

The Maccabean Mother and Her Seven Sons in *Sefer Yosippon* 15: Interconnections with Previous Versions of the Martyrdom and Important Motifs

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1 Introduction

There is a rich reception history of the so-called Maccabean martyrs in Jewish and Christian literature. Within Christianity the martyrs' reception also concerns material culture, including a gilded reliquary in Cologne in which the martyrs' bones are supposed to be kept.¹ The Maccabean mother and her seven sons were popular saints in late Medieval Cologne. Their bones were allegedly brought to Cologne by Archbishop Reinhardt von Dassel.² The early Jewish reception of the martyrdoms starts with the Book of 4 Maccabees, which includes a re-interpretation of the martyrdoms of the old scribe Eleazar and the Mother and her seven sons as narrated in 2 Macc 6:18–7:42. In the rabbinic tradition Eleazar's martyrdom seems to have been forgotten. *Sefer Yosippon*, however, transmits both martyrdoms and also re-situates them in the context of the persecution by the Seleucid King Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 BCE).³ Moreover, because *Yosippon* was such an influential work, it probably has given a boost to the reception of the martyrdom of the mother and her sons.⁴ The martyrdom is commemorated in several *piyyutim* that are part of the liturgy of the Sabbath of Hanukkah and of the Ninth of Av, when the destruction of the Temple is commemorated.⁵ Saskia Dönitz suggests that the redactor of *Yosippon* “felt the necessity to reintegrate these sources into the

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2 Walvoort and van Henten, “Re-Interpretation of the Maccabean Mother.”

3 Cohen, “מעשה חנה,” 118; Cohen, “Hannah;” Dönitz, *Überlieferung und Rezeption*, 215.

4 Baumgarten and Kushelevsky, “From ‘The Mother and her Sons;’” Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, *Christian Memories*; Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, “The Mother and Seven Sons.”

5 Cohen, “מעשה חנה,” 120–122; Cohen, “Hannah;” Dönitz, “Sefer Yosippon;” Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, “The Mother and Seven Sons,” 127n3.

Jewish textual tradition in Hebrew,” which would be in line with a trend that can also be observed in other medieval Jewish writings.⁶

The martyrdom of the mother and her seven sons in *Sefer Yosippon* (SY 15) is the focus of this contribution, but when relevant I will also take the martyrdom of Eleazar into account (SY 14). I will start with a brief discussion of the composition and then move on with a comparative analysis of *Yosippon* 15 and previous versions of the martyrdom, first and foremost 2 Maccabees, which is clearly the author’s main source, as Gerson Cohen and David Flusser already observed.⁷ *Yosippon* renders 2 Maccabees mostly rather freely and creatively. Nevertheless, I will briefly discuss the textual version of 2 Maccabees on which *Yosippon* 15 may be based. For the text of *Yosippon* I will use the shorter version as given in Flusser’s edition, in which the mother still remains anonymous.⁸ I will also discuss other possible sources apart from 2 Maccabees, including the Hebrew Bible, 4 Maccabees and the rabbinic versions of the martyrdom. In my final section I will attempt to highlight some of the particularities of the story in *Yosippon*.

2 Composition of *Sefer Yosippon* 15

The Maccabean martyrdoms are part of a cluster of stories in *Sefer Yosippon* 11–35, which are set in the Seleucid period and focus on Hasmonean history.⁹ These stories are followed by another cluster of events in which the Romans have taken over the rule from the Greeks (cf. SY 11: “In these days [בימים ההם] was Seleucus King over the nation of Macedon;” SY 36: “In these days [בימים ההם] Pompey the Great, the commander of the Roman army, departed with a heavy-armed army ...; cf. SY 21). The cycle of stories in *Yosippon* 11–35 is based on sections from 1 and 2 Maccabees as well as Josephus. The martyrdoms in *Yosippon* 14–15 are clearly an integral part of the entire work of *Yosippon*, since there are two cross-references to them in other parts of *Yosippon*.

6 Dönitz, “Historiography,” 961.

7 Cohen, “מעשה חנה;” Cohen, “Hannah;” Flusser, *ספר יוסיפון*, 1.68–75.

8 Flusser, *ספר יוסיפון*. For related versions of the story in Medieval Hebrew writings including the one in Abraham Ibn Daud’s *Dorot ‘Olam* (ca. 1160 CE) and other versions of *Sefer Josippon* in Hebrew and vernacular languages, see Vehlow, *Abraham ibn Daud’s Dorot ‘olam*, 146–149; Zeldes, *Reading Jewish History*, 3–4, 23–28, 33–35, 123–127. Zeldes (27) argues that Ibn Daud’s version derives from *Sefer Yosippon*, because the martyrdom is set in the rule of Antiochus IV and the mother is named Hannah (about the mother’s name, see n. 20). Although SY is a main source of the *Dorot ‘olam* (Vehlow, *Abraham ibn Daud’s Dorot ‘olam*, 29–30), the content of this brief version nevertheless differs greatly from SY 15.

9 Cf. Dönitz, “Historiography,” 956, who argues for SY 11–26 as coherent unit.

Yosippon 12 refers to Eleazar being tested and killed in the days of Antiochus, and in *Yosippon* 81 the high priest Amithai refers to the death of the mother and her seven sons by way of a contrast.¹⁰ The martyrdoms are situated in the persecution ordered by Antiochus IV, which is partly executed by the Phrygian Philip on Antiochus' behalf. The king's commands imply that an image of him had to be venerated, that a piece of pork had to be consumed, and that both the Sabbath observance and the performance of circumcision were forbidden. As a result, many of the pious ones (החסידים) were killed and some fled to the woods (*SY* 13). A passage that is reminiscent of 2 Macc 6:10 about the horrendous killing of two women who had circumcised their boys in spite of Antiochus' decree forms the transition to Eleazar's martyrdom. After the martyrdoms the narrative continues with Mattathias' refusal to sacrifice, which is the go-ahead for the Maccabean revolt (*SY* 16; 1 Macc 2). The two martyrdoms are loosely connected to the previous context and to each other by a brief introductory formula "At that time was/were arrested ..." (אז נתפסו; אז נתפס; *SY* 14 line 1; *SY* 15 line 1). The command to eat a piece of pork and the reference to the commandments of the king (המצוות המלך, *SY* 14 lines 3–4; *SY* 15 line 15) also connect the martyrdoms to the previous chapter.

