

Killing Matthias: *De excidio* 5.22 and *Sefer Yosippon* 81 (כח)

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Sefer Yosippon's most important source was the text we call *On the Destruction of Jerusalem* (*De excidio Hierosolymitano*),¹ or 'Pseudo-Hegesippus.'² *Yosippon* used *De excidio* as its primary source for the latter half of its storyline (Chapters 51–89).³ It was on the basis of *De excidio* that *Yosippon* scripted its most important narrative moments from the later Second Temple Period and the Roman-Jewish War: examples include the Battle of Jotapata and Josephus' famous speech there (*DEH* 3.8–18 ≈ *SY* 66–67), Josephus' speech to the Jews on behalf of Titus before the walls of Jerusalem (*DEH* 5.15–16 ≈ *SY* 78), the terrible *teknophagia* episode where the beleaguered Maria eats her infant son (*DEH* 5.40 ≈ *SY* 86),⁴ and the final showdown on Mount Masada (*DEH* 5.53 ≈ *SY* 89). *De excidio* is a Latin and overtly Christian text. For a Hebrew-writing historian in the early Medieval period to use this enthusiastically anti-Jewish iteration of first-century Jewish history as its primary source is striking. More than a few scholars have wondered at this, usually concluding that *Yosippon* used *De excidio* because its author had no other choice: he must not have had access to another account of these events, for example the Latin translation of Josephus' *Bellum Judaicum* (widely accessible at the time of *Yosippon*'s

1 All Latin of *De excidio* herein is taken from Ussani, *Hegesippi qui dicitur Historiae libri v*, and all translations thereof are my own. The Hebrew text of *Yosippon* is borrowed from Börner-Klein & Zuber, *Josippon*, which reformats but largely reprints the standard critical text of Flusser, *The Josippon*. My sincere thanks to Dagmar Börner-Klein for providing me with a more user-friendly version of her Hebrew text. It should be noted in all this, however, that even Flusser's standard Hebrew text is not without need of emendation—the Hebrew text of *Yosippon*'s earliest version (as far as we know), i.e. Flusser's 'Rescension A,' is in need of real re-examination in light of many Cairo Genizah fragments antedating the earliest manuscripts; see Dönitz, "Josephus Torn to Pieces."

2 The foundational study is still Flusser, "Der Lateinische Josephus und der hebräische Josippon."

3 See Dönitz, *Überlieferung und Rezeption*, 6, and Dönitz "Historiography Among Byzantine Jews," 956.

4 See Bay, "The 'Maria Story' in Greek, Latin, & Hebrew."

writing).⁵ Perhaps this is so. Perhaps not. In any case, what I will show here is that *Yosippon*'s use of *De excidio* is complex, nuanced, and highly significant for understanding *Yosippon* as a literary and rhetorical work.⁶

Both *Sefer Yosippon* and Pseudo-Hegesippus are wildly understudied.⁷ This is just beginning to change. But even within this change, it must be said that very little work has been done by way of close comparison between the Hebrew text of *Yosippon* and the Latin of *De excidio*.⁸ In other words, there exists in the scholarship very little knowledge about how exactly *Yosippon* made use of its

5 Flusser, "Der Lateinische Josephus," 127 states that "Ob der Verfasser des Josippon das 'Bellum Judaicum' gelesen hat, ist ungewiß; er hat in diesem Buch höchstens geblättert. (...) Der Verfasser des Josippon hat also das Bellum Judaicum wohl kaum gelesen und die letzten vier Bücher der Antiquitates nicht gekannt." Rather, Flusser concludes that *Yosippon*'s author apprehended the Latin *Antiquities* and *De excidio* together in a single manuscript ("Daß der Josephus unserem Verfasser in einem Kodex vorlag, konnten wir schon sehen"), as confirmed by the contents of *Yosippon* itself ("Aus Josippon kann man ersehen, daß dieser Kodex sechzehn von den zwanzig Büchern der Antiquitates und auch den Hegesippus enthalten hat"). Later, further musing appears in Flusser, "*Josippon*, a Medieval Hebrew Version of Josephus," 392: "It seems that [*Yosippon*'s author] also knew Josephus' *Jewish War* (in Latin translation), but this is by no means completely certain. If, indeed, he really read the original *Jewish War*, he only occasionally referred to it. He certainly did not use it as his main source, because he wrongly believed that the *Hegesippus* was also written by Josephus, and, thus, he was sure that he did not need Josephus' other book that dealt with the same subject. It is sure that he did not know the last four books of Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*." Scholarship has progressed little beyond Flusser's cursory remarks. More recently, Dönitz, "Sefer Yosippon (*Josippon*)," 384, states that "there is no definite evidence that the tenth-century author of *Sefer Yosippon* knew the other, more literal translation of *Jewish War* by Rufinus or even the Greek original. Parts of *Jewish War* that do not appear in *De excidio* are also missing from *Sefer Yosippon*" (384; N.b.—Rufinus did not produce the Latin translation proper of the *BJ*, though it was at times ascribed to him, as it was to Jerome and Ambrose according to Cassiodorus, *Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning* 1.17.1). It should be noted that one can find small hints here and there that *SY* might well have known the Latin *BJ*.

6 As such, this essay contributes to a small but growing collection of scholarship that broaches this issue, although very rarely is *DEH* in particular the object of inquiry vis-à-vis *SY*. See, however, Bay, "The Jerusalem Temple and Jewish Identity Between Pseudo-Hegesippus & *Sefer Yosippon*."

7 They are still in that stage, that is familiar to scholars, in which virtually every essay on either or both works begins with some iteration of the statement: 'this text (these texts) have been largely ignored and is (are) significantly misunderstood. This needs to change; hence the present study ...'

8 See Dönitz, "Sefer Yosippon," 387–388, whose epilogue on the history of scholarship on *SY* includes nothing on this subject. Some work has been done, sporadically. Flusser's critical edition and various essays, which constitute probably the most quantitatively significant efforts in this direction, tend to be cursory. For a partial bibliography of Flusser's output, see Lowe, "Bibliography of the Writings of David Flusser." A good overview of the older scholarship on *SY* (pre-1980) is Feldman, *Josephus and Modern Scholarship*, 57–74.

Latin Christian source-text and what this can tell us about *Yosippon* and what it does within the broader Josephan historiographical tradition.⁹ The present chapter is part of a larger study which seeks to map out this terrain comprehensively and in detail. Here I will use one chapter—*De excidio* 5.22 and its parallel in *Yosippon* 81—to illustrate the kinds of things that *Yosippon* does with *De excidio* and what this means for our understanding of *Yosippon* as a work which inserts itself into a contested milieu of late Second Temple history (when I speak of *Yosippon* in this paper, I am referring to Flusser’s ‘Recension A,’ i.e. his Hebrew text, the closest published text we have to the earliest version of the work; I do not refer to Flusser’s Recensions B and C). But this enterprise will not be purely descriptive. I have an argument. And, like *Yosippon*, in making my argument I seek to insert myself into a larger conversation.

