

The Christian Reception of *Sefer Yosippon* in Western Europe

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Christian reception of *Yosippon* in the Middle Ages and Renaissance rested on three assumptions: that it was authored by Josephus, that it could serve to confirm the historicity of Christianity, and that it could be used as a tool in religious polemics against the Jews. One of the reasons medieval and Renaissance scholars sought out *Yosippon* was their interest in finding an interpolation that mentions Jesus and his followers, a Hebrew version of the so-called *Testimonium Flavianum*, a passage found in the eighteenth book of Josephus' *Antiquitates Judaicae* that refers to Jesus as "messiah," telling of his crucifixion and resurrection. Until its authenticity was questioned by modern scholars, this passage was considered proof of the truth of the Gospel and the historical existence of Jesus. It is extensively quoted by Christian authors from Late Antiquity up to modern times.¹ Its presence in a Hebrew source deemed authentic by the Jews had particular value since it strengthened the Christian narrative. *Yosippon's* account of the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Second Temple was also of primary importance as a testimony given by an eye witness and thus proof that Christianity had superseded Judaism, demonstrating how divine punishment had been meted out to the Jews for rejecting Jesus. This interpretation of the events appears in Pseudo-Hegesippus' *De excidio Hierosolymitano* and was later adopted by medieval authors, some aware of this source and some not.²

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- 1 Josephus, *AJ* 18.63–66. On the *Testimonium Flavianum*: Feldman, "On the Authenticity of the *Testimonium Flavianum*," 18. For a comprehensive study, see Whealey, *Josephus on Jesus*; Whealey, "The *Testimonium Flavianum*." Other relevant studies include Carleton Paget, "Some Observations on Josephus and Christianity" (see p. 565 on the inclusion of the *Testimonium* in all surviving manuscripts of *AJ*).
 - 2 On Josephus in patristic literature, see Hata, "The Use and Misuse of Josephus;" Inowlocki, "Josephus and Patristic Literature;" for Christian views on the destruction of the Second Temple, see *DEH*; Ps-Heg discusses the rejection of Jesus at *DEH* 2.12.1 (e.g.); see 5.44 on the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple; for the High Middle Ages, see Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, 134. On this topic see also Nisse, *Jacob's Shipwreck*, 26–29.

Christians were also interested in *Yosippon* for its opening chapter's narrative, loosely based on Virgil's *Aeneid*, depicting the fictitious biblical hero Zepho ben Eliphaz as the founder of Rome. Modern scholarship interprets this narrative as an attempt to create a Jewish historiography of the Roman Empire. Gerson Cohen emphasized the significance of the Edomite genealogy of Esau for portraying the Romans as descendants of the eternal rival of Jacob and shows how the concept is extended to represent the conflict between Judaism and Christianity. Joshua Holo argues that the story of Zepho, grandson of Esau, represents an ethnic conception of Roman history that connects the Edomites and the native Roman people of Kittite (i.e. Greek) stock. In his view, *Yosippon* creates a link between Edom-Rome-Christianity in the passage describing the persecutions of Gaius (Caligula), to be discussed presently. Ruth Nisse calls this reworking of the *Aeneid* "a medieval Jewish fantasy of Rome," where Virgil's imperial poem becomes an "epic" text of the Jewish Diaspora and represents a reversal of power on Edom's terms.³ Christian tradition, however, appropriates the identity of Jacob-Israel while casting the Jews as Edom, interpreting the biblical story of the younger brother superseding and replacing the elder, a cornerstone of Christian belief.⁴ But, as will be shown in following pages, during the later Middle-Ages and the Renaissance, the myth of Zepho loses its original historical intent and serves to create founding myths that fulfil another purpose: confirming and validating Jewish presence in Christian Europe by attributing the founding of cities and lands to biblical figures.⁵

Lastly, Christian interest in *Yosippon* manifested itself in translations of the text into European languages. The early translations represent a selective use of *Yosippon* adapted to suit certain purposes, whether by highlighting its value as historical chivalric literature, or by pointing out weaknesses and anachronisms in the text.