The composition of *Sefer Yosippon* 15 roughly follows the structure of the martyrdom of its main source, 2 Maccabees 7, but a comparison with this chapter shows besides obvious correspondences also significant differences. As a matter of fact, *Sefer Yosippon* 15 is an artful narrative of its own, composed in a specific style with many echoes of biblical language and particular literary devices including alliteration and dramatization. The structure of the narrative is indicated by forms of בוא "bring" (in the *hif'il* or *hof'al*; lines 4, 15, 24, 29, 32, 36, 50, 53)¹¹ and concluding formulae with וימת "and [he] died," which introduce and conclude the seven sections about the individual brothers. The author of *Yosippon* 15 focuses in comparison to 2 Maccabees 7 more on what is said than on what is done. The tortures of the first and second brothers are described in detail, similar to what is found in 2 Macc 7:1–9, but the author nevertheless leaves out some of the information given in 2 Maccabees. There are no tortures mentioned for the fourth, fifth and sixth brother and from the third brother onward the narrator moves over almost immediately to the statements of the martyr. The sevenfold structure of the narrative is expanded at the point when the sixth brother has died, similarly to 2 Maccabees 7, but the expansions partly differ from their main source. They provide more space to the mother, with whom the story ends (cf. 2 Macc 7:24–42 with *SY* 15 lines 41–91).

10 Cohen, "מעשה חנה," 119–121; see Carson Bay's chapter in this volume.

11 I refer to the text according to the lines given in Flusser's edition (see n. 8).

In fact, more than half of the narrative space in *Sefer Yosippon* 15 is devoted to the mother and her youngest son. The speeches of the mother (lines 43–49; 58; 59–67; 88–90) and the youngest son (lines 68–85) are more elaborate than those in 2 Maccabees 7 and there is a contest going on between the mother and the king. The story ends in a dramatic way with the mother (lines 88–91). 2 Maccabees 7 briefly reports in a neutral way that the mother died after her sons (7:41). Next, the narrative of both martyrdoms in 2 Maccabees ends with a concluding sentence (7:42), which is missing in *Yosippon* 15. Instead, the author of *Yosippon* highlights the dramatic moment when all seven sons had been tortured to death by focusing on the mother who is standing beside the corpses of her sons (line 88; similarly lines 42–43).¹² This passage visualizes and dramatizes the loss of the mother (cf. 4 Macc 17:7–10). The author of *Yosippon* characterizes her again as “their/the holy mother” (האם הקדושה), as he did before in line 41 (האם הקדושה), which ties in with other qualifications of the martyrs in *Yosippon* 14–15 as “holy ones” (see the final section, below). The mother’s final words (lines 89–90) are introduced with a reference to a biblical gesture (line 88): she stretches out her hands to heaven (ותפרוש כפיה השמימה).¹³ Next, introduced by ותאמר (line 88), she addresses God in direct speech with two formulae (line 89), “Exalted God, Eternal God” (אלהי הנשגב ואלהי עולם), of which the second one is biblical (Isa 40:28).¹⁴ Then she makes her final statement with a humble self-characterization (“I, your maidservant,” אני אמתך) and expresses the expectation that she would go with her sons to the place that God had prepared for them (line 89–90). This place is only mentioned in abstract terms, but other passages in *Yosippon* 15 mention the vindication of the martyrs more elaborately. The last clause (lines 90–91) is a narrative conclusion, which indicates with three different phrases that the mother died after she had made her statement and with one other phrase that she went indeed with her sons. The cluster of phrases that points here to the mother’s death is different from the short formula that indicates the death of her sons (and [he] died,” above): “she finished breathing” (שילמה נפשה),¹⁵ her soul left her (ותצא רוחה), she fell on the corpses of her sons (ותפול על פגרי בניה) and she went with them (ותלך עמהם), lines 90–91.” This cumulation of phrases may indicate that the mother has a higher status than her sons in *Yosippon* 15. These phrases also differ from the brief vocabulary that describes the mother’s death in 2 Macc 7:41 in the Greek and Latin versions.

12 Cf. 4 Macc 14:2–17:1

13 Cf. 1 Kgs 8:22; 2 Chr 6:12–13; cf. Exod 9:33; Ps 44:21(20); 68:31; Ezra 9:5.

14 KBL³ 3:755 s.v. עולם; Börner-Klein and Buber, *Josippon*, 176 translate “Gott der Welt.”

15 These words recall a phrase that indicates the death of Eleazar in SY 14 line 27: ושלם נפשו.

3 *Sefer Yosippon's* Use of 2 Maccabees as Main Source

Several scholars have pointed out that the author of *Sefer Yosippon* 14–15 used 2 Macc 6:18–7:42 as main source for the martyrdoms in *Yosippon* 14–15.¹⁶ A detailed comparison supports this observation. Two questions are relevant here: How did the author of *Yosippon* use this source and which textual version of 2 Maccabees did he use?

I will start with the first question. Gerson Cohen contends in his seminal article on the story of Hannah and her seven sons in Hebrew literature that the author of *Sefer Yosippon* based himself on the Latin version and that he copied his source apart from one major addition almost verbatim: “and the story appears in his book as it does in its foreign source virtually word for word” (והמעשה בא בספרו כמו שהוא במקורו הלוועזי כמעט מלה במלה).¹⁷ The comments that David Flusser offers on the text in his edition also point to many similarities between *Yosippon* 15 and the Latin version of 2 Maccabees 7, but they also imply that the author of *Yosippon* 15 sometimes adapted his source.¹⁸ A comparative survey of the introduction and the martyrdom of the first brother should demonstrate whether Cohen and Flusser are right and may also shed some light on the textual version of 2 Maccabees that may have been used by the author of *Yosippon*.¹⁹

The introduction of the martyrdom of the mother and her seven sons partly corresponds to what 2 Maccabees 7:1 tells us. Like 2 Maccabees *Sefer Yosippon* mentions the arrest of the mother and her seven sons, but it introduces the narrative with a formula that reminds one of rabbinic martyrdoms: “At that time were arrested (seven brothers and their mother) ...” (אז נתפסו) (*sY* 15 line 1; cf. *sY* 14 line 1, above). Several rabbinic martyrdoms start with this formula, including one rabbinic version of the martyrdom of the mother and the seven sons, who is called Miriam bat Tanchum instead of Hannah in this version (*LamR* 1.16).²⁰ *Yosippon* 15 continues with an addition to 2 Maccabees, which

16 References in footnotes 17 and 18.

17 Cohen, “מעשה חנה,” 118; similarly: Cohen, “Hannah,” 51; cf. Dönitz, “Sefer Yosippon,” 228.

18 Flusser, *ספר יוסיפון*, 1.68–75.

19 Cf. Dönitz, “Sefer Yosippon,” 223n2, who is more cautious about the textual version of the non-canonical books used in *sY*. I consistently use the word “author” for the person who was responsible for the composition of the version of *sY* on which Flusser’s edition is based.

