

The Beginning of the End: *Yosippon's 'Aeneid'* and Adso's Apocalypse

Ruth Nisse

Several years ago, I was asked to comment on a possible connection between one of the opening texts in the early tenth-century *Sefer Yosippon*, a very short, inventive and fundamentally midrashic adaptation of the *Aeneid*, and Adso of Montier-en-Der's *Letter on the Origin and Time of the Antichrist* (ca. 950), an apocalypse featuring a specifically Frankish "Last World Emperor."¹ This unexpected question was in essence about how the two texts reflect Roman authority in the post-Carolingian era. *Yosippon* rewrites the great imperial myth in Hebrew, and Adso presents a Western imperial eschatology, reworked in part from a Byzantine model; both exemplify a cultural transfer that circulated widely and became highly influential. Beyond the Roman Empire, however, there would seem to be few common themes between the larger Jewish account of the fall of Jerusalem and the Christian scenario of the Antichrist's oppressions and return of Christ. Adso's *Letter*, written a few decades later, is nevertheless a useful text with which to think through *Yosippon's* two most radical additions to its main sources, Josephus' *Antiquitates Judaicae* and the Christian Latin version of his *Bellum Judaicum*, Ps-Hegesippus' *De excidio Hierosolymitano*: the 145-line epitome of the *Aeneid* followed by a list of Roman rulers; and the final bloody battle between Roman soldiers and righteous Jewish warriors.² *Yosippon's* narrative circle from Virgil's Italy to Josephus'

1 Professor Cecilia Gaposchkin from the Department of History, Dartmouth University, posed this productive and provocative question in a discussion at the Dartmouth Medieval Colloquium in 2015. Verhelst, "Adso of Montier-en-Der" provides an excellent account of the *Letter* and its context.

2 All references to *Sefer Yosippon* are to David Flusser's edition, cited simply as Flusser 1 and 2 for volumes 1 and 2 of his edition, increasingly recognized as problematic for its eclectic character and redaction from texts beyond his base manuscripts of Recension A. The sections that this chapter focuses on are Flusser's chapters 1–2 and 89. Saskia Dönitz's work on the earliest version of *SY* in the Cairo Genizah fragments shows that these two sections (the beginning and the end) are included, but survive in fragments from different codices: the 2 opening chapters are in the Codex Orientalis 1 (Cambridge, University Library, T-S 10 K 16 No. 4–5 and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Heb. d. 64, fol. 118v–119v), and the long version of the final prayers (found in Recensions B and C) in the Codex Italicus (T-S 10 K 16 No. 12). My argument, therefore, is

Masada reveals an imperial messianism that derives from the author's translated Roman imagination as much as his final prayers for redemption. My answer to the question of *Yosippon* and Adso's *Letter* is that the connections lie in a shared history that can be recovered from the Hebrew anthology. In very different ways, both are concerned with the past glory and eschatological role of the fourth empire—Rome following Media, Persia and Greece in most schemes—and both end with a type of messianic fifth empire.³ With *Yosippon*, there may be one Jerusalem past and future, but there are several Romes in play. Vespasian and Titus' invincible army is distinct from the fantastic-literary and liturgical-exegetical versions of Rome that bookend the imperial triumph.

Adso's letter was derived from, among other sources, an early Latin translation by "Peter the Monk" of the Greek version of the Syriac *Revelation of Pseudo-Methodius*, a text dating to the seventh-century Arab conquest of the Middle East.⁴ The major elements of a Last Roman Emperor or Last World Emperor in these wildly popular Christian apocalyptic narratives are essentially the same. The Latin version of Ps-Methodius from early eighth-century Gaul foresees the time when the "Promised Land" and everything around it has been conquered by the "sons of Ishmael." A "King of the Greeks, that is Romans," the fourth and final empire, will arise to defeat them. After many other tribulations, the King of the Romans will come to Jerusalem and remove his crown and place it on the cross at Golgotha, delivering the kingdom of the Christians to God when the crown and cross ascend to heaven. The King will then die, and the Antichrist from the tribe of Dan will appear and reign from Jerusalem until Enoch and Elijah appear to oppose him; after he kills them, Jesus will return in glory.⁵ Adso's later version, written for the weak Carolingian court of the "Frankish" Louis IV but also in the orbit of the soon-to-be-imperial Ottonians, begins with an Antichrist "born from the Jewish people," reigning in

necessarily based on a hypothetical version of SY taken from Flusser's text and Dönitz's new reconstructions. Dönitz, *Überlieferung und Rezeption*, 39–46 and personal communication. See also Dönitz's chapter in this volume, 'The Hebrew Manuscripts of *Sefer Yosippon*.'

3 There is an enormous amount of scholarship on the four-empire scheme, based on Dan 7:3–7. See de Lange, "Jewish Attitudes," 271 and n. 28 with rabbinic sources; Hadas-Lebel, *Jerusalem Against Rome*, 512–514.

4 *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*. On the Syriac version and its transmission, see Paul Alexander's classic article, "The Medieval Legend of the Last World Emperor." Reinik, in "Pseudo-Methodius's Concept of History," disputes Alexander's argument for a Jewish origin for the idea of a Last World Emperor in favor of the Alexander Romance and idealized Byzantine emperors. On Peter the Monk's Latin version and its great popularity, see Palmer, *The Apocalypse*, 119–129. Given his Greek-Latin bilingualism, it is likely that the author was from Italy.