In her 8-page introduction to *Sefer Yosippon* in the 2016 Wiley-Blackwell *Companion to Josephus*—the best introduction on the work to date—Saskia Dönitz makes this statement: “The Christian orientation of *De excidio* certainly posed a problem for the author of *Sefer Yosippon* and therefore he reworked his source.”¹⁰ I would put this another way. Rather than a problem, I suggest that *De excidio*’s Christian orientation provided *Yosippon*’s author with an **opportunity**, an opportunity not just to base his history in sources but to make a splash, to write a history that was original, unique, even controversial and edgy. *Yosippon*’s author was a Jew, writing in Hebrew and therefore apparently *for Jews*, and as such he was more or less taking Josephus back for *Jewish* cultural heritage and discourse for the first time in almost a millennium. Yet in so doing *Yosippon* infringes upon Christian territory: Josephus had been the purview of *Christian* historiography and literature up to that point. Thus,

9 Studies between *SY* and its sources have tended to concentrate, ironically, on areas other than a comparison between *SY* and its two primary sources, the Latin *AJ* and *DEH*. This must be due mostly to the fact that both of these Latin traditions are very rarely studied, and it is not easy to approach them. Early comparative studies include Reiner, “The Jewish War: Variations in the Historical Narratives in the Texts of Josephus and the *Yosippon*,” which, as its title suggests, compares *SY* to **Josephus’ Jewish War** (!). A similar endeavor, likewise usefully ambitious but methodologically problematic, is Sorscher, “A Comparison of Three Texts: The Wars, the *Hegesippus*, and the *Yosippon*,” which among other things uses William Whiston’s translation as its basis for *BJ*. While the Josephan tradition is *SY*’s largest source ‘data-bank,’ it does help to remember that “Das *Sefer Yosippon* bietet jedoch weniger eine hebräische Übersetzung des Josephus, als vielmehr eine Kompilation seiner ins Lateinische übersetzten Schriften mit Auszügen aus der Vulgata und anderen nichtjüdischen Quellen,” Dönitz, *Überlieferung und Rezeption*, 5.

10 Dönitz, “*Sefer Yosippon*,” 385. I think Dönitz would agree; what she means by “problem” is that *SY*’s author had to change Christian aspects of *DEH* to render it palatable for his own purposes.

I argue that *Yosippon* was not just an extension of, but an improvement upon and a response to, its most important source. This argument in itself is nothing new—far from it.¹¹ Yet this argument is most often painted in broad strokes, whereas here I seek to demonstrate its validity through fine-grained comparative textual analysis. This essay does not just say but shows, not in general but in detail, how it is that vis-à-vis *De excidio*, *Yosippon* may be considered as something between counter-history and alternative history.¹² I make this illustration by comparing two versions of a story told in both *Sefer Yosippon* and *De excidio*. Next I introduce that story.

1 Simon bar Giora, Scourge of Jerusalem in Josephus, *De excidio*, and *Sefer Yosippon*

In Book 4 of Josephus' *Bellum Judaicum* one reads of civil war in Judea and Rome respectively. The infamous 'Year of the Four Emperors' in Rome more or less parallels devolutions to the East as the Judean rebel John moves from his hometown of Gischala to Jerusalem, there to wreak havoc and tyrannize the populace. As Steve Mason explains in his excellent introductory essay, while John "dominates the first half of Book 4 as key 'tyrant,'"

The latter half belongs to tough-guy Simon bar Giora, whom the surviving notables welcome [into Jerusalem] as the only conceivable antidote to John's poison—inadvertently creating a more intractable problem.¹³

11 A good recent discussion of this point appears in Nisse, *Jacob's Shipwreck*, who recognizes sY's attempt to "reclaim Josephus as a Jewish historian" (13–14) and who speaks broadly of sY's use of *DEH* as a kind of response in line with my argument here (21–22), positing that "*Yosippon* ... engages Hegesippus polemically and transforms this belligerent yet elegiac Christian narrative about the figure of Josephus and the fate of Jerusalem into its own diasporic account of Jewish self-destruction and heroic sacrifice within the temporal frame of the Roman Empire."

12 Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*, defines counter-history thus: "Counterhistories form a specific genre of history written since antiquity; it is curious that they have not been identified as such in treatises on historiography sooner. Their function is polemical. Their method consists in the systematic exploitation of the adversary's most trusted sources against their grain—'die Geschichte gegen den Strich kämmer'" (36). This is a fair way to describe how *Yosippon* uses its Classical and/or Christian sources. Interestingly, Funkenstein gives *Yosippon* short shrift and dismisses it as a late, alien, and derivative contribution to Jewish historiography (15).

13 Mason, "Josephus's *Judean War*," 19.

“Intractable problem” is right and, if anything, an understatement. Said ‘tough guy’—Simon in *De excidio*, Simeon in *Sefer Yosippon*—whom Josephus says was invited into Jerusalem as its savior, became its worst enemy, slaughtering a number of fellow Jews, including a certain Matthias (Amitai in *Yosippon*), who had been delegated to invite him into Jerusalem in the first place. Josephus summarizes Simon’s reign of terror as an unjust and murderous takeover, and the tragedy of this turn of events is epitomized in the slaughter of an innocent supporter of Simon (!) along with three of his four sons.¹⁴ This short account becomes much longer in *De excidio* and, by proxy, in *Sefer Yosippon*. Ps-Hegesippus puts a long speech into Matthias’ mouth before his death—one of two speeches original to *De excidio*¹⁵—decriing Simon’s injustice and musing over a host of issues which effectively embody the Jewish plight. *Yosippon* ‘records’ the same speech. But it is *not* the same.

By tracking some key differences between this speech in *De excidio* and *Sefer Yosippon* respectively, we gain a representative glimpse into how *Yosippon* used, changed, and thereby replaced Ps-Hegesippus’ version of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Roman-Jewish War. In particular, (1) I will show how *Yosippon* infuses his version of this story with a kind of scriptural poetics corresponding to the Hebrew Bible which renders the episode, and the larger saga to which it belongs, a kind of sequel to (or moment within) the broader Jewish scriptural tradition; (2) I will show how *Yosippon* theologizes Matthias’ speech via the use of the divine name and otherwise, thereby creating a more sacred and ‘religious’ framework for the episode and recasting its Jewish actors as a covenant people beholden to their agreement with God; and (3) I will show how Matthias (arguably a proxy for the Jews) comes off looking less guilty and more righteous in *Yosippon* than in *De excidio*, an ethical shift in the narrative that signals *Yosippon*’s Jewish transvaluation of its Christian source narrative. But do not mistake this case study for an incidental, one-off occurrence in *Yosippon*. The ways in which *Yosippon* changes its source here are paradigmatic of some of the changes it makes to *De excidio*’s version of events across its narrative.

