interested in the interpolations than in the edited text which did not yet exist until the late 20th century.

The latter part of the 20th century has formally split the identification of Josephus, Hegesippus, and Yosippon into three separate scholarly sources. Josephus has become literally an empire of scholarship faithfully recorded by Louis Feldman in a series of bibliographies. As for Hegesippus, despite its scholarly edition by Ussani and recent studies on the text, there still exist two major problems: time and place of composition. In other words Hegesippus remains somewhat of a mystery although we are beginning to unravel some of its latter 4th-century *Sitz im Leben*.³¹ Yosippon is now recognized by scholars as a major contribution to Jewish literature and identity and an integral part of the Hebrew renaissance in southern Italy during the late ninth through 12th centuries. Aside from Flusser's claim that it

²⁸ Dagmar Börner and Beat Zuber, *Josippon. Jüdische Geschichte vom anfang der Welt bis zum Ende des ersten Aufstands gegen Rom* (Wiesbaden:marixverlag, 2010).

²⁹ *Abraham ibn Daud's Dorot 'Olam (Generations of the Ages)* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

³⁰ *Abraham ibn Daud's Sefer HaQabbalah* (Philadelphia: JPSA, 1959).

³¹ In addition to A. Bell's 1977 dissertation at the University of North Carolina, "An Historiographical Analysis of the "De Excidio Hierosolymatano" of Pseudo-Hegesippus," see C. Somenzi, *Egesippo-Ambrogio: formazione scolastica e Cristiana a Roma alla metà del IV secolo* (Mila: Vita e Pensiero, 2009).

is a unique example of true history writing, it is more recognized as a literary and lexical contribution to medieval literature. Recent study of Sefer Hayashar, which is clearly indebted stylistically to Yosippon, reopens the problem of dating this text which Joseph Dan placed in the 17th century and argues for the stylistic and literary structure of Sefer Hayashar to be from the same period and locale of Sefer Yosippon which Sefer Hayasher quotes extensively.³² Thus another greatly influential text for the survival of Jewish identity is removed from its early modern confusion to its rightful place in the Hebrew renaissance of southern Italy.

In sum, Simhoni's scholarly translation of Josephus's Jewish War made a reliable Hebrew version available to scholars and students. At the same time Lamdan's epic Masada, which was based on Yosippon, stimulated a generation of young students in their developing national and literary trek through the Yishuv.³³ Joseph Klausner disparaged Yosippon as an historical source. He was chastised for this by Micah Bin Gurion who was propagating Yosippon as a source for the new heroes of the Yishuv and later by Yitzhak Baer and David Flusser who emphasized the medieval literary contribution of Yosippon and its influence through the centuries. Yosippon thus became the center piece of the Hebrew renaissance in southern Italy that reflected its historical, literary, and linguistic influence on Italian, Ashkenazi and Sephardi as well as Arabic-speaking Jews for the next millennium. Today a new generation of younger scholars has extended Flusser's work by a restudy of old and new manuscripts and new evaluations of the text against its South Italian – Byzantine – background. This paper has summarized the development of the scholarship on Yosippon and its relationship to Josephus, the latter now the major source for the Second Temple period. Yet these two seminal books remain in

³² My thanks to Peter Lehnhardt for sharing his insights on this exciting text.

³³ See Nachman Ben Yehuday, *Masada Myths: Collective Memory and Myth Making in Israel* (Madison: University of Wisconsin UP, 1995); Feldman, *Glory and Agony*, pp. 118-123.

tandem as seminal to the understanding of the medieval and modern Jewish and Israeli mindsets.

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