5 *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, 125–139.

Jerusalem from a rebuilt Temple and converting kings and princes away from the Roman Empire. Adso's argument is that even though the Roman Empire, "which had all the kingdoms of the earth under its power," no longer exists, "the greatest and last of all kings" will still arise from the Franks, govern a universal realm, and surrender his crown and scepter on the Mount of Olives.⁶ This is the Last World Emperor, reigning over a new Carolingian fifth empire. In this notably anti-Judaic apocalypse, the Antichrist will circumcise himself, and diaspora Jews will accept him as their messiah. The rest is much the same as Ps-Methodius' plot until Jesus returns.

Yosippon opens with the "Sons of Japhet," an extensive account of European nations and geography that gives pride of place to the "Frankos" who live in Francia on the Seine. After tenth-century West Francia, the map encompasses the real and imagined extent of the Roman empire in Europe and beyond, in its fragmented condition.⁷ Like Adso, *Yosippon* understands the empire as the remnants of Charlemagne's realm, but he at the same time recalls the former glory of Rome. The historical Romans, who are the Kittim, live on the Tiber and once had power over all these lands. The text also includes the current battles over Tarsus between the Byzantine rulers and the Emir of Aleppo. In this map of decline, the Carolingians, even with their empire dissolved are still the true heirs to Rome rather than the diminished Byzantine empire. Even though *Yosippon's* redactor is working in multilingual Southern Italy, in the Byzantine cultural sphere, he looks to Western Europe in terms of language and historiography, including the available sources of the Latin Josephus, Ps-Hegesippus, Orosius, and Virgil. The Aeneid midrash (= Yos.Aeneid) similarly fragments empire at its core.⁸ The tale begins with the "sons of Esau" disrupting the burial of Israel/Jacob in Hebron; and Joseph defeats them, capturing Zefo son of Elifaaz, the son of Esau. Zefo then escapes from Egypt after the death of his cousin Joseph. He arrives in Carthage to meet, not Queen Dido as in Virgil's epic, but rather "Agneus" the "King of Africa" and subsequently becomes the leader of his army. King Agneus, his brother "Lukas" (Evander) and his nephew Pallas from Sardinia, go off with his army to fight with Turnus for the hand of the beautiful and wise Yania (Lavinia) who has inherited the land of the Kittim (Italy/Latium) from her father Uzi. Pallas is killed in battle. Having killed Turnus, Agneus returns to Carthage with Yania. After many more non-Virgilian adventures, Zefo changes sides and becomes Janus-Saturnus, the god of beginnings. Double-faced Carthaginian and Roman, he eventually

6 Adso, *Letter* (trans. McGinn, 93–96).

7 See Flusser, 2.98–108 on the Franks and sy's geography.

8 For the purposes of this chapter I will refer to this text as Yos.Aeneid.

rules over all of Italy. His grandson Latinus, the codifier of the Latin language and alphabet, attacks and defeats Agneus' son Ashdrual in order to win his beautiful daughter Especiosa. A list of Latinus' descendants follows, continuing Yos.Aeneid. The city only becomes Rome when Romulus builds the highest possible wall around it out of fear of King David, with whom he makes a treaty.⁹ These two opponents resonate with a messianic future as much as a Jewish memory of military dominance. Alexei Sivertsev has argued that Jews "positioned themselves as the Byzantine imperial narrative's sole legitimate heirs" in seventh and eighth-century texts, including apocalypses; he characterizes these Hebrew productions as "counter-histories" and "counter geographies" in dialogue with Byzantine Rome.¹⁰ Among the numerous things to say about *Yosippon's* unique counter-history or counter-epic is that the author, by translating his narrative from Latin and highlighting the figure of Latinus, links himself with the greatest Latin poet of empire. This ambition in itself signals his cultural engagement, through the route of Lombard and Carolingian Italy, with a Western imperial narrative and a broader European literary scene.

While this abbreviated epic, oddly drained of desire and rage, announces *Yosippon's* connection to the Virgilian poets of Charlemagne's and his descendants' courts, it has usually also been understood as the sequel to an emotion-filled Talmudic story in *b. Sotah* 13a.¹¹ Esau interrupts Jacob's funeral with a claim to his own place in the Cave of Machpelah. Rather than waiting for a deed to check, Hushim the son of Dan clubs Esau to death, and Jacob revives briefly to laugh. "And that is what is written: *the righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance; he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked* (Ps 58:11)." Since Joseph was in charge of this event, the interpretation linking the story to Yos.Aeneid is that he could have captured his cousin Zefo and brought him to Egypt at this point.¹² Taken as a midrashic unit, the narrative presents an ongoing twinning of Israel and Rome, from Esau and Jacob to an enforced separation between Romulus and the more powerful King David. Gerson D. Cohen has assessed the Jewish identification of Rome with Esau and Edom in terms of their similar ambitions: "as the Jews spoke of an eternal covenant between Israel and God, the Roman could quote the promise of Jove to Rome, "Imperium sine fine dedi" (*Aeneid* 1, 279).¹³ *Yosippon's* emphasis on the relationship between Joseph, Zefo, and Rome problematizes Vergil's central

9 Flusser, 1.10–18. Berthelot, "The Rabbis Write Back!" See also Nisse, *Jacob's Shipwreck*, 51–61.

10 Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology*, 5–44.