20 See also *SifDev* 307; *bAZ* 17b–18a; cf. *PesR* 43. About the names of the mother, see Cohen, “מעשה חנה,” 118–121; Cohen, “Hannah,” 51–54; Zeldes, *Reading Jewish History*, 25–26, 35 with n. 78, 111, 123, 126, who points out that the name Hannah occurs already in Ibn Daud’s version of the martyrdom. About the rabbinic versions, see Avemarie, Furstenberg and van Henten, *Jewish Martyrdom*, 240–249.

explains that the king is present during the martyrdom: he had left Jerusalem, but was still close to the city. This may show an awareness of the problem in 2 Maccabees that the king had left for Antioch (2 Macc 5:21) but nevertheless was present during the martyrdoms, which are obviously situated in Jerusalem.²¹ In 2 Macc 7:1, the martyrs are forced to eat a piece of pork during a kind of ritual meal. They are tortured beforehand with scourges and cords made out of sinew (Vg: *flagris et taureis cruciatis*). This remarkable detail may be explained as a display of power by the king.²² In *Yosippon* 15 the martyrs are sent to the king and next they are cruelly scourged and their flesh is cut to pieces with a chain or cord (שוספו באכזריות ובשור בשרם הוות), lines 2–3) *because they refused to eat a piece of pork* (cf. 2 Macc 7:2). The author adds here in comparison to 2 Macc 7:1 that eating pork is a sinful and abominable act.

In 2 Maccabees 7:2 one of the brothers responds to the preliminary torture on behalf of the others by explaining that further questions were useless, because he and his brothers were ready to die for the ancestral laws. In *Sefer Yosippon* 15 line 4 the first brother is brought before the king in line with the composition of the story (ויובא האחד לפני המלך, see the previous section), which is an addition to 2 Maccabees 7 that is reminiscent of Eleazar's martyrdom in *Yosippon* 14 (line 2) and the beginning of the martyrdoms in 4 Macc 5:1–4, where Eleazar is brought to Antiochus, who is sitting on a platform with his men.²³ The continuation in *Yosippon* 15 lines 4–5 is close to the first words of the statement of the brother who acts as spokesperson in 2 Macc 7:2: "In what way is it useful for you to abound in words and instruct us?" (מה לך להרבות דברים או ללמד אותנו; 2 Macc 7:2 LXX Τί μέλλεις ἐρωτᾶν καὶ μαρτυρᾶν ἡμῶν; Vg *quid quaeris et quid vis discere a nobis*). The correspondences between these three versions of the martyr's question are close, but *Yosippon* 15 is still different from the two versions of 2 Maccabees 7 (להרבות דברים; אותנו is object) and it is hard to tell whether it is dependent on the Greek or the Latin version. The continuation of the statement differs significantly from 2 Maccabees 7 (lines 5–6): "We have already learned from our ancestors. Behold, we have prepared ourselves to receive the death for Adonay and his Torah!" (לקבל המות על יי ועל תורתו). Instead of the motivation of a death for the ancestral laws, the son highlights the instruction by the ancestors, which goes through his mother, as we learn later on, and not through his father as 4 Maccabees has it (below). The preparedness to die corresponds to 2 Macc 7:2 (אנחנו ערכנו אותנו; 2 Macc ἔτοιμοι ... ἐσμέν; Vg *parati*

21 Van Henten, *Maccabean Martyrs*, 96.

22 Van Henten, "Martyrdom, Jesus' Passion."

23 This beginning in 4 Macc 5:1–4 is reminiscent of the setting of Christian martyrdoms, van Henten, "Martyrdom and Persecution," 66–69.

sumus), but the death for God and the Torah are two motivations which are added by the author of *Yosippon*.

The continuation of the story in *Sefer Yosippon* 15 in lines 6ff first matches its source, by highlighting the anger of the king about the martyr's statement and reporting his order to bring in a brass frying pan (מחבת נחושת), while 2 Macc 7:3 mentions both a frying pan and a cooking pot (4 Macc 8:12–13 is different). Later on, *Yosippon* 15 mentions a large brass cooking pot, but what happens with and in the pan and the pot is different from 2 Maccabees. The tongue of this son is cut off and the skin of his head is taken off as in 2 Macc 7:4, but a plus to 2 Maccabees implies that his hands and feet are also cut off, as illustrations of the scene show.²⁴ The limbs go in the frying pan on the fire, before the eyes of his brothers. This is different from 2 Maccabees 7, which notes that the other brothers and the mother were looking at the torture of the first martyr (7:4). The rest of his body was thrown in the cooking pot (line 9), which is partly different from 2 Maccabees 7. In lines 10–11 the king orders to take the cooking pot from the fire, so that this first brother would die slowly, which is another addition to 2 Maccabees 7 that dramatizes the scene and is plausibly intended to intimidate the others.

My brief discussion of the first nine lines of *Sefer Yosippon* 15 in comparison to 2 Macc 7:1–4, which roughly concerns 10% of the story in both cases, shows that the author of *Yosippon* clearly bases himself on his source from 2 Maccabees, which is apparent from the similarity in content and the verbal analogies. These analogies do not seem to be close enough to determine which textual version of his source he used. At the same time, it will be clear that the author uses his source creatively, by leaving out or changing information and by adding information or comments. I have made a comparative analysis of the entire story, but the results for the rest of the story are not very different from what we have seen so far, apart from several longer expansions of the story in *Yosippon*, to which I will turn later.

Before concluding this section, I will briefly return to my second question: which version of the text of 2 Maccabees may the author of *Sefer Yosippon* have used? My main point here is that the author renders 2 Maccabees 7 mostly rather freely, which does not allow us to make a claim about the version of 2 Maccabees used. In a few cases, however, the wording of *Yosippon* is specific enough to make a comparison. The first one concerns the response of the youngest son to the words of persuasion by the mother, who concludes with the statement that “I will go with you to that place and I will rejoice together with you (ואשמחה עמכם) as on the day of your wedding (כביום חתונתכם). And

²⁴ E.g. Cohen, “מעשה חנה,” 123.

with you I will have a share in your righteousness” (SY 15 lines 65–67, see also below). The author highlights that “while she was still speaking, the boy responded and said ...” (ויען מדברת ויען הנער ויאמר) (line 68). The Latin of the Vulgate reads in the parallel passage of 2 Macc 7:30: *cum haec illa adhuc diceret ait adulescens* “while she was still speaking, the young man said ...”²⁵ The Greek is slightly different, and there is a text-critical issue involved: in the transmitted text the clause starts with ἔτι (“still”),²⁶ but most scholars follow the emendation ἄρτι (“as soon as” as in the phrase ἄρτι δὲ ταύτης καταληγούσης in 9:5) proposed by Kappler: ἔτι/ἄρτι δὲ ταύτης καταληγούσης ὁ νεανίας εἶπεν “While she was still finishing (speaking)/As soon as she finished, the young man said.”²⁷ *Yosippon* 15 is closer to the text in some of the Latin versions, especially the one transmitted in Old Latin MS B (but cf. *matre*/היא), but it seems to support the ἔτι (“still”) transmitted in the Greek manuscripts. Somewhat further on in the complex statement of the young man addressed to the king, which is much more elaborate than the one in 2 Maccabees 7 (SY lines 68–85; cf. 2 Macc 7:30–38), he scoffs the king in many ways and reproaches him: “you have schemed wickedly to act in this way by stretching out your hand against his [i.e., God’s] servants” (ולשלוח יד בעבדיו) (line 73). The Vulgate reads in the parallel phrase (7:34) *extolli ... in servos eius* “turn against his servants,”²⁸ while the Greek text reads ἐπὶ τοὺς οὐρανίους παιῶδας ἐπαιρόμενος χεῖρα “(do not think that you can be so insolent to have the idle hope of) raising (your) hand against the children of heaven.” MS P seems to remain closest to the Greek text and refers as the only Latin witness to Antiochus raising his hand: *noli incassum extolli mente, superbiens spe incerta ad servos dei, sed manu levata*.²⁹ The text of *Yosippon* shows similarities with the Greek and Latin versions of 2 Macc 7:34 (SY + Vg + Lat^{LV}: his servants; SY + LXX + Lat^P stretching out your hand/raising your hand). If we take into account that both passages are part of a larger and complex statement in *Yosippon*, which includes similarities in content with 2 Maccabees 7 but also shows significant differences from this source, and that the vocabulary in other passages is not specific enough to argue for a specific version of 2 Maccabees, we should conclude in my opinion that the evidence