2 A Poetics of the Hebrew Bible in *Sefer Yosippon* 81

After arranging for Simon’s entry into Jerusalem, Matthias, accused of treachery, ends up the victim of Simon’s savagery. Nor is he allowed to defend himself.

14 See Josephus *BJ* 4.527–532; cf. 4.574–576, a recap, and a note in 6.114.

15 Along with *DEH* 5.2, which does have a very short precedent in *BJ* 5.19–20. See Bell, “Historiographical Analysis,” 134, and also 33, 139, 153, 219.

But where did the accusation come from? Ps-Hegesippus provides no information here: he uses passive verbs to say that Matthias was “accused of betrayal” and “suspected of conspiracy” and thus that “an accusation arose against him.”¹⁶ But this is how *Sefer Yosippon* 81 begins: “At that time *the sons of Belial* came and reported to Simeon, saying, ‘Behold, Amitai the high priest, who brought you into this city, is seeking to defect to the Roman camp.’” Not only does this create a better story—putting actors together with actions—but it frames the entire episode in the unmistakable quasi-technical jargon of the Jewish Scriptures: the phrase *בני הבליעל* describes violent, evil, sacrilegious people throughout the Hebrew Bible,¹⁷ perhaps with under- or other-worldly connotations at times.¹⁸ By using it *Yosippon* baptizes this episode *ab initio* into a distinctively biblical parlance.¹⁹

- 16 DEH 5.22.1: “[Matthias] was convicted of no crime before him but rather was accused of betrayal and suspected of conspiracy (*insimulatum prodicionis et suspectum consilii*), which, in his custom of being concerned for the common welfare and free of guile, he was believed to have suggested to a close friend. ... Thus when an accusation arose against him (*insimulatum apud se*) that he had intentionally come to an accord with and sided with the Romans, it was commanded that he be seized along with his sons.” PH basically follows Josephus here, though Thackeray’s translation thereof is misleading in implying that Simon is the subject of numerous active verbs, which in the Greek he is not: see BJ 5.30 (trans. Thackeray, LCL): “And now he had him brought up, accused him of siding with the Romans, and, without even granting him an opportunity of defence, condemned him to death” (ἀχθέντα δὲ τηνικαῦτα καὶ κατηγορούμενον τὰ τῶν Ῥωμαίων φρονεῖν κατακρίνει μὲν θανάτῳ). Simon is the subject of exactly one verb (κατακρίνει), directed at the brought forward (ἀχθέντα) and accused (κατηγορούμενον) Matthias.
- 17 The meaning of the term is, and has for some time now, been rather opaque; see Hogg, “Belial’ in the Old Testament.” The term is by no means restricted to the Jewish Bible, but appears in later literature like the Book of Jubilees and the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, often “as a name of Satan.” In the Hebrew Bible, however, Hogg suggested that the term should “in no case ... be treated as a proper name or merely transliterated” inasmuch as its “various interpretations” (as laid out in BDB) are “all based on its etymological meaning of ‘worthlessness’” (58). See further the standard study of Thomas, “*b^ellyaa’al* in the Old Testament.” Perhaps most helpful is the conclusion of Emerton, “Sheol and the Sons of Belial,” 100: “*b^ellyaa’al* does not mean ‘hell.’ While the view that it is a word for Sheol is not impossible, it is more probable that it means ‘destructiveness’ or the like.”
- 18 Otero, “Some Philological Notes on the Sons of Belial and the Septuagint.”
- 19 The phrase *בני הבליעל* is common in *Yosippon*, appearing also in 16, 65 (×2), 69 (no less than 10 ten times, remarkably, in reference to John of Gischala’s followers), 71; the basically congruent phrase *איש (ה)בליעל* (pl. *אנשי [ה]בליעל*) is also frequent: see *Yosippon* 4, 11, 15 (×3), 24, 30, 31, 41 (*איש רע ובליעל*), 42, 60, 65, 67, 69 (×7—interestingly, the brigands in this passage are at first referred to as *בני הבליעל* [ten times], and only thereafter as *אנשי הבליעל*; that is, there is no overlap in the terminology in this passage, by far the densest collection of this phrasing in all of *Yosippon*), 71. Cf. Deut 13:13, the first appearance of *בליעל* in the Hebrew Bible, which speaks of both “men” and “sons,” though only the latter is modified: “Some men, sons of Belial, came forth” (*יצאו אנשים בני-בליעל*). The concurrence of *איש/אנשים*, *בני*, and *בליעל* in the Hebrew Bible is actually relatively common:

And the theme continues. Again near the beginning of the chapter one reads of Matthias' pathetic plea to be put to death before witnessing the deaths of his sons. Simon does not acquiesce. *De excidio* puts this rejection in characteristically stylized Latin: "But he [Matthias] did not obtain what piety itself would have demanded even if he had not asked."²⁰ *Sefer Yosippon*, in turn, renders this in biblicalized Hebrew: "But Simeon's heart was hardened and he did not listen to his [Amitai's] plea."²¹ Even the casual reader of the Bible may recall the 'hardening of the heart' (יחזק לב, and sometimes את־לב) as the quintessential faux pas of Pharaoh in the Exodus narrative: "Pharaoh hardened his heart" or "the heart of Pharaoh was hardened" against God's command through Moses, as one reads throughout the early chapters of the Book of Exodus. In fact, several passages in Exodus, for example 7:22 and 8:19,²² describe Pharaoh's actions in language strikingly similar to what one finds describing Simeon here in *Yosippon*. By its language, *Yosippon* is transforming this episode into a Bible story.

Many, many linguistic biblicalisms of this kind appear in *Sefer Yosippon* 81.²³ To mention just a few more notable examples, a few lines later Amitai bemoans

Judg 19:22; 20:13; 2 Sam 20:1; 1 Kgs 21:10; 21:13; 2 Chr 13:7 (cf. Prov 6:12; 16:27) That *Yosippon's* author understands "Belial" (בליעל) as a pure adjective rather than a substantive is hinted at by the non-use of the construct ה- in many instances of the construction איש(ה)בליעל and is confirmed by his parallel use of בליעל and רע ("evil") in referring to "an evil and violent man" (איש רע ובליעל) in 41 (language from 1 Sam 30:22). Cf. the reference to "evil counselors and violent men" (יועצי הרשע ואנשי בליעל) in 53. "Evil people" (רעים) and אנשי בליעל are also paralleled in 60. Interestingly, John of Gischala, described as איש הבליעל, stands alongside Simon bar Giora, described as אִישׁ דְּמִים וְבוֹן בְּלִיעֵל in 71 (language peculiar to 2 Sam 16:7). Simeon alone is identified in the singular as בן בליעל in all of *Yosippon*. Our passage, *Yosippon* 81, is the last in the work to use the term בליעל.