11 Flusser, 2.24.

12 Flusser, 1.10–11. See Cohen, "Esau as Symbol," 256–257.

13 Cohen, "Esau as Symbol," 247.

theme without entirely dismissing it, since what follows in the book as a whole is the inevitable rise of the Roman empire, only punctuated by Jewish expectations of its end. This explains why, perhaps counterintuitively, *Yosippon's* redactor did not move from the implied midrash about the twins' burial drama to any number of other rabbinical texts about Esau ha-Rasha and Rome from the Talmuds or works of early medieval midrash. Among the possibilities, looking ahead to the Jewish war, would be the rule of Rome as God's punishment of the Jews for the sins that led to the destruction of the temple; the punishment of Jacob for distrusting God's promise that in the series of four empires Rome would eventually fall and his own descendants rise (*LevR* 29.2); or the Roman empire's eventual fall from power with the arrival of the Messiah: "the son of David will not come until the pettiest kingdom [Rome] will cease to have power over Israel (*b. Sanh.* 98a)."¹⁴ Zefo does not represent the "blood of the wicked" in *Yos.Aeneid*, just the Rome that mirrors the Jews' self-image, as well as the Romans whom Josephus and Ps-Hegesippus portray with a certain sympathy. As with *Yosippon's* more obvious erasure of the rabbinic versions of the fall of Jerusalem and the story of Yoḥanan ben Zakkai in favor of the Latin Josephus and patristic Ps.-Hegesippus, *Yos.Aeneid* here too abandons the rabbinic imagination and turns instead to translate the Roman epic in the distinctly Carolingian idiom of rewriting Virgil to create new identities. The crucial lines of the *Aeneid* in this tradition come when Aeneas beholds Augustus Caesar, who will extend his empire "to a land which lies beyond our stars, beyond the path of year and sun."¹⁵

Einhard's *Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa*, written soon after Charlemagne's coronation, is considered the most influential "epic" poem of the ninth-century *renovatio* or cultural renewal. In this panegyric, with its many intricate allusions to the *Aeneid*, the emperor is both a Frankish new Aeneas and a new Augustus, a "hero and emperor" building a peerless "second Rome" in Aachen. His Christian Roman empire surpasses the first in power and piety, with Einhard further comparing Charlemagne to David as an ideal king. Each of these titles counters the claims of the Byzantine emperor and the status of Constantinople as the new Rome.¹⁶ The long afterlife of Charlemagne has come into sharper focus recently, as a group of scholars have examined the

14 Shaye J.D. Cohen, "The Destruction," 25–28 on this interpretation of the destruction of Jerusalem in *Midrash Lamentations Rabbati*; Hadas-Lebel, *Jerusalem Against Rome*, 388; Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology*, 39; Feldman, "Decline and Fall," 284–288. See Berthelot, "The Rabbis Write Back!," 181–182 on the tensions inherent in *SY*.

15 *Aeneid* 6.791–796.

16 Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, 23–24, 197–207; Lozovsky, "Roman Geography," 351–353.

emergence of imperial fantasies in the late ninth and tenth centuries, the period of *Yosippon*, when the Carolingians were in steep decline. In their sense of rivalry with the Byzantine empire, a series of nostalgic writers, often imitating Virgil's poetry both in ideology and style, revived Einhard's images and established a fictionalized Charlemagne as a Frankish world-emperor. In Anne Latowsky's words about the tenth-century Italian writer Benedict of Mount Soracte, "the author states openly that the emperor returned home having subjugated many foreign nations. Charlemagne thus unites east and West through symbolic defeat."¹⁷ By the eleventh century, Charlemagne's universal imaginary realm included the Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem or the entire Holy Land, conferred by the caliph Harun al-Rashid.¹⁸ Notker of St. Gall begins his fictional biography of the emperor *De Carolo Magno* (ca. 886) with "He who ordains the fate of kingdoms ... having destroyed one extraordinary image, that of the Romans, which had, it was true, feet of iron, or even feet of clay, then raised up, among the Franks, the golden head of a second image, equally remarkable, in the person of the illustrious Charlemagne." For Notker, he is a type of the eschatological "last ruler of the fourth empire" who has surpassed the Persians and Greeks, but also the first, pagan Roman empire. In elaborate later versions, this legendary Charlemagne is a victor without war: Byzantine and Muslim rulers alike recognize his superiority, and in Europe he governs as the uncontested Christian emperor of a universal Frankish Rome.¹⁹