25 Similarly: Old Latin MS V; “*adhuc*” (“still” is missing in Old Latin MSS L and X; MS B reads: *et adhuc matre dicente haec, adolescens respondit dicens*; De Bruyne, *Anciennes traductions*, 160–161).

26 Keil, *Commentar*, 353; Rahlfs, *Septuaginta*, 1.1117.

27 Kappler, *De memoria alterius*, 64; also Abel, *Livres des Maccabées*, 378; Hanhart, *Macca-baeorum liber II*, 76; Schwartz, *2 Maccabees*, 313, Doran, *2 Maccabees*, 147.

28 Similarly Old Latin MSS L and V; MS X *extolli ... in servos illius*; MS B: *extolli ... adversus servos dei*; MS M: *extollere ... adversus servos dei*.

29 De Bruyne, *Anciennes traductions*, 160–161.

is inconclusive for this chapter that *Yosippon* is based on either the Vulgate or the Old Latin version of 2 Maccabees 7.

4 Possible Use of Other Sources: 4 Maccabees

Is there any evidence that the author of *Sefer Yosippon* used additional sources for his re-creation of the story of the mother and her seven sons? Deviations from 2 Maccabees 7 and additional information provided in the pluses to 2 Maccabees 7 may offer a clue for answering this question. We already noted that the introductory formula **וְיִוְבֵא הָאֶחָד לְפָנַי הַמֶּלֶךְ** (line 4) is a plus in comparison to 2 Macc 7:1, which is reminiscent of the setting of the martyrdoms in 4 Macc 5:1–4 in which the martyrs appear before Antiochus IV (above). Several other passages show correspondences with the version of the martyrdom in 4 Maccabees. In his response to the men of Antiochus to obey the commandments of the king, the second brother responds: “Speed up with the sword and speed up with the fire ...” (**מַהֲרֵהוּ וּמַהֲרֵהוּ הָאֵשׁ**), which is a plus compared to 2 Macc 7:8, where this son only says “no” in his ancestral language, which is absent in *Yosippon*. This plus may be inspired by a statement of the first brother in 4 Macc 9:17, who suggests, among other horrible tortures, to the king’s men to cut off his limbs and burn his flesh (**τέμνετε μου τὰ μέλη καὶ πυροῦτε μου τὰς σάρκας**). That this concerns the first and not the second brother may not be a problem, because by adapting and elaborating his source the author of *Yosippon* demonstrates that the second brother underwent exactly the same tortures as the first one.³⁰ The statement “take off nothing from what you have done to my brother and do it to me as well, because I will not be inferior to my brother in piety and awe for my God (**בְּהַחֲסִידוּת וּיְרֵאת אֱלֹהֵי**, lines 16–18)” is another plus in *Yosippon* 15 and emphasizes the solidarity among the brothers, which is an important motif in 4 Maccabees and only hinted at in 2 Maccabees 7.³¹ Moreover, the piety highlighted at the end of the statement (**חֲסִידוּת**) is a motif that is reminiscent of **εὐσέβεια/pietas** “piety,” “proper attitude to God” as a key term in 4 Maccabees, which is the most important virtue in 4 Maccabees and also forms the foundation of the philosophy articulated in 4 Maccabees.³² In the section about the third brother (*SY* 15 lines 24–28; cf. 2 Macc 7:10–12), several details are different from 2 Maccabees, and this martyr

30 Flusser, **יוסיפון**, 1.71.

31 4 Macc 9:23–24; 11:22–23; 13:16; 16:14; cf. 13:23–25; 14:7–8; van Henten, *Maccabean Martyrs*, 284–287.

32 E.g. 4 Macc 1:4, 6; 2:6, 23; 5:23–24; 13:24; 15:10; van Henten, *Maccabean Martyrs*, 278–284.

begins his statement by making the point that it was useless for the king to terrify him and his brothers, because their sufferings were coming from Heaven, which is why they took them upon them out of love for Heaven (lines 25–26). The reference to Heaven (i.e., God) echoes 2 Macc 7:10, but the statement is very different from this verse, which concerns the posthumous revival of the brothers. In the first part of this statement in *Yosippon*, the brother also scoffs the king, he calls him a foe and an enemy (צַר וְאֹיֵב, line 25). This is another plus in *Yosippon*, which may build on 4 Macc 10:10, where the statement of the third brother includes the exclamation “o most abominable tyrant” (ὦ μαρῳάτατε τύραννε) and also starts with an explanation of the suffering of the brothers: “we are suffering because of our godly training and virtue.”

The king’s attempt to persuade the seventh and youngest brother to eat a piece of pork is described in two parts (lines 50–53 and 53–58). The first part explains the king’s motivation for doing this. He feels very ashamed because the mother defeated him and he states that he does not want the mother to brag about him and defeat him. This is different from 2 Macc 7:24, where the king thinks he is held in contempt. The defeat of the king is highlighted by two verbal forms of the root נצח (נצחו line 50 and נצחתי line 52). This motif is absent in 2 Maccabees 7, but 4 Maccabees highlights that the king was defeated by the martyrs (e.g. 1:11; 17:11–16).³³ In her extensive statement of encouragement of her youngest son (lines 60–67), the mother presents herself as an instructor concerning awe for God (גַּם יִרְאֵת אֱלֹהִים לְמַדְתִּיד, line 62). This is another plus in comparison to 2 Maccabees 7, which may be inspired by 4 Maccabees, which recalls in a flashback the instruction of the sons by their father. The father instructed them in the law and the prophets (4 Macc 18:10), which is illustrated by a cluster of quotations from Scripture which help to interpret the performance and vindication of the sons (4 Macc 18:11–19). It is significant that in *Sefer Yosippon* the mother takes over this role as instructor from the father, who is not even mentioned. Thus, although there are no elaborate verbal correspondences between *Yosippon* 15 and 4 Maccabees, my findings seem to support that several of the plusses in the story in comparison to 2 Maccabees can plausibly be explained by the assumption that the author incorporated content and important motifs from 4 Maccabees. If this assumption is justified, we may conclude that the author of *Yosippon* 15 was also familiar with the story about the mother and her sons as it is transmitted in 4 Maccabees.