20 DEH 5.22.1: *Non impetravit quod ipsa pietas exigebat, etiamsi non rogaret.*

21 ויחזק לב שמעון ולא הקשיב תחינתו. For the form הקשיב cf. Ps 66:19; Jer 23:18.

22 Exod 7:22 (NASB): "But the magicians of Egypt did the same with their secret arts; and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them (ויחזק לב־פרעה ולא־שמע), as the LORD had said." Exod 8:19: "Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of God.' But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them (ויחזק לב־פרעה ולא־שמע אלהם), as the LORD has said."

23 Notable occurrences of biblical language also include a phrase in Amitai's prayer about Simeon that the LORD would "Let him fall into the hands of those seeking his life;" the phrase "those seeking his life" (מבקשי נפשו) picks up the particular argot of the Psalms (35:4; 38:12; 40:14; 63:9; 70:2) and Jeremiah (19:7; 21:7; 22:5; 34:20–21; 44:30; 46:26; [49:37]). See also 1 Sam 25:29. This passage also draws on some rare terminology of the Hebrew Bible: when Amitai discusses how the king of Babylon caused Zedekiah to continue living after the death of his sons, he states that he did so "that he might weep while enraged in his heart, for he was enraged on account of his sons." The phrase "enraged in his heart" (חום לבבו) can also be rendered "was hot in his heart," and repeats a rare construction

his letting Simeon into Jerusalem, complaining that whereas he was hoped to be a help, he became “a stumbling block and snare.”²⁴ This line, nowhere in *De excidio*, picks up the language of Isa 8:14, language famous not only from Jewish but also from Christian Scripture (Rom 9:33 and 1 Pet 2:8).²⁵ Amitai then proclaims himself worthy of being “stoned with stones,” a reference to a biblical, communally-based form of capital punishment also unmentioned by Ps-Hegesippus.²⁶ Finally, contemplating his fate, at one point Amitai tells Simeon that “by your hand I descend in grief to Sheol,”²⁷ שְׂאוֹל being a famously mysterious concept of the afterlife particular to the Hebrew Bible;²⁸ Matthias’ particular phrasing comes from a statement of the patriarch Jacob in Gen 42:38.²⁹

found in Deut 19:6. Also, when Amitai says that by being slain with the same sword as his sons their blood will mingle, which will be “a medication and a soothing balm” (לְתְרוּפָה וּלְמַרְחַם מְנוּחָה) to him, he uses a term from Ezek 47:12, תְּרוּפָה, which is a *hapax legomenon* in the Hebrew Bible, alongside the much more common “balm” or “consolation” (מְנוּחָה), though in this case with the rare and etymologically unclear מַרְחָם (“to spread [balm], to apply [cream], to oil”); Gesenius, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch*, 738–739 (and 737).

- 24 Amitai, speaking about Simeon, in SY 81: “For I said, ‘perhaps he will be of assistance to this city,’ but he became a stumbling block and a snare (לְמַכְשׁוֹל וּלְמוֹקֵשׁ) to us and to this entire city.” Compare this to Isa 8:14 (adapted from NASB), where the prophet is speaking of the LORD: “Then He shall become a sanctuary; / But to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock for stumbling (וּלְצוּר מַכְשׁוֹל), / And a trap and a snare (לְמוֹקֵשׁ) for the inhabitants of Jerusalem.”
- 25 Rom 9:33 (NASB): “Just as it is written, ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense (λίθον προσκόμματος και πέτραν σκανδάλου / *lapidem offensionis et petram scandali*), and he who believes in him will not be disappointed.” Cf. 1 Pet 2:7–8 (NASB): “This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, ‘The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner stone,’ and ‘a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense’ (λίθος προσκόμματος και πέτρα σκανδάλου / *lapis offensionis et petra scandali*); for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this they were also appointed.”
- 26 משפּט יהיה לי להסקל באבנים. See, e.g., Deut 13:11; 17:5; 22:24; see Gesenius, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch*, 901.
- 27 “And now, behold, the vengeance of the LORD has fallen upon my gray hair, for by your hand I descend into the gloom of Sheol (ועתה הנה נקמת יי תחול על שיבתי כי מידך ארדה) (ביגון שאולה).”
- 28 See Bar, “Grave Matters.”
- 29 Also with a form of the verb ירד (“descend”) and in reference to “my gray hair (or old age)” (שיבתי), when Jacob is addressing his remaining sons about the potential loss of Benjamin. Gen 42:38 (NASB): “But Jacob said, ‘my son shall not go down with you; for your brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should befall him on the journey you are taking, then you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow’ (והורדתם את שיבתי ביגון) (שאולה).

All in all, the language of *Yosippon's* iteration of this episode is biblical at its baseline. This is an important point for my argument, to which I will return in my conclusion.

3 Theologization: Yahweh, Temple, and Covenant in *Sefer Yosippon* 81

By my count, God (*Deus*) is mentioned explicitly exactly four times in *De excidio* 5.22.1: thrice in the genitive (twice modifying *populus*—the “people of God”—once *altaria*), and once in the vocative, as Matthias prays: “o Highest God” (*Summe deus*). Four mentions. In addition, *dominus* is used once to refer to God.³⁰ In *De excidio*, this is not a divinity-saturated passage. Conversely, God is named no fewer than twenty-one times in *Sefer Yosippon* 81,³¹ seventeen of which reference the author’s pietized version of the divine name, the double-yod (י״).³²

At a basic semantic and lexical level, God is far more present in *Yosippon's* version of this story.