Yos.Aeneid could be seen as a contemporary Jewish version of this kind of late-Carolingian imperial fantasy, a midrash about Rome and Aeneas—or two Aeneas figures: the Jewish-adjacent Zefo and the pagan Agneus. In this counter-fantasy, however, the Romans ultimately descend from Esau as in rabbinic tradition, as well as the Kittim, but the imperial plot is dislocated and difficult to align with the somewhat-real European geography—beginning with the Franks—that precedes it. The list of the "sons of Japhet" manages to capture, even in its ruins, some of the Carolingian fiction of a universal Western-centered empire, with every kingdom under its rule: even the terrified Vikings could not escape this nostalgic version of Roman power.²⁰ In this construction of Europe, the author opens his text with a triumph of West over East, inscribing into *Yosippon* the Virgilian names used to glorify the once-heroic Franks, rather than recalling the Byzantines locked in warfare with Muslim powers. By contrast, he situates his translation itself as a victory

17 Latowsky, *Emperor of the World*, 15.

18 Latowsky, *Emperor of the World*, 1–18, 59–78; Gabriele, *An Empire of Memory*, 13–44.

19 Notker, *De Carolo Magno*, 93.

20 Flusser, 1.7–8; Nisse, *Jacob's Shipwreck*, 53–54.

of diaspora Hebrew over both languages of weakened Christian empire. With these layers of emulation and revision, *Yos.Aeneid*'s author stakes out a dual identity, late-imperial and Jewish, as the way to frame Josephus' material.

The strangeness of *Yos.Aeneid* is that it represents a completely different sort of Latin-to-Hebrew translation than "the words of Joseph ben Gurion." In contrast to Yosippon's version of Josephus' *Antiquities* and Ps-Hegesippus, *Yos.Aeneid* is a tale that prizes fictional transformation over historical eyewitness.²¹ This authorial idea appears in *Yosippon*'s description of "a single scroll" containing the unquestionably true words of Joseph ben Gurion, "the most important writer" outside of scripture and the sages together with some un-named "other authors who wrote about our ancestors."²² The collection includes versions of Alexander's visit to Jerusalem, the books of the Maccabees, and other apocryphal texts about Jews, but evidently the *Aeneid* can also by definition be about "our ancestors," Esau and his family as they gradually, through many geographical and linguistic twists and turns, became Romans. As a short but crucial part of the "scroll," *Yos.Aeneid* writes the Jews into the Roman imperial myth, and in this way likens them to the Franks themselves in terms of fluid identities and cultural claims. While distinct in the sense of an anthological assembly, both narratives ground what Steven Bowman has called "the author's grand theme in his history," Rome and Jerusalem bound together inextricably.²³

Yos.Aeneid stands in a sharply dialogic relation to the Josephus-Hegesippus texts. In the early tenth century, Virgil's poem towered as the founding text of the Western Roman Empire, but here it is drastically fragmented by some Rabbinic Hebrew and Arabic sources and filtered through the shifting cultural context of Southern Italy.²⁴ The body of *Yosippon* is intended as the "authentic" Hebrew account of the destruction of the second Temple both internally by the rebels and externally at the hands of the Romans; these, as Flusser has argued, are implicitly the emperors who precede the Byzantine rulers of the author's day.²⁵ Both are about the destinies of Rome and Jerusalem: *Yos.Aeneid* inserts Esau into the narrative as the origin of Rome and Joseph takes the structural place of the Greeks after the Fall of Troy as he defeats Esau's grandson Zefo ben Elifaaz, who—like the Trojan Aeneas—escapes to become the

21 Bowman, "Sefer Yosippon: History and Midrash," 282–285 especially. See also David B. Levenson's chapter in this volume, 'Beyond Flusser: The Text of Latin *Antiquities* 13 and *Sefer Yosippon*'.

22 Flusser, 1.143–144.

23 Steven Bowman, "Sefer Yosippon: History and Midrash," 287.

24 Flusser, 2.87–91

25 Flusser, 2.89–91.

original founder of all European nations and the various iterations of a New Rome. These introductory texts, however, never mention Jerusalem. Instead, they take Europe and Africa—Italy, Carthage and West Francia—as their stage, sites of current Jewish diaspora as well as a memory of imperial history. With Jerusalem absent in the initial narrative, and only an implicit map of a scattered Jewish world within both the Carolingian and Byzantine kingdoms, the redactor's engagement with Latin culture is the beginning of the end of *Yosippon*. The trajectory from the transformation of Rome, through language and literature, into *Yosippon*'s own time and space, Jewish and exilic, culminates in the final exile after the end of the Jewish city. Likewise, the ambivalent hero shifts from Zefo–Janus–Saturnus to Joseph ben Gurion.

The much more gruesome Josephus-texts about Jerusalem—where *Yosippon* usually follows original sources and particularly the authority of Joseph ben Gurion's speeches—emphasize the ascendancy of Rome, the universalizing logic of empire itself, praise for Vespasian and Titus, and the doomed revolt led by John of Gischala and Simon bar Giora, the “bnei belial” (“scoundrels” as in Deut 13:14). In one recension, a very brief messianic passage appears in the author's own voice in Chapter 50, a prayer for the rebuilding of the Temple “soon in our days” (בית יי אשר יבנה עוד במהרה בימינו) following his account of the construction and celebration of Herod's temple.²⁶ This is echoed in the last words of the text, a final prayer for God's mercy on his people and his city and his temple “soon in our days.”²⁷ These are urgent but muted words that express a messianism similar to the Amidah prayer, “And to Jerusalem, Your city, return in mercy, and dwell in it as You have spoken; rebuild it forever soon, in our days, and speedily establish in it the throne of David,” which appears prior to the prayer for the “sprout of David.”²⁸ However passive the passages are, Flusser and others have observed that they nonetheless inevitably look ahead from the tenth century to the destruction of Rome implied in the restoration of the Temple. In a different recension, the