33 Van Henten, *Maccabean Martyrs*, 119–122, 236–237, 262–263.

5 Possible Use of Other Sources: Rabbinic Versions of the Martyrdom

What about the rabbinic versions of the story concerning the mother and her seven sons, which are transmitted in the Babylonian Talmud (*b. Gittin* 57b), in Midrash *Lamentations Rabbah* 1.16 (18b), in *Pesiqta Rabbati* 43, in *Seder Eliahu Rabbah* 28/30 (*SEF*; ed. Friedmann 151 line 24–153 line 15)³⁴ and still other versions (*Yalqut Shimoni Ki Tavo, EkhZ* 1)?³⁵ As is well-known, the historical setting of the martyrdom in these versions is adapted to the Roman period in “the days of persecution” (בימי השמרד) as *PesR* 43 states (in *SEF* the emperor is identified as Hadrian). The martyrs are forced to venerate an idol, which is similar to the story in *Sefer Yosippon* 15 but significantly different from 2 Maccabees 7. The narrative of the rabbinic texts is more schematic than the stories in 2 Maccabees 7 and *Yosippon* 15. The version in tractate *b. Gittin* 57b takes off with the order to commit idolatry by venerating the stars (פלה לעבודת כוכבים; cf. *LamR* 1.16: השתחוה לצלם) and the seven brothers motivate their refusal on the basis of quotations from Scripture. After the execution of her sons, the mother kills herself by throwing herself from a roof.³⁶ The mother is called Miriam bat Tanchum in *PesR* 43 and *SEF* 28/30³⁷ and Miriam bat Nahtum in *LamR* 1.16. Nevertheless, there are a few correspondences between these rabbinic passages and the story in *Yosippon* 15. The rabbinic martyrdoms share one element of the composition with *Yosippon* 15: the brothers are all brought before the ruler (explicitly in *b. Gittin* 57b: “they brought the first one before the emperor” אחיהו קמא איהו דקיסר), which is indicated with forms of the verbs בוא (*SEF* 28/30), בוא and יצא (*LamR* 1.16) or אתא (*b. Git* 57b). The concluding formula that structures the narrative in *Yosippon* 15 (“and [he] died”) is, however, missing in the rabbinic versions. *LamR* 1.16, *b. Git* 57b and *SEF* 28/30 have different concluding formulae which indicate the death of each of the brothers. *PesR* 43 briefly reports that the first brother was fried in a frying pan (טיגן; cf. *SY* 15 line 8), without giving further details. In *b. Gittin* 57b, the mother asks Caesar’s men to allow her to give her youngest son a little kiss (ואינשקיה פורתא; cf. *SY* 15 line 59), which enables her to encourage him briefly with a statement which is absent in *SY* 15: “My son, go and say to your father Abraham, you bound one son to the altar, but I bound seven altars” (cf. *SEF* 28/30). *LamR* 1.16 notes that the seventh

34 See Cordoni, *Seder Eliyahu*, 262–272.

35 Further discussion in Doran, “The Martyr;” Himmelfarb, “The Mother of the Seven Sons;” Avemarie, Furstenberg and van Henten, *Jewish Martyrdom*, 240–249.

36 *b. Gittin* 57b; *LamR* 1.16; *PesR* 43 is different; cf. 4 Macc 17:1.

37 The name Miriam is added in an interlinear gloss in MS Vaticanus, ed. Friedmann l.c.

son is the youngest of all of them (cf. *SY* 15 lines 41 and 51).³⁸ In *Lamentations Rabbah*, the mother asks the emperor to embrace and kiss her son (cf. *SY* 15 line 59) and in a dramatic way she bares her breasts and breastfeeds him, after which she starts a dialogue with the emperor because she wants to be killed first (this scene is expanded in *SER* 28/30). This is in vain, because while she is still embracing and kissing her son, he is cruelly killed while she is holding him in her arms. In the mother's final words of encouragement of her youngest son in *Yosippon* 15 quoted above (lines 65–67), we find the motif that the mother anticipates the future joy of celebrating together as if she would participate in the wedding celebrations of her sons. Flusser suggests that the author of *Yosippon* compares *qiddush ha-Shem* with a wedding here and he refers to late Midrashic parallels concerning the *Aqedat Jitzhaq*, but the joy may also point to the posthumous vindication of the martyrs in the world to come.³⁹ This is suggested by the conclusion of the story in the rabbinic versions, where the deceased mother is called “a joyful mother of children” with the words of Ps 113:9 (אם הבנים שמחה). The conclusion in *b. Gittin* 57b reads after the report of the death of the mother: “A Bat Qol emerged and said: “a joyful mother of children” (similarly *SER* 28/30). *LamR* 1.16 ends likewise, but expands this ending: “And the Holy Spirit cried out: ‘for these things I weep.’” *PesR* 43 makes the same connection with Ps 113:9, but it ends differently: “The Holy One, blessed be He, said, ‘In the time to come, I will cause her to rejoice (אני משמח אותה) the more in her children, a joyful mother of children” (trans. Doran).⁴⁰ This forms an inclusion with the beginning of this version:

Another comment: “The Lord our God ... causes to dwell barren in her house.” The Holy One, blessed be He, said, “I make Miriam the daughter of Tanchum become childless like a barren woman in order to make her rejoice (לשמח אותה) the more in her children in the time-to-come ...”

Trans. Doran

These parallels between *Sefer Yosippon* 15 and the rabbinic versions of the story may imply that the author of the *Yosippon* was familiar with one or more of these versions, but it will be obvious that he did not use them systematically as a source for his own re-creation of the story.

38 *LamR* 1.16 and *SER* 28/30 give his age according to the sages: 2 years, 6 months and 6.5/7.5 hours.

39 Flusser, *יוסיפון*, 1.74; Dönitz, *Überlieferung und Rezeption*, 254.

40 Doran, “The Martyr.”

It should be noted in passing that the association of martyrdom with a wedding feast is also a motif in Christian martyrdoms. The attitude of the Christian martyr Blandina at the moment when she is facing the beasts is compared to the joy of someone who is going to a wedding party:

And last of all the blessed Blandina, just like a noble mother who has encouraged her children and sent them ahead in victory to the king, undergoing herself through all the contests of her children, hastened to them, rejoicing and exulting in her departure, as if she were summoned to a wedding feast (ὡς εἰς νυμφικὸν δεῖπνον κεκλημένη) and not thrown to the beasts.⁴¹

MLugd 55, trans. Rebillard

The motif is also found in a homily on the Maccabean martyrs by Gregory of Nazianze about the mother, who, in line with the report in 4 Macc 17:1, does not wait for her executioners and walks herself to the pyre as if it was to the bridechamber (ὡς ἐπὶ νυμφῶνα) so that her holy body would not be touched by them.⁴²

6 The Use of the Hebrew Bible

Although *Sefer Yosippon* 15 does not abound in scriptural quotations as some of the rabbinic versions of the story do, the author seems to present the story also from a biblical perspective, or rather, he gives it a finishing touch by incorporating biblical vocabulary and integrating biblical motifs, which may invite the readers to interpret the story also in biblical terms.⁴³

The author consistently uses biblical phrases and formulae in his narrative. One example can be found in line 51, where the king expresses the hope that the youngest son could be persuaded “to act according to our desire [or: will]”: לעשות רצונו (cf. line 57: לעשות רצוני; line 86: עשה רצונו). A parallel phrase of this vocabulary in line 57 is absent in 2 Maccabees, and the potential speech of the mother that follows upon it (lines 52–53), given in direct speech, from the perspective of the king, is missing as well. Combinations of the verb עשה + the noun רצון occur in the Hebrew Bible, note especially Ezra 10:11: ועשו רצונו

⁴¹ Cf. *MLugd* 48.