But this is not the full story. A closer look at how the mention of God functions in *Sefer Yosippon* shows that this divinification actually changes the passage. God, or Yahweh, rarely appears as an actor here. Most frequently, the moniker י״ appears as a modifier specifying some aspect of Jerusalem’s Temple and/or religious rites/status as “of the LORD.” Thus we find reference to the י״ היכל (the “Temple of the LORD”) four times, and the י״ חג (“holy day of the LORD”), י״ כהני (“priests of the LORD”), and י״ עם (“people of the LORD”) twice

TABLE 1 Divine mentions in *Sefer Yosippon* 81 and *De excidio* 5.22.1

	<i>Sefer Yosippon</i> 81	<i>De excidio</i> 5.22.1
God (אלהים / <i>Deus</i>)	4	4
Lord (אדוני / <i>Dominus</i>)	0	1
Yahweh (י״ / -)	17	0
Total divine mentions	21	5

30 In the genitive, modifying *sacerdotes*: “the priests of the Lord.”

31 God is mentioned as אלהים thrice, twice in the construct, and once as the shorter אל.

32 To be fair, *DEH* would generally use the Latin *Dominus* as the correlate to the Hebrew יהוה or י״, but I add אדוני to the list here to convey all the terms that *SY's* author could have used. Note that the divine name fluctuates between manuscripts throughout the *SY* text tradition. Thanks to Saskia Dönitz for reminding me of this.

each. Likewise, of course, Jerusalem is “the city of the LORD” (עיר יי). Divinity appears as personality only a few times in this passage: namely at its end, when Amitai “cries out to the LORD” (ויצעק אמיחיי אל יי) and addresses him as “o LORD my God, exalted and awesome” (יי אלהי הנשגב והנורא) and, in a similar vein, “o LORD my God, the Exalted One who dwells on high” (יי אלהי הנשגב שוכן מרום) (These are biblical forms of address, and liturgical formulae, by the way).³³ It is not, therefore, that God is overtly active across this passage, but rather that the loaded language of ‘Godness,’ if you will, landscapes the episode’s narrative terrain: city, Temple, people, and time are all linked explicitly to the Jewish God, a linguistic and conceptual novelty within *Yosippon* which finds no correlate in *De excidio*, its source. Compared to *De excidio* 5.22.1, the language of divinity in *Yosippon* 81 restructures and reframes the entire narrative episode.

The most important upshot of this semantic divinization has to do with how it frames the Jews mentioned in the narrative, past and present. When comparing his own plight to that of the Maccabean mother and her seven sons, famous from 2 Maccabees 7 and 4 Maccabees (see Jan Willem van Henten’s

33 The first combines the *niphal* of שגב (נשגב = “to be exalted”) known from Ps 148:13 and Isa 12:4 and 33:5 with the *niphal* of ירא (נורא = “to be fearful, dreadful”), familiar from Gen 28:17 onwards as a common term denoting God’s dreadfulness. The latter address is a partial quote from Isa 33:5: “The LORD is exalted, for he dwells on high; he has filled Zion with justice and righteousness” (ונשגב יהוה כי שכן מרום מלא ציון משפט וצדקה). Not incidentally, Amitai is here asking God to “judge (שפוט) and rebuke.” One should note that, in general, a substantial percentage of *SY*’s language simply happens to be that of the Hebrew Bible, and thus tracing ‘biblical’ language in *SY* can open itself to the charge of pedantry. (Nb—Peter Lehnhardt should be consulted in all studies of *SY*’s language.) Still, it is imperative for readers of *SY* to pay attention to the text’s biblical language and thematic allusions, as these can tell us a great deal about how a particular passage was reworked, or designed to be read, by its author. Is it significant, for example, that *SY* speaks of the “violence (חמס) of Simeon” in explaining his slaughtering of a number of high priests along with Amitai toward the end of our passage? The term חמס, after all, has a biblical ring of ‘original violence’ to it, it being a major problem precipitating the flood in Gen 6, where “the earth was filled with violence” (ותמלא הארץ חמס; 6:11) and thus God says the same thing to Noah in explaining his plan to destroy the world by flood: “The end of all flesh has come before me, for the earth is filled with violence through them” (כי־מלאה הארץ חמס) (מפניהם; 6:13). Is it over-interpretation to read the primordial connotations of this term in the Hebrew Bible as informing Simeon’s description in *SY* 81, perhaps as the kind of quintessentially violent individual whose actions resonate with actions which literally led to the world’s destruction in the ancient past according to scriptural tradition? Perhaps. At the very least, I think we must pay close attention to the scriptural resonances in *SY*’s language, and in this I follow the lead of Steven Bowman, whose research initially inspired me to this inclination. See, e.g., Bowman, “Jewish Responses to Byzantine Polemics,” 107–108; Bowman, “Mock Aqedah or Mashiah?” Bowman, “Sefer Yosippon: History and Midrash;” and most recently see Bowman, “*Sefer Yosippon*: Reevaluations,” 60–64.

chapter in the present volume), Amitai notes how these paradigmatic Jewish martyrs “died for the LORD and for his covenant” (ימותו על יי ועל בריתו).³⁴ On the contrary, speaking of himself, Amitai bemoans that “the vengeance of the LORD has fallen upon my gray head” (נקמת יי תחול על שיבתי).³⁵ In this way the narrative intimates to the reader that the Maccabean mother and Amitai, while both slain by wicked overlords alongside and after their sons, are not cut from the same cloth. The Maccabees were killed as martyrs, Amitai murdered for his mistake. The former died *for* the LORD, Amitai implicitly dies *because of* the LORD. As I have shown elsewhere, *De excidio* makes this juxtaposition painfully clear, showing over and over again in 5.22 that while the Maccabean mother and her sons were martyrs—this is the only place in all of *De excidio* where the term *martyres* appears—Matthias is simply another first-century Jew reaping what he has sown.³⁶ However, *Sefer Yosippon* complicates this binary, and these two uses of the divine name help illustrate precisely how.

By describing both the deaths of the Maccabean martyrs and that of Amitai in terms of relationship to Yahweh—something *De excidio* does not do—*Sefer Yosippon* implicitly classes all these victims of murder within the same demographic continuum. In *Yosippon* 81, the slain are framed in relation to the LORD, and thus the entire scene takes on the hues of theodicy. This coloring shines forth all the more brightly when compared to *De excidio*'s account, where it is the Roman argot of patriotism and nationalism that shades the scene, Matthias over and over again lamenting the offense he had done *to his country* (*patria*), and to his fellow citizens (*ciuibus*), by way of betrayal (*proditio*). It is as

34 Several manuscripts contain the variant “and they died for the LORD and for his Torah” (תורתו)—namely ק,ד,י. Not coincidentally, perhaps, this phrasing—death “for the LORD and for his Torah” (על יי ועל תורתו)—is used to describe these same people twice toward the beginning of *SY* 15 (טו)—see van Henten’s essay in this volume (chapter 10). (*SY* 15 also twice mentions the death of these martyrs as simply “for the LORD” [על יי].) Such martyrological formulae are fundamental for *SY*’s basic vision of historical Jewish identity, demonstrated nowhere more clearly than near the very end of the work (that is, what Flusser calls “Recension A”) where the Jewish rebel holdouts atop Mount Masada—who die not in mass suicide but in battle against the Romans in *SY* (89)!—are described thus in their final line: “And they died for the LORD and for his sanctuary” (ועל יי ועל ימותו על יי ועל ימותו). This is effectively the final line of the narrative. See here Grundmann, “Ist nicht an einem solchen Tag der Tod besser als das Leben?,” who nevertheless does not deal with *SY*’s source for the Masada passage, namely *DEH* 5.53.