26 Flusser, 1.234.

27 יהי רצון מלפני אלהי השמים שיחמול עלינו ועל עמו ועל עירו ועל ביתו ועל חיבלו ועל מקדשו ועל נחלתו במהרה בימינו. As discussed above in n. 2, Flusser's classifications and descriptions of *Yosippon*'s manuscripts and editions have now been superseded by the work of Saskia Dönitz. For her extensive re-conception of the A, B, and C recensions of SY, see *Überlieferung und Rezeption*, 35–102. This reference is to Flusser's Recension A and quotes his earliest manuscript, Jerusalem oct. 41280. In Yerachmeel ben Shelomo's version of *Yosippon* in MS Oxford Heb. DU, the 12th-century anthologist inserts the word חסד into the prayer after רצון to form an acrostic of his name. See Neubauer, “Yerachmeel ben Shelomoh,” 366.

28 Kimelman, “The Messiah of the Amidah,” 315. See also Kimelman, “The Daily ‘Amidah,’ and Alexander, “The Rabbis and Messianism,” 228–229.

final prayer is much more robust and more explicitly messianic.²⁹ In several ways for each aspect, it asks God to remember his oath to our ancestors, to rebuild our city and our temple, gather our scattered exiles, speed the coming of our Messiah (יְהוָה מְשִׁיחֵנוּ וְיִמְהַר לְגַאֲלוֹנוּ), take revenge and strike down all our enemies, and fulfill what is written in scripture. Five biblical passages follow to finish the text of *Yosippon*. The first, Ezek 25:14, reveals God's plan for Rome: "I will wreak My vengeance on Edom through My people Israel and they shall take action against Edom in accordance with My blazing anger; and they shall know my vengeance." In this vision of the end, the opposition between Rome and Jerusalem is as stark as possible, looking ahead to the Jews' final revenge for all that has come before. The other four passages address God's return of the remaining exiles to Jerusalem, including Zeph 3:30: "At that time I will gather you, And at [that] time I will bring you [home]; For I will make you renowned and famous among all the peoples on earth, When I restore your fortunes Before their very eyes." Both of these liturgical-biblical endings look to the future and a messianic temporality, which is necessary in any case to refute the Christian teleology of Ps-Hegesippus, which forecloses any future with the words "this is the final destruction after which the Temple cannot be restored."³⁰ Christian Rome, on the contrary, will have to rewrite the end of its own history. The messianic prayers clearly do not seamlessly follow the Latin sources that largely blame the Jews for their own exile. They are, in a sense, an interpretation of *Yosippon's* famous alteration of Josephus and Ps-Hegesippus in the final sequence of events at Masada and a recuperation of the Josephan text as a whole for future readers (SY 89). The Jews' sacrificial killing of their wives and children as burnt offerings is followed not by their collective murder-suicide but rather a fierce battle where the righteous warriors kill an immense number of Roman soldiers before being killed themselves.

In this final scene, *Yosippon* intersects with some of Adso's elements. Taken in its anthological sense, both *Yosippon's* Virgilian beginning and overall messianic potential fit into the larger themes of the Carolingian legends with their distinct spatial and temporal schemes. For Adso, the end of days depends on the Last Emperor's final actions in Jerusalem; his identity as a Roman, a new Charlemagne, is essential to the vision. Adso's *Letter's* main idea of how Christian Rome and Jerusalem conceptually depend upon each other long predates it in the apocalyptic tradition. It seems worth considering, even as speculation, whether the Last Roman Emperor, as he appears in triumph in

29 Flusser, 1.430–431. For the variations in the prayers in the manuscripts of Recension A, see Flusser, 2.358–359.

30 DEH 5.32 (ed. Ussani, *Hegesippi*, 373).

Ps-Methodius' apocalypse or defeated in its Jewish counterparts, is lurking somewhere beneath the surface of *Yosippon's* "single scroll" that closes with the ashes of Jerusalem, a battle between Jews and Romans, and divine vengeance on Rome.