⁴² Gregory of Nazianzus, *In Mach.* (PG 35:929); cf. 932 lines 42–44.

⁴³ With Börner-Klein and B. Zuber, *Josippion*, 11.

(“and do his [i.e., God’s] will”).⁴⁴ The exclamation of woe addressed to the king by the youngest son, *אוי לך אויב אוי לך*, “Woe to you, o enemy, woe to you” in line 71 echoes similar biblical exclamations, which are, however, not repeated as this one (Num 21:29 and Jer 48:46: *אוי לך מואב* “woe to you, o Moab”).⁴⁵ In line 79, the youngest son announces the king’s death with the statement *תמות בנגעים גדולים* (“you will die through great plagues”), and this is reminiscent of the description of the death of Antiochus IV in 2 Maccabees 9:1–8, who is struck by God, but the phrase *נגעים גדולים* occurs already in the Bible in Gen 12:17 concerning God’s punishment of Pharaoh.

Several motifs in the story also recall biblical passages. In the king’s attempt to persuade the youngest brother, he promises the boy to make him deputy-king, which would enable him to rule over his entire kingdom (*ולעשותו מלכותו*, line 55, another plus in comparison to 2 Macc 7). This reminds one of the position held by Joseph in Egypt (Gen 41:38–46; cf. Mark 6:23). The instruction by the mother, discussed above, concerns the awe for God (*יראת אלהים*; line 62; cf. line 18: *ויראת אלהי*; also *SY* 14 line 26). This is not only a biblical phrase but also an important expected attitude of the Israelites.⁴⁶ In line 25, the king is characterized as *צר ואויב* “foe and enemy,” which reminds one of Haman’s characterization in the Esther story as *איש צר ואויב המן הרע הזה* (“a foe and enemy, this wicked Haman,” Esth 7:6).⁴⁷ Line 38 includes the phrase *מלאך לבך לעשות האלה* (“you, who have fully set your heart on doing such things,” which includes the biblical phrase *מלא לב* (Eccl 8:11). It especially echoes another phrase referring to Haman: *אשר מלאו לבו לעשות כן* (Esth 7:5 “[who is he] who has set his heart on doing so”). Another plus, in the statement of the fourth brother, culminates in the characterization of the king as *איש הבליעל* (“a useless [or ill-natured] man;” lines 29–30; similarly lines 72 and 82).⁴⁸ This is also a biblical phrase, which occurs in Prov 16:27; 1 Sam 25:25; 2 Sam 16:7 (cf. 1 Kings 21:13). The statement of the sixth brother includes a confession of guilt, which indicates that the sufferings of the martyrs are justified. He states: *ידענו רשעינו כי חטאנו ליי* (“we know we have committed wicked deeds because we have sinned before the Lord,” line 36). This statement recalls biblical confessions of guilt in Solomon’s prayer before the dedication of the

44 See also Ps 40:9; 103:21; 143:10 and with the preposition *כ* Est 1:8; 9:5; Neh 9:24 and Dan 8:4; 11:3, 16, 36.

45 See also Jer 13:27; Ez 16:23.

46 Gen 20:11; 2 Sam 23:3; common parallel phrase *יראת* *י* Isa 33:6; Ps 19:10; 34:12; 110:10; Prov 1:7; 2:5 etc.

47 See also Lam 4:12: *כי יבא צר ואויב*.

48 For similar phrases in *SY*, see Carson Bay’s chapter in this volume.

Temple in 1 Kings 8 and Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9.⁴⁹ A related phrase is found in line 84 (ואנחנו הרשענו) "we have acted wickedly"), which also literally recalls a biblical passage (Neh 9:33; cf. Ps 106:6).

A more complex use of the Hebrew Bible concerns the biblical quotation in the mutual words of encouragement when the first brother is about to die for God and his Torah (*SY* 15 lines 11–14). The other martyrs refer explicitly to Moses' Song in Deuteronomy 32 as in 2 Macc 7:6, but the reference to this song is shorter and different in *Sefer Yosippon*: ובעבדיו: ובשירו: יתנחם ("Behold, this is what Moses, the servant of God, has said in his song: 'He will have compassion on his servants'" lines 12–13). The quotation itself is close to a phrase which occurs in Deut 32:36 as well as in Ps 135:14 (ועל עבדיו יתנחם). The quotation remains unexplained in 2 Maccabees, but *Yosippon* adds the following explanation, which is an adaptation of an important line of thinking in 2 Maccabees that God was angry with the Jews because of the wickedness of a group of Jewish leaders and brought Antiochus IV upon them as an instrument of temporary punishment, although in the end God would not forsake his people (2 Macc 6:12–16). In *Yosippon* 15 lines 13–14 we read: יתנחם עד עתה יתנחם יי. בנו על כל הרעה אשר דבר לעשות לעמו וירחם עליהם ("Until now has God shown his compassion with us. In spite of all evil which he has said he would do to his people he has been merciful to them").⁵⁰

7 Important Motifs in the Story in *Sefer Yosippon* 15

My comparative analysis results in several preliminary findings that may point to particularities of the martyrdom of the mother and her seven sons as narrated in *Sefer Yosippon*. These findings need to be corroborated by further research into their connection with the larger context of the story, including the retelling of the Masada story with which *Yosippon* concludes (*SY* 89). The motifs of the beneficial death of the martyrs and their vindication are clearly articulated differently from 2 Maccabees 7 and 4 Maccabees. The motivations for preferring death to obeying the commandment of the king and the formulae which indicate that are also different. And the author of *Yosippon*

49 1 Kgs 8:47: והענינו ורשענו; 2 Chr 6:37: ורשענו; חטאנו והענינו ורשענו and Daniel's prayer in Dan 9:15: חטאנו רשענו; cf. Dan 9:5.

50 For still other interconnections with biblical passages, see the direct speech of the mother after the death of her sixth son in lines 44–49 (see the next section) and the detailed description of Sheol in lines 79–81; cf. Deut 32:22; Ps 107:10, 14; Job 3:5; 10:21–22; Isa 30:6; Prov 1:27; Gen 19:24; Ezek 38:22; Ps 11:6.

characterizes the brothers and their mother in a new way, which is most obvious in the case of the mother. I will start with the last point.