1 The Quest for the *Testimonium*

The earliest reference to *Sefer Yosippon* in a Latin medieval source is found in *De principis instructione liber* (*Book of the Instruction of the Prince*) by Gerald of Wales (ca. 1146–ca. 1223).⁶ Gerald's work reflects the intellectual revival of the

3 Nisse, *Jacob's Shipwreck*, 52–61.

4 Cohen, "Esau as Symbol," esp. 33–35; Holo, "Byzantine-Jewish Ethnography," 924–925.

5 Myth of Zepho: Flusser, *Sefer Josippon*, 1.9–14, 2 (א); 2.134–135. On the *Aeneid* as a source for SY, see Toaff, "La storia di Zephò," 41–46; Sela, "The Genealogy of Sefo (Σωφαρ) ben Elifaz;" Zeldes, *Reading Jewish History in the Renaissance*, 20–21, 55–69.

6 Gerald of Wales, *De principis instructione liber*.

High Middle Ages and the renewed interest in classical works that prompted Christian scholars to seek information regarding the life of Jesus and the beginnings of Christianity in historical narratives written (or thought to have been written) during the lifetime of Jesus and the first apostles.⁷ In this treatise, Gerald of Wales gives an account of the advent of Christianity during the rule of Emperor Tiberius, quoting the passage known as *Testimonium Flavianum*. Gerald adds that “The great malice and obstinate faithlessness of the Jews is made quite clear by the fact that they keep the book of their great historian [i.e. in Hebrew] among themselves and deem it to be authentic, with the sole exception of the testimony about Christ, which they do not accept.”⁸

In his chronicle, Gerald included the story of Robert of Cricklade, Prior of Sr. Frideswide, as proof that the Jews refuse to accept even the truth recorded in their own books. Prior Robert is described as “erudite, well-read in the Scriptures, and a man not ignorant of the Hebrew language.” Prior Robert is probably the correspondent of the Sicilian scholar, Henry Aristippus, the Latin translator of Plato’s *Phaedo*. In a letter dated 1160, Aristippus tells an English friend named Roboratus, identified by modern scholarship as Robert of Cricklade,⁹ about the treasures of Sicilian libraries. If this identification is correct, Prior Robert could have learned about the existence of *Sefer Yosippon* during his sojourn in Italy. In any event, the Prior decided to collect as many manuscripts of *Yosippon* as he could find in England, checking them for the presence of the passage mentioning Jesus and early Christians. In only two manuscripts, per Gerald, “he found this testimony to Christ intact and written in the logical place, but it appeared as though it had been recently erased.”¹⁰ Gerald deemed this finding incontestable proof of the perfidy of the Jews. Ruth Nisse discusses this text and argues that Gerald of Wales’ narrative reveals the contestation between Jews and Christians over the authenticity and cultural significance of ancient post-biblical writings, as well as the Bible itself.¹¹ But beyond the story’s significance in inter-religious polemics, this testimony shows that, in the twelfth century, Christian scholars already knew about the Hebrew *Yosippon*, and that the interpolation about Jesus was already in place

7 For the twelfth century intellectual revival and its impact on Christian-Jewish relations, see Abulafia, “Twelfth-Century Humanism and the Jews;” Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 147–363.

8 Gerald of Wales, *De principis instructione liber*, 65–66.

9 For Roboratus identified as Robert of Cricklade, see Houben, *Roger II of Sicily*, 90–99n1 (and the bibliography cited there).

10 Gerald of Wales, *De principis instructione liber*, 65–66.

11 Nisse, *Jacob’s Shipwreck*, 21–23.

by that time.¹² Some of these interpolations are pejorative. Had they come to Prior Robert's attention, Gerald would have pounced on them as proof of the wickedness of the Jews. What he probably found is something close to the following:

And in those days, there were in Judea controversies and quarrels between the Pharisees and the lawless (*parizim*) of our people who were following Yeshua ben Joseph, who performed great miracles in Israel until he was defeated by the Pharisees and was hanged on a tree.¹³

Gerald (or Prior Robert) claimed that in some manuscripts the Jews erased or censored the story, saying "it had been missing for a long time; it appeared as though it had never been there."¹⁴ But these were clearly texts that had survived without the intervention of the anonymous interpolator.