Several recent studies have shown that early Byzantine narratives of a Last Roman Emperor, despite—or because of—their invective against Jews and Muslims, actually lent themselves to appropriation.³¹ The landscape of a fractured Rome and a lost, spectral Jerusalem could easily be adapted by Jews. At least one of the Jewish apocalypses from Byzantine Palestine, the *Signs of Shimon bar Yochai*, includes a Last Emperor-figure as the seventh sign of ten, after a series of portents aimed at scaring and converting the gentiles and a group of three false messiahs who will lead eighty thousand false Israelites astray. The "King of Edom" will enter Jerusalem, defeat an army of "Ishmaelites" led by a king named Hoter or Mantzur, and then "will enter the sanctuary, take the golden crown off his head, and place it on the foundation stone." He will then say "Master of the Universe, I have now returned what my ancestors removed."³² This is followed by the actions of the common figures of Jewish apocalyptic texts, the best-known of which is the earlier *Sefer Zerubbabel*.³³ The Messiah son of Joseph, named Nehemiah ben Hushiel, will appear, kill the king of Edom in battle and put on the crown from the Temple. Next Armilos, the Jewish version of the Antichrist, will celebrate idolatry, burn thirty Israelites with a Torah scroll and kill the Messiah ben Joseph; finally, God will send the Messiah ben David to end Armilos' rule and restore Jerusalem. The direct inversions of Ps-Methodius are clear: the foundation stone replaces Golgotha, Armilos (another name for Romulus) represents Rome as opposed to the Jewish Antichrist, and the Messiah ben David is not Jesus. The messianic figures recall the opposition that *Yosippon* earlier sets up between Romulus and King David as rival rulers before Rome became the universal power. Above all, the King of Edom—the Byzantine emperor—is a debased figure whose role is to give back what the Romans once stole from the Jews when they destroyed the city: the sacred implements of the Temple and by extension the site of the Holy of Holies itself.³⁴ The foundation stone is the center of a Temple that will

31 Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology*, 45–58; see also Boustán, "The Spoils of the Jerusalem Temple."

32 Translation in Reeves, *Trajectories*, 111–116. Even-Shmuel, *Midrashei Geula*, 311–314.

33 The most comprehensive treatment of this mysterious text is Himmelfarb, *Jewish Messiahs*. See also Reeves, *Trajectories*, 40–66.

34 On the Byzantine context of the Last World Emperor in Jewish messianism, See Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology*, 52–82 and Greisiger, *Messias—Endkaiser—Antichrist*, 159–172. See also Boustán, "The Spoils of the Jerusalem Temple," on the sacred vessels in Jewish apocalyptic texts.

be rebuilt. Sivertsev has argued convincingly that the Messiah ben Joseph in this scenario becomes “the ruler of the last universal kingdom on earth, the messianic kingdom of Israel, which inherits and grows out of the universal empire of Rome.”³⁵ After he kills the King of Edom, he becomes the Last-Last World Emperor, wearing the imperial crown. Vespasian and Titus’ destruction of the city is reversed, their “empire without end” ended. Even the founding of this final “fifth empire” is, of course, temporally and spatially bound to the model and history of Rome.

In a related text, *Otot ha-Mashiah*, the apocalyptic battles with “wicked Edom” are bloodier. The Messiah ben Joseph, together with the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin, and some of Gad, “kills great heaps (תילי תילים)” of Romans before finishing off a Last World Emperor figure. Then he “will devastate the province of Rome [and] will recover some of the Temple vessels that had been deposited in the palace of Julianos Caesar and come to Jerusalem.”³⁶ In a further escalation, the Messiah ben Joseph’s army of Israelites will fight Armilos’ massive forces of “the nations of the world” and kill “great heaps” of them before the messiah himself is killed.³⁷ After oppression and exile, Michael will blow the shofar and the Messiah ben David and Elijah the prophet will be revealed to the “righteous ones of Israel.” The messiah will take his seat in the ruined Temple, and God will destroy Armilos and “the wicked Edom who destroyed the Temple ... and exiled us from our land.” After further vengeance and the absolute obliteration of the nations, the text ends with prayers similar to *Yosippon*’s for redemption and a rebuilt Temple.

The final events at the fortress of Masada cannot really be characterized as apocalyptic. However, Eliezer ben Anani and his followers’ sacred violence, the most consequential revision of *Yosippon*’s sources, in some ways echoes the trajectory of early medieval apocalyptic texts. Given their wide circulation, it is likely that the author was familiar with some version of them.³⁸ Even as *Yosippon*, like Josephus before, blames the “benei belial” for the destruction of the Temple, the Romans transform into the nation of Esau seen at the beginning of the anthology as the fictional descendants of Zefo, Janus, and Romulus.

35 Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology*, 47–52.

36 Translation in Reeves, *Trajectories*, 121–129; Even-Shmuel, *Midrashei Geula*, 319–323. Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology*, 52–58.

37 On this evocative expression and its derivation from Cant 5:6, see Reeves, 124.

38 No fewer than five “Signs of the End” texts, including “Signs of the Messiah (442–443),” as well as *Sefer Zerubbabel* (427–435), and, of course, *Sefer Yosippon*, are included in Eliezer ben Asher Ha-Levi’s great compilation, the *Sefer Ha-Zikhronot* (early 14th century). One of these texts, “15 Signs Before the Day of Judgment,” (447–448), is taken from the twelfth-century anthology of Yerachmeel ben Shelomo. See Yassif’s Introduction to *Sefer Ha-Zikhronot*, 23–31. On *Yosippon* in these anthologies, see Dönitz’s chapter in this volume, “The Hebrew Manuscripts.”