35 The phrase “vengeance of the LORD” (נקמת יהוה) is a construction from the Book of Jeremiah, particularly Chapters 50 and 51 (50:15, 28; 51:11)—several lexical idiosyncrasies of this chapter of *SY* resonate with Jeremiah’s language—but see also Num 31:3. The phrase יי ועל נקמת appears only here in all of *SY*, though נקמה (“vengeance”) is itself not a rare word therein.

36 Bay, *Biblical Heroes and Classical Culture*, 157–194.

though this scene has been filtered through two different voices in *De excidio* and *Yosippon* respectively, the former the voice of Roman political discourse and the latter the voice of the Jewish Bible and its covenantal vernacular. This embodies a defining difference between *Yosippon* and its major source, here crystallized in a key scene of the narrative. Inasmuch as this scene has to do with the presentation of Matthias'/Amitai's guilt and fate, it leads us to our last point.

4 From Matthias to Amitai: Redeeming *De excidio* 5.22 in *Sefer Yosippon* 81

One of the most obvious conclusions to which the reader of *De excidio* 5.22 must inexorably come is that Matthias, for all his lamenting, is in some sense a guilty party. Over and over again Ps-Hegesippus has Matthias confess his crime and proclaim himself deserving of punishment.³⁷ Comparing this motif to Amitai's self-presentation in *Sefer Yosippon* is tricky. At first glance, Amitai's speech in *Yosippon* appears to present the same story: he begins by saying that he should be considered a murderer just like Simeon (נחשבתי גם אני לרוצח) because he had brought the tyrant into the city, and that his fate and that of his sons had come from his very own hand (מידִי).³⁸ As in *De excidio*, so

37 Consider the following statements that pepper Matthias' speech in *DEH* 5.22.1: "I deserve this, I confess, and I do not exonerate myself of guilt (*Merui, fateor, nec culpam excuso*) ... We who sought a defender are culpable before our country (*rei sumus patriae*) ... Rightly do we suffer the punishment for imprudence (*recte quidem soluimus poenam imprudentiae*) ... there is nothing I could have done worse (*nihil grauius facere potui*) than what I have done in placing you upon our necks ... in this I was a traitor to my homeland (*in eo patriae reus fuerim*) ... I owe a death sentence to the people (*debuerim ego ciuibus mortem*) ... I owe the punishment of betrayal to the country (*debuerim patriae poenam proditionis*) ... I multiply my own crimes (*coaceruo crimina mea*): I welcomed gangs into our native city, I armed your fury, I prepared this widespread destruction because of some folly of old age. I recognize the imprudence of [this] mindless stage of life ... We must ameliorate our shame with confession, since we are not able to dismiss our sin by denying it (*Confessione leuemus pudorem, quoniam negando peccatum exuere non possumus*) ... Therefore I pay to you, o country, the punishments that I owe (*Pendo igitur tibi, patria, debitas poenas*) ... I deserve it, I confess (*Merui, fateor*), I who was unable to see that John was deceptive and who elected for you to be armed. O, rash old age!"

38 Consider the following statements that Amitai (= Matthias) makes in his speech in *SY* 81: "My sons, I myself brought this murderer into this city, for which reason I am to be considered a murderer just like him (נחשבתי גם אני לרוצח כמוהו). ... For this has come to me and to you from mine own hand (מידִי). ... For I have sinned against God and against His people and against the holy city (אנכי חטאתי לאלהים ולעמו ולעיר הקודש) ... But all of this is accounted to me, as if I had done it (והכל נחשב לי כמו אני עשיתי), on account of

here: Amitai is culpable. But he is not culpable in the same way. A closer comparison between *De excidio* 5.22 and *Yosippon* 81 reveals that the latter's Amitai represents something of a redemption of the former's Matthias.

In *Sefer Yosippon* 81, from the moment Amitai begins speaking until he makes his final utterance (just before he dies) comprises by my count 1,284 Hebrew words. The same portion of text in *De excidio* contains 1,427 Latin terms.³⁹ Even allowing for variance in word-count attendant to the respective grammatical and syntactical necessities of Hebrew and Latin,⁴⁰ *De excidio*'s version of Matthias' speech is a bit longer. Yet it is not the absolute size of each discourse that matters here, but their relative arrangements. In *Yosippon* 81, Amitai makes a critical statement very early on in his speech. He quickly follows up the admission of his culpability with the statement: "But indeed, I did not bring him into this city from my own love for him, but rather *all the priests and the people sent me to bring him hither*."⁴¹ This statement begins with the sixty-sixth word of out Amitai's mouth, less than six percent (5.6%) of the way through the passage containing his speech. In *Yosippon*, in other words, Amitai's guilt is mitigated right away with the supplemental information that he did not bring Simeon into the city on his own volition, but at the behest of "all the priests and the people" (כל הכהנים והעם). Amitai may have made a mistake, but he was not alone.

Things are a little different in *De excidio* 5.22. There, Matthias does not make this claim at the beginning of his speech. He does briefly pass from the first-person singular to the first-person plural, perhaps implicitly implicating others along with him for bringing Simon into Jerusalem.⁴² At the

the fact that I brought you into this city. ... And now, behold, the vengeance of the LORD has fallen upon my gray head (יִי תַחֲוֹל עַל שֵׁיבְתִי) ..."

39 Counting the full sentences that, in each work, introduce Matthias'/Amitai's first and final words respectively.

40 This is complicated by Latin's lack of a definite article, Hebrew's aggressive prefixing and suffixing, and a great many other obvious but important differences between the languages.

41 וגם אני לא הביאותיו אל העיר הזאת מאהבתי אותו כי כל הכהנים והעם שלחוני להביאו הנה.

42 In what can be counted as the first paragraph or section of his speech, Simon moves from "I" to "we/us" and back again to "I." This section runs: "*I have summoned (arcessiui) one who is worse. Simon was sought for help and, having been turned to the killing of his own country, he has brought diligent advisors up on charges. We who sought a defender are culpable before our country (Rei sumus patriae qui defensorem quaesiuiimus). Rightly do we suffer (soluimus) the punishment for imprudence, though not for perfidy. Simon himself absolves us by killing us, he who claims that it was not granted him by me but was sought by the will of the country that he should be an aid against the savagery of John as soon as he arrived and led in the Idumeans. We believed (Putabamus) that in putting the two of them together the common people would be free. Who would believe that I did not*

same time, *Simon* implies that it was not Matthias alone who invited him into Jerusalem—rather, Simon “claims that he was sought by the will of the country” (*qui pronuntiat non sibi a me donatam sed patriae contuitu petitem*). But this is not the same as the straightforward statement made by Amitai in *Yosippon*. In *De excidio*, this statement does appear—but much later. There, right before discussing the Maccabean martyrs, Matthias addresses his sons as they prepare to enter into the afterlife:

Nevertheless, because you are innocent, for this reason better lodging-places will be selected for you than if I *myself*, who summoned *Simon*, should precede you. That embassy weighs me down, even though *it was commanded by the citizens, accepted by a striving populace*. Go on ahead, therefore, sons, treading that celestial path with a purer footprint.⁴³

For our purposes, what is important is that in *De excidio* 5.22 this statement comes 689 words into the speech—nearly halfway through (48.3% of the way, to be specific). Let us put this in perspective: in both *De excidio* 5.22 and *Yosippon* 81, Matthias/Amitai makes a long speech just before the rebel leader Sim(e)on unjustly executes him and his sons. In *Yosippon*'s version, one of the first things Amitai says is that he was sent by the priests and the people to bring Simeon into Jerusalem; his was not a lone act. In *De excidio*'s version, this information—the only information that helps mitigate Matthias' self-proclaimed guilt—is not forthcoming until the speech is half over. What are we to make of this difference?