During the Renaissance, the *Testimonium* was again sought out by Christian scholars. Count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) mentions it a letter dated 10 November 1486, written in response to questions addressed to him by an anonymous friend. From the answers, we can infer that this friend asked Pico whether or not *Sefer Yosippon* was reliable. The text of the letter has been recently published in its entirety, along with a translation into Italian, by Giacomo Corazzol.¹⁵ Corazzol identifies the anonymous friend as Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), known for his works on Christian theology, particularly his *Vera religio* (*On the True Religion*).¹⁶ Pico's response dismisses *Yosippon* as "not the right Josephus" and clearly refers to the *Testimonium*:

Regarding your question about Josephus, know that the Jews do not have the right Josephus,¹⁷ only a shorter epitome of Josephus, in which there are many inventions, and one can read there about the ten tribes who did

12 Extant sy manuscripts that include the interpolation on Jesus are: Ms. Budapest 355, Ms. Rothschild 24, Ms. Vatican, Borgiana ebr. 1, Ms. Paris, BnF 1280. See also the list and discussion in Dönitz, *Überlieferung und Rezeption*, 50–51, 276. The passage is quoted and discussed by Flusser, *Sefer Josippon*, 1.438–444; 2.56.

13 Ms. Vatican, Borgiana ebr. 1, fol. 129v and Ms. Paris, BnF, 1280, fol. 123v. On the use of the expression "hanging on a tree," see Gribetz, "Hanged and Crucified," 159–180.

14 Gerald of Wales, *De principis instructione liber*, 65–66.

15 Corazzol, "Chiunque tu sia," 429–457 (transcription and translation of Pico's letter on 432–433); Stein Kokin, "Josephan Renaissance," 239–242.

16 On Marsilio Ficino, see Celenza, "Marsilio Ficino." On Ficino's views on religion and Judaism, see Idel, "Prisca Theologia," 137–178; Bartolucci, *Vera religio*.

17 Pico refers to "iustum Iosephum," which Corazzol in his "Chiunque tu Sia" translates as the "complete Josephus," whereas I prefer to translate this literally: the "right Josephus."

not return home after the Babylonian captivity, and these are known spurious stories. ... I know that there is a passage about Christ in the Greek Josephus, and there he is mentioned in a trustworthy honourable [manner], but I cannot ascertain that this [passage] is identical with what can be read in Latin codices without consulting the Greek version.¹⁸

Pico was therefore aware of the existence of the Hebrew *Sefer Yosippon* and knew that it was not one of Josephus' works but a shorter compilation. It is interesting to note that Pico's description of the book is strikingly similar to that of the Dominican Raymond Martini in his thirteenth-century polemical work *Pugio fidei* (*Dagger of Faith*), to be discussed presently. For comparison's sake, it should be noted that Martini referred to *Yosippon* as "*Josephon abbreviator Josephi*."¹⁹ But Pico, who knew about the *Testimonium Flavianum* in Josephus' *Antiquitates*, believed that it was not present in *Yosippon*. In his article, Corazzol suggests that his information on *Yosippon* came from the Sicilian convert Flavius Mithridates, who was close to Pico in 1486, when the above-cited letter was written.²⁰ This conjecture corresponds to Daniel Stein Kokin's suggestion that Pico never read the book and relied on other informants, who told him about its contents.²¹ But to return to Pico's response to his friend "regarding your question about Josephus," we can infer that the friend wished to know if the Josephus of the Jews, namely *Yosippon*, also mentioned Jesus. Pico, apparently without having read the book, assured his friend that there was no such passage there. It can, therefore, be argued that Pico, or rather his informant, read a version that lacked the interpolation. But Pico's puzzling claim that *Yosippon* includes stories about the Ten Lost Tribes is obviously spurious and seems to support Stein Kokin's argument for his lack of familiarity with the text.²²

Stein Kokin also translates this portion of Pico's letter in Stein Kokin, "Josephan Renaissance," 239.

18 Original letter: Picus Mirandula, *Opera omnia*, 384–386. English translation by the present author.

19 Martini, *Pugio fidei*, 275. The various renditions of the name "Josephon, Yosefon" are characteristic of medieval inconsistency in the spelling of names.

20 Corazzol, "Chiunque tu Sia," 435.

21 Stein Kokin, "Josephan Renaissance," 205–248.

22 There are several possible explanations for Pico's statement that *SY* included stories on the Ten Tribes, but these are beyond the scope of this paper. On this topic, see Zeldes, *Reading Jewish History in the Renaissance*, 81–82.