By the end of the narrative, the Romans of imperial myth and romance have hardened into the universal enemy they would remain. Eleazer ben Anani Ha-Kohen is a confusing character in *Yosippon*, identified with both heroes and villains.³⁹ In the end, however, realizing that the evil Simon bar Giora has “destroyed the tzaddikim and hasidim who were in the city and that there is no other hope” for Jerusalem, he escapes to and guards Masada.⁴⁰ He is by this point far from Ps-Hegesippus’ tyrannical if eloquent leader Eleazar or Josephus’ vicious Eleazer ben Jair, leader of the sicarii. *Yosippon* later describes the large group of Jewish refugees who have gathered with him. While the author never explicitly refers to these survivors as the remaining few “tzaddikim and hasidim,” the sense of their righteousness and piety emerge from their leader’s exhortations to martyrdom and the new meaning of their actions as the full completion of the “single scroll”: they die “for God and his temple.”⁴¹ When Titus sends Silva to besiege the fortress, the Romans take on the new valence of Edom and Esau Ha-Rasha, the Rome of the prophets and the rabbis—and eventually the apocalypses.⁴² Following Ps-Hegesippus with many changes, *Yosippon* has Eleazar begin and end his speech by telling his followers to shape a heroic narrative, imitating the previous generations. Once they have offered

39 As Flusser explains, *SY*’s author evidently confuses Eleazer ben Anani with almost all of the other figures named “Eleazer” in Josephus and Ps.-Hegesippus. To further confound matters, many of the passages where he mentions the name are authorial interpolations into Ps.-Hegesippus. Since he typically calls Eleazar ben Anani by his entire name, it is possible to trace his “career” in *SY*, although it may well be the result of scribal errors. He begins as the character he is in Josephus’ *BJ*, a brave and violent young man who is an implacable foe of the Romans, in particular the tyrannical procurator Florus (277). He later evolves into one of the leaders of the מרצים, as *SY* calls the rebels (Ezek 7:22), and they take power. His group is responsible for burning down Agrippa’s and Berenice’s houses and all of the king’s documents (288). He forbids foreigners to offer sacrifices in the Temple and leads another army into battle against the Romans. He is next seen, in the author’s invention, as one of three military commanders, together with his father and Joseph ben Gurion (299–300). Although *SY* appears not to confuse him with the Zealot leader Eleazar ben Simon (whom the author calls by one name only in a triumvirate with John of Gischala and Simon bar Giora) he is present by name when the rebel factions splinter after John’s slaughter of worshipers in the Temple at Passover (347). His next appearance is when he flees to Masada (385). While some of these references are obviously out of place, there is a consistency between Eleazar’s final “positive” role and his uncompromising opposition to the Romans, insistence on the purity of Temple sacrifices, and military leadership. See Flusser, 2.172.

40 Flusser, 1.385.

41 Flusser, 1.430.

42 Hadas-Label, *Jerusalem Against Rome*, 439–523; De Lange, “Jewish Attitudes;” Noam, “Will This One Never Be Brought Down?”

their wives and children as sacrifices to God, saving them from slavery to idolators, they will go out to fight the enemy and die. The improbable question remains in the end as to who can claim the *Aeneid* as part of their heroic past.

In the context of the development of Christian-Latin imperial legends like Charlemagne's world rule and Ps-Methodius' and Adso's apocalypses, but also of Jewish counter-narratives like the *Signs of the Messiah*, *Yosippon's* beginning and end distill a larger, multifaceted narrative of empire. Like their Carolingian counterparts, *Yosippon's* collection of stories relies on ideas of transfer. Charlemagne's actual battles turn into grand triumphs over a multilingual East, and *Yosippon* constructs a new cultural force through the recovery of Hebrew texts from Latin manuscripts preserved by the resources of Byzantine and Carolingian imperial culture. While Charlemagne's Virgilian court poets celebrate his Roman authority, *Yosippon* begins by reimagining Virgil's celebration of Rome as a midrashic epic with Jewish origins, and ends with prophecies of an eventual return of Jerusalem to the Jews by means of a final brutal combat with the Romans. When Eleazar and the Jews fight Silva's army, they kill "innumerable" Roman soldiers, a detail similar in meaning to the "great heaps" of Romans whom the Messiah ben Joseph kills in battle with the last emperor of Edom before Armilos kills him. The Romans by the end of *Yosippon* are an eschatological enemy; when Silva defeats Eleazar and his heroes, he advances not toward Titus' eternal victory but Ezekiel's assurance of vengeance.

The final battle at Masada can certainly be seen as a desperate heroic act, more Roman than the Romans and as Virgilian as Turnus' defeat at the end of the *Aeneid*. Yet it could also be another beginning—a war in which the small number of Jews who have fled from the evil men ruling Jerusalem, having become new "hasidim and tzaddikim" through sacrifice, take part in the first of a violent sequence of events. The intervening temporal period between their death and the redemption will finally result in a defeated fourth empire, the return of all exiles, and a rebuilt Temple. *Yosippon* makes no mention of what that period holds, but the Ezekiel verses confirm a time of more violence with Rome. In *Yosippon*, this projection into the future approximates one aspect of the eschatological narratives that to some degree inform this material: a Jewish-imperial fantasy of renewal, a future fifth empire bound to a necessary messianism.