Here is my argument: this difference points to a discrepancy in the ways in which *Sefer Yosippon* and *De excidio* evaluate and present Amitai/Matthias on the spectrum from guilt to innocence. That is, *Yosippon* redeems to some extent the Matthias constructed in *De excidio*. *Yosippon*'s Amitai is by no means completely innocent: by allowing Simeon into Jerusalem, he has effectively damned the local populace, God's people, along with God's city and Temple. However, this Amitai is not as thoroughly and intensively culpable as Ps-Hegesippus' Matthias. One could even make the argument that, implicitly, he is not all that guilty on *Yosippon*'s telling at all: if not only the people, but

bring (*non ... me ... detulisse*) this to you out of fondness but reckoning it to be the more tolerable of evils, lest you should kill? But why should *I speak* (*loquor*) as if *I am making excuses* (*excusem*) for a crime?"

43 *Tamen quod innocii estis, eo meliora vobis hospitia deferentur, quam si ipse accersitor Simonis praeuenirem. Grauat me illa legatio licet a ciuibus mandata, petente populo suscepta. Praecedite ergo, filii, mundiore supernum iter carpentes uestigio.*

the people *and the priests* bid you do something on behalf of the whole, what else are you going to do?

In case this argument seems tenuous at this point—we are after all talking about long, complicated speeches in two languages, which are not identical—let me introduce some supporting evidence. One of the more interesting features of Amitai's/Matthias' speech is his mention of the Maccabean martyrs ("Hasmoneans" in *Yosippon*).⁴⁴ When Matthias introduces these ancestral *exempla* in *De excidio*, this is what he says:

So also the Maccabees went before their mother, but they [went] to reward, we to punishment.

Et Macchabaei matrem praeuenerunt, sed illi ad praemium, nos ad supplicium.

According to Ps-Hegesippus, the outlook for Matthias and his sons is bleak—they can expect a very different experience in the hereafter from what the Maccabees found.⁴⁵ However one wants to read *supplicium* as a description of their post-mortem lot, the prognosis is not good. In *Yosippon*, however, this juxtaposition is notably softened. There we read:

For it was done like this long ago, in the days of the Hasmoneans—the woman who sent seven sons before her. And they went and prepared a resting place for themselves and for their mother. ... They were slain by the cruelties of Antiochus, but we by the cruelties of Simeon. And would that we also could be with them in one resting place! But if we should not be able to come into their resting place, might we yet be their neighbors. For they died in their righteousness, but we die in our naivete.

כי נעשתה כזאת מלפנים בימי החשמונים האשה אשר שלחה שבעה בנים לפני. וילכו ויכינו מלון להם ולאמם.... המה נהרגו באכזריות אנטיוכוס ואנחנו באכזריות שמעון. ומי יתן והיינו גם אנחנו עמהם במלון אחד! ואם לא נוכל לבוא אל מלונם נהיה להם לשכנים. כי המה מתו בצדקתם ואנחנו נמות בתומנו.

44 On the Maccabean tradition, including the Maccabean martyrs, in *Yosippon* see Dönitz, "Sefer Yosippon' and the Greek Bible," and now also Bay, "Reinventing the Hammer."

45 Rightly does Somenzi, *Egesippo—Ambrogio*, 172 note that "il sommo sacerdote Mattia, conxannato a morte con i suoi figli da Simeone, introducendo nel suo discorso l'exemplum del martirio dei Sette Maccabei, esprime la consapevolezza di una profonda e sostanziale distanza da esso, pur nella somiglianza di certe condizioni esteriori."

In *Yosippon*'s comparison, Amitai and sons come off looking not so bad. In fact, one can read their portrayal here as downright positive. Just like the Hasmoneans were killed by the cruelty of a tyrant, so also are Amitai and his sons to be. Moreover, the juxtaposition between the Hasmoneans having died בצדקתם ("in their righteousness") and Amitai and sons dying בתומנו (which I have translated here "in our naivete") depicts the latter in better light than *De excidio* on even the most ungenerous reading. The Hebrew noun תם can mean "naivete, simplicity, innocence," but even more often in the Jewish Scriptures it refers to "completeness, fullness" or even "integrity." When Prov 19:1 states "Better is the poor man who walks in his integrity than he that is perverse in speech and is a fool," the term for "integrity" is תם (in the same construct we find in *Yosippon*: בתמו). This is not to say that *Yosippon* is having Amitai praise himself here, but it is to say that, compared to the Hasmoneans, *Yosippon*'s Amitai seems to be not nearly as condemnable as the Matthias of *De excidio* appears.

One could add further examples, but suffice it to say that in *Yosippon* 81 the condemnation and blame which Amitai is made to heap upon himself is considerably ameliorated from what we find in *De excidio* 5.22. What does this mean?

It is well known that Josephus walks a line in the *Bellum Judaicum* between condemning and blaming the various Jewish rebel groups and leaders for Judea's troubles and Jerusalem's destruction and depicting a noble, ancient, fundamentally peaceable Jewish people easily amenable to life under Roman *imperium*.⁴⁶ Such a narrative set-up made it all too easy for Ps-Hegesippus, the most influential paraphraser of Josephus, to nudge condemnation of Jewish *rebels* into a more sweeping condemnation of a rebellious Jewish *people*, damned not only for fomenting revolt against Rome but, even more so, for rejecting and killing God's would-be salvation for them, Jesus Christ.⁴⁷ *Sefer Yosippon*, however, takes more than a step back from this anti-Jewish bent. He fundamentally rewrites *De excidio*'s version of things to construct anew the nobility and consequent salvageability of the Jewish people writ large, therein returning to Josephus' initial impulse to condemn Jewish rebels for Jerusalem's and the Temple's fall while absolving the Jewish collective. Inasmuch as Matthias-turned-Amitai stands in for the non-rebel Jews in *De excidio* 5.22 and *Sefer Yosippon* 81, to that extent his portrayal illustrates this ideological difference between Ps-Hegesippus and the author of *Yosippon*. In *De excidio*, more

46 Discussed, e.g., throughout Klawans, *Josephus and the Theologies of Ancient Judaism*.

47 This is widely recognized, but see now Bay, "Writing the Jews out of History."

so than in Josephus' *Bellum Judaicum*, the Jews are guilty, they deserve what they get; in *Yosippon*, this notion is noticeably mollified.