Pico's correspondent, presumably Marsilio Ficino, also sought the truths revealed in ancient Jewish writings.²³ Ficino's reference to the Hebrew *Yosippon* appears as an annotation in a manuscript containing the Latin version of the New Testament. Ficino copied the passage known as the *Testimonium Flavianum* from Josephus' *Antiquitates* into the manuscript and added his own note: "The Jews affirm [moreover] that in the Hebrew text of Josephus, Christ is accorded praises of great import apart from the resurrection" (*Ebrei affirmat [insuper] testu Iosiphi ebraico esse superiores Christi laudes praeter resurrectionem*).²⁴ If Pico's correspondent is, in fact, Ficino, as identified by Corazzol, his answer becomes clear: "Regarding your question about Josephus, know that the Jews do not have the right Josephus." In other words, what you are looking for—the passage praising Christ—is not found in the Josephus of the Jews.

Gianozzo Manetti (1396–1459) was particularly interested in the role played by Judaism in the origins of monotheistic religion and the history of early Christianity. He wrote the well-known works *Apologeticus*²⁵ and *Adversus Judeos et gentes* (*Against the Jews and the Gentiles*).²⁶ In 1444, Manetti commissioned a copy of *Sefer Yosippon* from the Jew Elijah ha-Melamed of Fano, which has survived to this day.²⁷ However, there is no evidence that Manetti ever cited *Yosippon* in his writings. His *Adversus Judeos et gentes* is a historical narrative based on the Bible and the New Testament, complemented by numerous non-biblical sources such as Josephus' *Antiquitates Judaicae*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods*, and Lactantius' *Divine Institutes*, to name a few.²⁸ Manetti could easily have cited *Yosippon* in this work, written between 1456 and 1459, long after he had acquired the manuscript. He does not. Yet Josephus' *Antiquitates* is frequently cited. In a recent article, Stein Kokin notes this omission and concludes that Manetti does not

23 Edelheit, *Ficino, Pico, and Savonarola*, 212–213. On Ficino's attitudes towards Judaism, see Idel, "Prisca Theologia," 137–178.

24 Manuscript: Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Ric. 426, c. 2r, quoted by Bartolucci, *Vera religio*, 110n2–3; In his "Josephan Renaissance" (225–226), Stein Kokin corrects Bartolucci and adds the missing third word *insuper* ("moreover") in above-quoted passage from Ficino's manuscript: Stein Kokin, "Josephan Renaissance," 225–226.

25 Manetti, *A Translator's Defense*. For Manetti's Hebrew studies, see Garin, "L'umanesimo italiano e la cultura ebraica," 363–365.

26 Manetti, *Against the Jews and the Gentiles*, 48–49, 54–55. For Manetti's anti-Jewish views, see Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, 2.722–734; Fubini, "L'ebraismo nei riflessi della cultura umanistica," 283–324.

27 The copy of *SY* commissioned by Manetti is at the Vatican, BAV, ebr. 408; see Flusser, *Sefer Josippon*, 2.16.

28 For the sources quoted, see Manetti, *Against the Jews and Gentiles*, notes to the translation, 433–463.

“ever even appear to mention the former text [ספ] explicitly.” Stein Kokin also wonders why Manetti never made use of the *Testimonium Flavianum* (see above), or why he did not use the relevant passages on Jesus found in some versions of *Yosippon*.²⁹ If Manetti commissioned the copy of *Yosippon* only because he hoped to find there a passage on Jesus rather than to use it as a historical source, he was probably disappointed when he read the following phrase that depicts Jesus and his followers in a rather pejorative manner: “and then all the lawless [*parizim*] woke up to confound our people [paraphrase of Daniel 11:14] to do as every man pleased [Judges 17:6], and they changed the Torah’s meaning.”³⁰