The mother is clearly a strong woman and a saint. The author characterizes her in line 41 as “the holy mother” (האם הקדושה), which is repeated in line 88 (“their holy mother;” אמם הקדושה). The youngest son calls his brothers “his holy brothers” (אחיי הקדושים, line 69). The old Eleazar demonstrates his great dignity and his glorious holiness (יקר גדולתו ואת קדושת תפארתו) when he responds to the offer to pretend to eat a piece of pork (SY 14 line 9; cf. line 13). This qualification implies a special status for the martyrs within their community, which is supported by a few other occurrences of the phrase הקדושה or הקדוים in *Sefer Yosippon*, which concerns in at least one other case a very brave and admirable woman: the mother of John Hyrcanus, who was taken captive and tortured heavily and then murdered (SY 27).⁵¹ The epithet “holy” is paralleled and probably inspired by the commemoration of Christian saints who were allegedly tortured to death or brutally executed and called “sanctus” or “sancta,” including the Maccabean martyrs themselves in the Christian reception. Their status as “holy” is apparent from titles of works about them, such as the *Passio sanctorum Machabaeorum*, the Passion of the Holy Maccabees, which is a Latin paraphrase of the martyrdom.⁵²

The author of *Sefer Yosippon* reports in line with 2 Maccabees 7:20 that the mother saw how her seven sons were executed on a single day, but he describes her response differently. He highlights the drama of the scene (see above), but her response is not emotional and different from 2 Maccabees: the mother does not show any fear in her heart or anxiety in her mind (לא פחד ליבה ולא רגזה) נפשה (line 42–43). She stands beside the corpses of her sons “with strength” (והעמוד בכח, lines 42–43).⁵³ The strength of the mother is also emphasized by the way she dies in the story (lines 87–91, above). Another detail in the section after the death of the sixth son may also reflect the interest of the author or redactor. The speech of the mother in response to the death of six of her sons shows a particular focus on the body of her sons (SY 15 lines 41–49).⁵⁴ The text shows correspondences with the mother’s two brief speeches in 2 Maccabees in which the mother argues for an analogy between both God’s creation of the universe and the creation of her sons on the one hand and God’s re-creation of the sons after their death (2 Macc 7:22–23, 27–29). *Sefer Yosippon* partly

51 Cf. SY 34 concerning Salome Alexandra and SY 78 concerning Joseph/Josephus’ mother.

52 Dörrie, *Passio ss. Machabaeorum*.

53 Cf. line 88 and above and SY 14 lines 18 and 26–27 concerning Eleazar.

54 I thank Saskia Dönitz for pointing this out to me.

echoes the language of the mother's words in 2 Maccabees,⁵⁵ but the vocabulary about the creation and birth of her sons is different and describes the bodies involved in realistic terms, which caused David Flusser even to think that the author or redactor was a medical doctor:⁵⁶ "Also, I did not deliver you from my womb ... and he [God] has built your bones and he has woven your tendons, covered them with skin on top of them and made hair grow on it ... (lines 45–47)."⁵⁷ The references to the birth of her sons and their creation, which are both explicitly attributed to God (line 46: נתנה), are more articulate than in 2 Maccabees and at the same time reflect biblical language deriving from Gen 2:7 and Ezekiel 37 about the revival of the dry bones.⁵⁸

A significant detail in 2 Maccabees concerns the motif of pity: the mother calls upon her youngest son to have mercy with her in 2 Maccabees 7:27. This motif is left out in *Sefer Yosippon*,⁵⁹ which makes sense in the light of the focus on her strength in *Yosippon*. The author of *Yosippon* 15 also points out that the mother alone defeated the king, which is different from 4 Maccabees, where the king is defeated by all martyrs (above). And finally, the mother's role as instructor of her sons as discussed above, puts her at least on the same level as Eleazar, whose role as model for the young Jews is emphasized several times in *Yosippon* 14.

In 2 Maccabees, three motivations for preferring death instead of giving in to the king stand out: the faithfulness to God, or more explicitly to God's laws, the observance of the ancestral laws and customs of the Jewish people, and the exemplary role of the martyrs, in particular Eleazar's ambition to set an example for the young Jews.⁶⁰ These motivations re-appear in the statements of the Maccabean martyrs in *Sefer Yosippon* 14–15, but with different articulations. The brothers point out that they are ready to die for God and his Torah, as the first one expresses in lines 5–6: "we are prepared to accept death for the Lord and his Torah" (אנחנו ערכנו אותנו לקבל המות על יי ועל תורתו). The same double motivation is expressed with a so-called dying-for-formula in line 12: כי מת אחיהם על יי ועל תורתו ("[while they were seeing] that their brother died for the

55 Cf. especially *SY* 15 lines 45–46 with 2 Macc 7:22, 27, 29.

56 Flusser, *ספר יוסיפון*, 2.86.

57 *SY* 15 lines 45–47: וכל ... ולא גידלתי ולא רוממתי אתכם ... ועצמותיכם הוא בנה. וארג את הגידים וכיסה עור מלמעלה והצמיח שערות.

58 Cf. lines 47–48 חיים ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים) with Gen 2:7 (ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים) and line 46–47 עור מלמעלה (עליהם עור מלמעלה), Flusser, *ספר יוסיפון*, 1.73.

59 As noted by Flusser, *ספר יוסיפון*, 1.74; the second use of the motif in 2 Macc 7:30 is also left out.

60 Van Henten, *Maccabean Martyrs*, 125–269.

Lord and his Torah”), which is also used for the single motivation “מֹת עַל יְיָ” or מֹת עַל אֱלֹהֵינוּ (line 30, גְּמוּת עַל יְיָ, line 64, מֹת עַל אֱלֹהֵינוּ, line 53).⁶¹ What is striking in comparison to the motivations of the martyrs in 2 Maccabees 7 is that the patriotic dimension is totally absent in the motivations as transmitted in *Yosippon*: the references to the ancestral laws and customs as well as to the ancestral language in 2 Macc 7:2, 8, 21, 24, 27, 37 have been left out.

Finally, the motif of the beneficial effect of the death of the mother and her sons (cf. 2 Macc 7:33, 37–38; 4 Macc 6:28–29; 9:24; 12:17; 17:20–22) is less prominent in *Sefer Yosippon* and the vindication of the martyrs is interpreted differently. The sixth son refers once briefly to the atoning effect of the death of his family in lines 35–38 in one of the plusses in comparison to 2 Maccabees. He starts this statement with a confession of guilt (line 36: יִדְעוּ רָשָׁעֵינוּ כִּי חָטָאנוּ לַיְיָ, above) and it remains unclear whether the transgressions referred to were committed by the brothers themselves or by other Jews or by the entire Jewish people. The previous brother dismisses already the idea that God has forsaken his people and he indicates that God has brought the glory of the violent death of his family members upon them out of love for them (כִּי מֵאֱהָבָתוֹ אוֹתָנוּ הִבְיָאנוּ) ועָתָה אֲנַחְנוּ אֲשֶׁר נִתְּנָנוּ אֶת נַפְשׁוֹתֵינוּ לְמוֹת בְּעַד כְּפָרַת עַמּוּנוּ (“And now we surrender our souls in order to die for the sake of the atonement of our people ...,” lines 37–38). The vocabulary that hints at the atonement of the people might link up with a biblical notion of atonement, but it is unique within *Yosippon* and there are no parallels with biblical passages. The youngest son expresses the expectation that God will be merciful for his people (וְאֱלֹהֵינוּ יִרְחַם עָלֵינוּ, line 82; cf. Isa 49:13), which might imply that the death of his family forms a turning point in the history of the people. A few lines further, he repeats that God “will turn and be merciful to us and will revive us by giving us eternal life” (וְהוּא יָשׁוּב וְיִרְחַמְנוּ וְיַחְיֵינוּ חַיֵּי עוֹלָם), lines 84–85), which seems to focus on his family only.