The only emperor, either first or last, who actually appears in these opening and closing sections of *Yosippon* is Titus, the tragically ambivalent but definitive destroyer of Jerusalem. The extremely popular early apocalypse *Sefer Zerubbabel* casts Titus in the eschatological role of the "tenth" of ten Roman kings (Dan 7:24), who will "hand [the Jews] over to destruction, despoiling,

and panic," after which the messianic battles begin.⁴³ In *Yosippon*, by contrast, Titus' final appearance is purely historical, when he delegates the last battle to Silva. The Last Roman Emperor, then, is present through absence: he is not the counter-narrative king of the Jewish apocalypses, but instead an abstraction of Rome that completes the text's imaginative reworking of both Virgil and Josephus. The *Aeneid* in any form always recalls the praise of Augustus Caesar, and, in *Yosippon's* context, the many literary Charlemagnes of the ninth and tenth centuries. This is the Rome of imperial power but also the beauty of its poetry, the gift of Latinus. In the conclusion, the actions of the leader Eleazer ben Anani and his followers turn the suicidal offering as it plays out in Josephus and Ps-Hegesippus into a redemption through pure sacred violence, a killing radically different from the litany of the rebels' atrocities or the Romans' brutal military operations. Even in this beginning of a messianic end, Virgil's epic lends its imperial authority to *Yosippon*, however ambiguous the terms of reception and translation. The Jews kill innumerable Roman soldiers, the embodiment of Edom. They are still defeated, but in their astonishing near-Roman epic force, *Yosippon* offers a glimpse of their potential future role in a new hybrid Roman-like Jewish empire.

In a terrible coda to this tenth-century textual blend of Jerusalem and Rome, *Sefer Yosippon* and Adso's *Letter on the Antichrist* unquestionably collide in the Rhineland persecutions of 1096. Adso's imperial fantasy evoked *Yosippon's* vocabularies of martyrdom. Influenced directly by Adso's book, with its Jewish Antichrist and his disciples, Emicho of Flonheim, the leader of the most violent faction of crusaders, declared himself to be the Last World Emperor.⁴⁴ In the words of the *Chronicle of Solomon bar Simson*: "Count Emicho, the oppressor of all the Jews ... arrived outside [Mainz] with a mighty horde of errant ones and peasants ... He was made leader of the hordes and concocted a tale that an apostle of the crucified one had come to him and made a sign on his flesh to inform him that when he arrived in [Byzantium], he [Jesus] himself would appear and place the kingly crown upon his head and he would vanquish his foes."⁴⁵ Solomon is familiar enough with the idea of a Last World Emperor,

43 Reeves, *Trajectories*, 56.

44 Rubenstein, *Nebuchadnezzar's Dream*, 47–48; Chazan, "Let Not a Remnant or a Residue Escape," especially 305–307. Both authors offer interpretations of the Christian sources that mention Emicho, whose crusading army was eventually destroyed in Wieselburg. Stow, who also offers a close examination of the Christian sources, reads *The Chronicle of Solomon ben Simson's* account of Emicho as a reflection of this defeat: "Emicho of Flonheim," 916.

45 *Hebräische Berichte*, 309; Translated by Eidelberg in *The Jews and the Crusaders*, 28. "Byzantium" is Chazan's translation of Solomon's "Italy of Greece"—which makes sense

evidently from Christian sources like the Latin Ps-Methodius or even Adso's *Letter*, that he is able to make sense of Emicho's grandiose self-image and his apocalyptic motives. Solomon touches on the novel detail that the German Emicho possibly imagined his coronation taking place in Constantinople before his journey to Jerusalem to destroy the Muslims; in this "concoction," he would be both the final Byzantine and Western Roman emperor, like Charlemagne uniting East and West. The *Chronicle* describes in turn how the Rhineland Jews drew on Eleazer ben Anani's speeches at Masada—among many other texts and traditions about martyrdom—as they carried out their sacrificial murder-suicides.⁴⁶ The *Chronicle* also recalls how a small group of Jews hopelessly fought against Emicho and his soldiers, an echo of the warriors' stand against Rome at the end of *Yosippon*. Trapped in Bishop Ruthard's courtyard, "When the people of the Holy Covenant, the saints, the Fearers of the Most High, saw the great multitude ... they clung to their Creator. They donned their armor and weapons of war (כלי מלחמתם) with Rabbi Kalonymos son of Rabbi Meshullam the Parnass at their head. But as a result of their sufferings and fasts, they did not have the strength to withstand the onslaught of the foe."⁴⁷ This is one incident in a text that recounts many forms of triumph over "Wicked Edom" through death. Armed like the last warriors in *Yosippon*, these ḥasidim and tzaddikim are agents of a revived apocalyptic consciousness, a challenge to the rule of the Last World Emperor.

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given the multivalent aspect of "Rome" inherent in both the ubiquitous designation of "Edom" for the crusaders and the figure of the Last World/Roman Emperor.

46 Shepkaru traces the path from *SY* to the chronicles of the 1096 martyrs in *Jewish Martyrs*, 107–210. See Dönitz, *Überlieferung und Rezeption*, 249–253, for a close examination of the Jewish crusade chronicles' adaptations of *SY*. See also Nisse, *Jacob's Shipwreck*, 34–48 on the later influence of these representations.

47 *Hebräische Berichte*, 317; Translated by Eidelberg in *The Jews and the Crusaders*, 30.

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