5 Conclusion

The three points I have made here concerning *Sefer Yosippon* 81 vis-à-vis *De excidio* 5.22 point to a comprehensible, overarching conceptual and rhetorical proclivity that characterizes *Yosippon's* use and rescripting of *De excidio's* narrative in general. There are a number of ways to frame this penchant. In conclusion, allow me to articulate two.

One way of reading *Sefer Yosippon's* reworking of *De excidio* (via the case-study of 81 versus 5.22 or otherwise) is as a transformation comprised of *underwriting* Hellenistic Judaism and *overwriting* the Classical-Christian Latinate tradition. By 'underwriting' I mean validating and affirming or endorsing, by 'overwriting' I mean rejecting and replacing. The Hellenistic-Jewish author Josephus presented a narrative of the later Second Temple period wherein the Jews were generally among the good guys, and the race possessed an innate virtue which the rebel leaders and fomenters of rebellion betrayed.⁴⁸ In this Josephus agrees with the Maccabean tradition. *Yosippon* 'underwrites' this tradition by restoring to his narrative a clearer distinction between the 'bad' rebel leaders and the fundamentally 'good' Jews-in-general—in *Yosippon* 81, Amitai's less-intensive self-blame and clearer (and quicker) semi-exoneration compared to *De excidio* 5.22 bears this out. So does the fact that the Jews are identified there as "the people of the LORD." That *De excidio* 5.22 is *Yosippon's* major, probably only source at this point in the narrative speaks to an 'overwriting' of the Romano-Christian take on the events of 70 CE. Matthias, the Jews, are not as culpable as that tradition made him/them out to be.

Another way of casting *Yosippon's* rewriting of *De excidio* in these chapters is as something between counter-history and alternative history. By "counter-history" I mean historiography that flies in the face of its source by directly contradicting important points therein. *Yosippon's* most stark move in this vein is in his rewriting of the Masada narrative in Book 89, but even *Yosippon* 81 betrays hints of counter-narrative upon close examination: were the Jews who died in 70 CE Jerusalem part of "the people of the LORD," as per *Yosippon*, or were they already explicitly *not* that people, as Ps-Hegesippus

48 But even they communicated at times the noble Jewish fear of death in their reckless abandon in battle and refusal to submit to what was perceived as illegitimate authority.

makes clear at several junctures in his narrative?⁴⁹ Perhaps a better way to view *Yosippon* (81) vis-à-vis *De excidio* (5.22), though, is as alternative history, a different version of the same events that communicates different things, implicitly and explicitly. It is responsive, as opposed to reactionary. Even where *Yosippon's* rewriting of *De excidio* seems slight and subtle, it is no less radical. Consider what we have just examined. First, we noted that *Yosippon* transforms the Latin vernacular of Ps-Hegesippus' Roman-Christian narrative into the unmistakable parlance of biblical Hebrew. This affects not only word choice but involves a selection of clauses, phrases, and allusions that restructure the passage such that it self-identifies as part of a Bible story, as it were: Jewish law, the Jewish covenant, and Jewish history combine to transform the episode into a kind of continuation of the Jews' sacred history. Second, and along the same lines, we marked that *Yosippon* imbues this chapter with overt God language, only a fraction of which is represented in its Latin source. By way of frequent reference to Yahweh, and a few times to "God" (אלהים), *Yosippon* resituates the ontology of the imagined scenario in first-century Jerusalem: unlike in *De excidio*, in *Yosippon* the scene is one in which God is in charge, in which setting, storyline, and characters all relate to this God, in which the dominant metaphor is therefore not patriotism and civil strife as it is in *De excidio*, but rather theodicy. God is unmistakably present in *Yosippon* 81 in a way that is not even close to true for *De excidio* 5.22.

Third, we saw that Amitai is simply a less culpable character in *Yosippon* than in *De excidio*. If Matthias is damned in *De excidio* as a kind of stand-in for the Jews-in-general, then *Yosippon* lifts and shifts this blame, even as he emphasizes the Jews' status as "the people of the LORD." Note that in none of this does *Yosippon* effect some extreme erasure of *De excidio* in which the Hebrew narrative becomes unrecognizable next to its Latin inspiration. Reading *Yosippon* 81 with *De excidio* 5.22 makes it obvious that the latter constitutes the source for the former, and it is fair to say that in one sense both texts relate the same basic story. But in another sense, these chapters represent very different histories.

Yosippon's treatment of Amitai's death points to larger realities concerning the Hebrew *Sefer Yosippon* and its relationship to its Latin Christian sources, particularly *De excidio Hierosolymitano*. These are realities that scholarship has yet to codify and appreciate fully. Here I have tried to show in one case study exactly what this relationship looks like—i.e. how *Yosippon* adapts, changes, even contradicts *De excidio*—and how this relationship might be understood in broader relief. At the very least we may say that *Yosippon's* use of *De excidio* is not disinterested. If the author of *Yosippon* was, as I have suggested, interested

49 See *De excidio* Prologue; 2.12; 5.2; 5.31–32; *et alibi*; Bay, "Writing the Jews out of History."

in, if not overtly contradicting, at least replacing *De excidio* as ‘the’ history of the later Second Temple period and the war of the Jews against Rome, then we might expect *Yosippon* to depart in telling ways from its source(s).⁵⁰ And this is precisely what we find in places like *Yosippon* 81. In recreating Second Temple history for a medieval Jewish readership, *Yosippon* wrests narrative and narrative authority from his Latin Christian forebear and, as with the story of Amitai so with his history on the whole, proffers a new version of how and why things happened between Rome and Judea in the later first-century CE. In killing Matthias (Amitai), the author of *Yosippon* resurrects a vision of Jewish history in the critical year of 70 CE that rescripts the Jews as less and/or differently culpable and more closely associated with God. In so doing, *Yosippon* reinvents a historiographically-grounded Jewish identity and respectability for his (undoubtedly) Jewish medieval readership, providing, perhaps, an apologetic tool for self-understanding and projection within the Christian-majority culture of the 10th-century (?) Southern Italy in which *Yosippon* was initially penned.

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⁵⁰ It also might be expected that, with that intention, *SY*’s author might have chosen *DEH* as a source on purpose as a way of rewriting history rather than writing history anew, as it were.

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