The posthumous vindication of the mother and her seven sons is a much more prominent motif than the beneficial effect of their death in *Sefer Yosippon* 15. It is sometimes indicated in rather general terms in the statements addressed to the king, but some passages are articulate and indicate that the martyrs are neither resurrected nor revived through a recreation of their bodies by God immediately after their death, as 2 Maccabees seems to imply.⁶² The entire family is revived or made new (lines 22; 30; 48; 72; 76; 84) and re-united

61 Cf. the surrender formula in line 37 נִפְשׁוֹתֵינוּ לְמוֹת, see below and Grundmann, “Ist nicht an einem solchen Tag,” 73; the dying-for formula does not occur in rabbinic martyrdoms, Avemarie, Furstenberg and van Henten, *Jewish Martyrdom*, 50–69.

62 Van Henten, *Maccabean Martyrs*, 172–182.

after death so that they will be with God until the resurrection at the end of days (lines 21–23). This place where they can be with God is also called the light that is with God (הנה המה הולכים אל האלהים אשר נתנם: האור אשר עם יי, line 21) ואל האור אשר עם יי. ועוד נחיה חיים ארוכים אשר אין בה סוף וקץ בהקיצו את מתי עמו ואת הרוגי עבדיו “Behold, they [our souls, הנפשותינו] go to God, who has given them, and to the light that is with God. We will live a long life without end or limit when he will rise the dead of his people and those of his servants who were killed.” The youngest son uses slightly different vocabulary, he refers to the eternal life and the eternal light (לחיי עולם ולאור עולמים), where no darkness is found (lines 76–77). Saskia Dönitz points out that the great light is already the reward for those who suffer in the Hebrew Bible (Isa 9:1; 53:11). It is a prominent motif in *Yosippon* in connection with the vindication of those who die because they are faithful to God and his Torah, or die for the sake of the covenant or the people.⁶³ This shared fate for Jewish heroes who die violently indicates that the story of the mother and her seven sons is well integrated in *Sefer Yosippon*’s presentation of Jewish history.

8 Conclusion

The composition of *Sefer Yosippon* 15 stands out by its biblical vocabulary and literary style in comparison to previous versions of the martyrdom of the Maccabean mother and her seven sons. The author focuses more on the statements of the martyrs than on their deeds and devotes more than half of the narrative space to the mother and her youngest son (lines 41–91). A detailed comparison implies that 2 Maccabees 7 is the author’s main source. It shows at the same time that *Yosippon* 15 is a rather free re-creation of this source with many adaptations and expansions.⁶⁴ It is difficult to assess on which textual version of 2 Maccabees *Yosippon* 15 is based. It may concern the Vulgate, as scholars have argued, but some passages seem to be closer to Greek or Old Latin versions of 2 Maccabees 7. There also significant correspondences in content and motifs with the martyrdom as told in 4 Maccabees, which render it probable that the author of *Yosippon* also built on that version of the martyrdom. There are some correspondences between the rabbinic versions

63 SY 65 line 26; 67 lines 28 and 35; 89 lines 23, 26, 30, 66; cf. 79 lines 41–44; Dönitz, “Sefer Yosippon,” 228; Dönitz, “Historiography,” 959 with n. 34; Dönitz, *Überlieferung und Rezeption*, 250–253.

64 For another case study of the re-interpretation of Maccabean heroes in SY, see Bay, “Reinventing the Hammer.”

of the martyrdom and *Yosippon* 15, including verbal ones, but there is not enough evidence to conclude that the author used them as a source. The author frequently incorporates biblical vocabulary and biblical motifs, which may imply that he aimed to invite his readers to interpret the story also along biblical lines.

The final section of my analysis highlights important motifs of the story in *Sefer Yosippon* in comparison with other versions of the martyrdom. The most significant observation in this respect is that the role of the mother is expanded. She is clearly the central figure in *Yosippon* 15 and is called “the holy mother” (lines 41 and 88). It may be worthwhile to compare this with the reception of other female characters in the narrative of *Yosippon*, for example the Roman lady Paulina who was deceived by Mundus (SY 57) and Miriam who killed and cooked her own son during the siege of Jerusalem in 66–70 CE (SY 86),⁶⁵ all the more so because Saskia Dönitz observes that these female figures become even more important in later versions of *Yosippon*.⁶⁶ The mother is characterised as a strong woman by not showing any emotion or anxiety when she is confronted with the tortures of her sons (lines 42–43) and by the way she goes to her death (lines 87–91). In line with this characterisation the motif of pity for her sons is left out (cf. 2 Macc 7:27). Her speech after the death of six of her sons reflects a particular focus on the bodies involved (lines 41–49). It is striking that in *Yosippon* 15 the mother alone defeats King Antiochus. And finally, the mother is also presented as the instructor of her sons.

The motivations of the martyrs for choosing death are mainly religious: they are ready to die for God or for God and his Torah (lines 5–6, 12, 30, 53, 64). A patriotic motivation is absent. The posthumous vindication of the mother and her seven sons is a much more prominent motif than the beneficial effect of their death, but it is indicated in rather general terms. *Sefer Yosippon* presupposes that the martyrs will be with God or the light that is with God until the resurrection at the end of times (lines 21–23; cf. lines 76–77).

All martyrs are presented as saints, they are called holy (SY 14 line 9; SY 15 lines 41, 69, 88). This epithet may be inspired by the commemoration of Christian martyrs as saints including the Maccabean martyrs. Another detail may also be explained by the assumption that the author was also familiar with Christian martyrdom traditions: the anticipation of the posthumous vindication of martyrdom with the imagery of a wedding feast (SY 15 lines 65–67). Both details may suggest that one of the aims of the author may have been to

65 For a detailed analysis of the various versions of the Miriam-Mary story from Josephus, BJ 6.201–213 up to SY 86, see Bay, “Maria Story.”

66 Dönitz, *Überlieferung und Rezeption*, 50–61.

respond to Christian martyrdoms, to reclaim the Maccabean martyrs for the Jews and show with a fresh rendering of their martyrdoms that the Jews had their own highly admirable saintly figures.

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