2 Jewish History and the Fall of Jerusalem

A more sophisticated reception of *Yosippon* is found in Raymond Martini’s polemical work *Pugio fidei adversus Mauros et Iudaeos* (*Dagger of Faith against the Muslims and the Jews*), completed around 1278. Martini’s use of Jewish sources in Hebrew and Aramaic has been the subject of extensive study, and yet his references to the Hebrew *Yosippon* remain largely unexplored. The *Pugio fidei* survived in several manuscripts but it is best known in Carpzov’s seventeenth-century printed edition,³¹ which is not identical to the medieval manuscripts and is therefore less applicable to the study of *Yosippon*’s reception in the Middle Ages. Recent studies have suggested that the thirteenth-century Saint Geneviève manuscript is an autograph, in which case it represents the most immediate reception of the Hebrew text by Martini.³² In fact, not all medieval manuscripts of *Pugio fidei* have the Hebrew citations; the Toulouse copy, for example, includes citations from *Yosippon* only in Latin translation.³³

29 Stein Kokin, “Josephan Renaissance,” 220–221.

30 See Flusser’s comment on this passage which is found in later interpolations, see: Flusser, *Sefer Josippon*, 1.439–440; Manetti’s copy: MS Vatican, ebr. 408, fols. 94v–95r. On the possibility that Manetti was looking for the passage on Jesus, see Corazzol, “Chiunque tu sia,” 436–438.

31 Martinii (Carpzov), *Pugio fidei*.

32 Paris, Sainte Geneviève Library, MS 1405. Autograph: Bobichon, “Le manuscrit Latin de la Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève (Paris),” 39–102. For a list of Hebrew and Aramaic texts used in this manuscript, see Bobichon, “Quotations, Translations, and Uses of Jewish Texts,” 267–293; Merchavia, “*Pugio Fidei*,” 203–234; Merchavia, “The Hebrew Versions of ‘Pugio fidei,’” 283–288.

33 Toulouse manuscript: Manuscrits numérisés de la Bibliothèque municipale de Toulouse, *Pugio fidei contra judaeos et sarracenos* Martin, Raymond (1230–1284?), fol. 30v–31r. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10560110p/f7.item> (accessed 10 October 2021).

Most citations of *Yosippon* in the Sainte Geneviève manuscript are added in Hebrew characters in the margins of the text, not always accompanied by Latin translation. Martini usually precedes each cited passage with אמר יוספון ("Josephon said Joseph ben Gorion said"), an attribution that does not always appear in the original Hebrew manuscripts of *Yosippon* (insofar as I was able to tell in comparing these passages with Flusser's edition and a number of manuscripts). Assuring his readers of the historicity of the narrative's events, Martini adds that they were "attested by Josephus who was then present" (*testante Josepho, qui presens fuit*). Even more remarkable is Martini's effort to eliminate any doubt as to the author's identity. When quoting from the section on the death of Cyrus, Martini forthrightly identifies Joseph ben Gorion, the presumed author of *Yosippon*, with Josephus:

ויתר דבריו הלא הם כתובים על ספר מלכי מדי ופרס ועל ספר יוסף בן גוריון הוא יוספוס אשר הגלה אותו מירושלים טיטוס בן אספסינוס ועל ספר מלכי רומיים.

The rest is written in the book of the kings of Media and Persia and in the book of Joseph ben Gorion, who is Josephus, who was exiled from Jerusalem by Titus, son of Vespasian, and in the annals of the Roman kings.³⁴

Although Martini identifies *Yosippon* with Josephus, "who was exiled," he observes that the Hebrew *Yosippon* is a shorter work, a concise version of Josephus' works, describing the author as "Josephon, the abbreviator of Josephus" (*Josephon abbreviator Josephi*).³⁵ Interestingly, Martini never quotes directly from the Josephan texts, probably because his work sets out to prove the errors of the Jews by using only the texts they themselves read, in Hebrew and in Aramaic.

Numerous citations from *Yosippon* are concerned with the history of the Second Temple Period. Martini put particular emphasis on descriptions of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, such as the following:

34 Paris, Sainte Geneviève Library, MS 1405, fol. xxxvi; and compare with Flusser's text of *SY* 8 (ח): יוסף בן גוריון הוא יוספוס ועל ספר מלכי מדי ופרס ועל ספר יוסף הכהן הוא יוסף בן גוריון אשר הגלה אותו מירושלים בימי בספסינוס וטיטוס בנו ועל ספר מלכי רומיים *Sefer Josippon*, 1.46.

35 Martini (Carpzov), *Pugio fidei*, 275.

אמר יוספון אמר יוסף בן גוריון ויגש טיטוס להלחם בחומות ירושלים וכו' ורבים מן היהודים היו משליכים את המתים אל הבורות ונופלים עמהם שם בעודם חיים.

So said Yosippon, said Joseph son of Gorion, and Titus came and attacked the walls of Jerusalem and many of the Jews were throwing their dead to the pits and falling in with them while still living.³⁶

Martini's choices are derived from his avowed purpose, which is to use texts and arguments from the Jews' own literature in order to refute their beliefs and demonstrate their errors. The detailed descriptions of the Fall of Jerusalem fit in with the Christian tradition that interprets it as divine retribution for the Jews' rejection of Jesus. Other lengthy passages concern the stories of Cyrus, whose figure Martini associates with the question of the messiah's identity. They are added on the margins of the main text as exegesis on the prophecy, "Thus said the Lord to Cyrus, His anointed one" (Isa 45:1).³⁷ Martini used *Yosippon* in order to turn its testimony against the Jews in the same way he used other Jewish writings in the *Pugio fidei*.

In his seminal study, Flusser determined that *Sefer Yosippon* has three main versions, or redactions—A, B, and C—with A the earliest and C the latest and most elaborate. In her study on the reception of *Yosippon* by the Jews, Saskia Dönitz identifies two more sub-variants for version A and offers a detailed description of all redactions.³⁸ A careful examination of *Yosippon* citations in *Pugio fidei* can be used to determine which redaction was used by Martini. Comparing Martini's rendition of the story of King Agrippa II in version A (published by Flusser) with the rendition in version C offers a telling example. The *Yosippon* narrative is a reworking of Josephus' *Antiquitates Judaicae* and a passage from his *Vita*. The same story appears also in *Bellum Judaicum* and there is a version of it in *De excidio* as well, the latter comprising the source of *Yosippon's* Recension A.³⁹ By conflating two narratives, Martini mistakenly portrays the king as a cruel villain who was finally defeated by Roman forces:

36 Paris, Sainte Geneviève Library, MS 1405, fol. xlix. This passage is faithfully rendered in Martini (Carpzov), *Pugio fidei*, 324.

37 The English translation is according to the JPS Bible, but Martini followed the Vulgate version which can be interpreted as referring to Cyrus as a Messiah (Christ): "haec dicit Dominus christo meo Cyro." The Cyrus stories in the Sainte Geneviève manuscript appear in fol. xxxv–xxxvi.

38 Flusser, *Sefer Josippon*, 2.310, 16–42; Dönitz, *Überlieferung und Rezeption*, 37–102, 276.

39 See Josephus, *AJ* 20.137, 161–172, 177–178; *Vita* 13, 37; *BJ* 2.247–270. A version of this story appears in *DEH* 2.6. However, there too the villain is not King Agrippa but the robber "Eleazarus princeps latronum," as in Redaction A (i.e., Flusser's edition) of *SY* 59 (טג).

Paris, St. Geneviève,
fol. xlii verso
(*Pugio fidei*)

Said Yosippon said Joseph son of Gorion. And then Agrippa son of Aristobulus son of Herod the Great king of Judea died, and after him reigned Agrippa his son, and he reigned for twenty years. And also Claudius died, and Nero Caesar reigned after him. And in the times of this Agrippa the Second Temple was demolished and great wars broke out in the entire land of Judea and Agrippa destroyed and ruined it, and he never stopped taking spoils and seizing the booty and killing the people, until Philis⁴⁰ the Roman general came with a great army and defeated his Parizim and put him in chains and took him to Rome.

Jerusalem National
Library, Ms. 8^o 4120
(Flusser, *Sefer Josippon*,
1.275 = SY 59 [כ"ט])

And Agrippa died and his son reigned after him, and he reigned for twenty years, and Claudius too died and Nero Caesar reigned after him. And in the times of Agrippa son of Agrippa great wars broke out in the entire land of Judea and Aram, because Eleazar head of the Parizim ran over the entire land of Aram and destroyed it, and for twenty years never stopped taking spoils and seizing the booty, killing the people ... until Philis the Roman general came with a great army and defeated his Parizim and put him in chains and took him to Rome.

Vatican, Borg. 1, fol. 29

And then King Agrippa died and his son who carried the same name reigned after him and also he ruled Israel for twenty years. At that time Claudius died and Nero became Caesar after him. And the Temple was demolished in the times of this Agrippa because for twenty years Agrippa wrought destruction and ruin, and he never stopped taking spoils and seizing the booty and killing the people until Philis the Roman general came with a great army and defeated his Parizim and put him in chains and took him to Rome.

40 Philis is probably Marcus Antonius Felix, procurator of Judea (52?–60). For his mentions in Josephus' works, see note 39 above.

Paris, St. Geneviève,
fol. xlii verso
(*Pugio fidei*)

Jerusalem National
Library, Ms. 8^o 4120
(Flusser, *Sefer Josippon*,
1.275 = SY 59 [טנ])

Vatican, Borg. 1, fol. 29

אמר יוסיפון אמר יוסף בן גוריון וימת אגריפס בן אריסתבליס בן אורדוס הגדול מלך יהודה וימלך תחתיו אגריפס בנו ומלך עשרים שנה וגם קלודיאוס מת וימלך תחתיו נירו קיסר ובימי אגריפס זה נחרב בית שני והתעוררו מלחמות גדולות בכל ארץ יהודה וישחיתה ויאבידה אגריפס ועשרים שנה לא חדל לשלול שלל ולבוז בן ולהרוג נפשות עד שעלה עליו פיליס שר צבא רומה בחיל כבד מאד וידך פריציו וילכדהו ויאסרהו בנחושתים ויוליכהו אל רומה	וימת אגריפס וימלוך תחתיו אגריפס בנו וימלוך עשרים שנה, וגם קלאודיוס קיסר מת וימלוך תחתיו נירוס קיסר. ובימי אגריפס בן אגריפס התעוררו מלחמות בכל ארץ יהודה ובכל ארץ ארם, כי אלעזר שר הפריצים אז נתן מרוצה בכל ארץ ארם וישחיתה ועשרים שנה לא חדל לשלול שלל ולבוז בן ולהרוג נפשות ... עד בוא עליו פיליס שאר צבא רומא בחיל כבד וידך את פריציו וילכדהו ויאסרהו בנחושתים ויוליכהו אל רומא	כי אז מת אגריפס המלך ומלך בנו כשמו וימלוך גם הוא על ישראל עשרים שנה כי אז מת קלאודוס הקיסר וימלוך נארון לקיסר וכי בימי אגריפס זה חרב הבית כי עשרים שנה לא חדל אגריפס לשלול שלל ולבוז בן ולהרוג נפשות ויעל עליו פילוס שר צבא רומה וידך את פריציו ויאסרהו בנחושתים ויוליכהו אל רומה
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Martini may have read *De excidio*, but the version of this story he recycles in *Pugio fidei* is not adapted from that source. In fact, it is almost identical to the *Yosippon* text found in MS Borgiana ebr. 1, which represents redaction C,⁴¹ proof that this redaction or an even earlier version of it was extant in the thirteenth century. Flusser suggested that in this section, the name of Jesus was replaced by the name of Eleazar, who is denoted as the prince of the renegades. This interpretation is more or less accepted by Holo, who also draws attention to a possible substitution of Edom for Aram in this passage.⁴² However, this “replacement” occurs already in *De excidio*, and this was the source of the story’s details, rather than there being there an intentional substitution by

41 Flusser, *Sefer Josippon*, 1.274–275; Ms Borgiana ebr. 1 (F 11654) fol. 29. For a list of manuscripts according to the different redactions, see Dönitz, *Überlieferung und Rezeption*, 276–277.

42 Flusser, *Sefer Josippon*, 1.272–274; Holo, “Byzantine-Jewish Ethnography,” 946–947.

Yosippon's author, or a later one dictated by an attempt at censorship. Further examination of the excerpts and a comparison with extant manuscripts will surely shed more light on the version used by Martini, but a fuller study of the *Yosippon* excerpts in *Pugio fidei* merits a larger project.

3 Zepho, Founder of Rome and Other European Cities

Sefer Yosippon appears in a roundabout way in the Dominican Pietro Ranzano's history of Palermo, *Delle origini e vicende di Palermo*, written in 1470.⁴³ Born in Palermo, Pietro Ranzano (1428–1492) joined the Dominican order and later became Provincial of the Dominicans in Sicily. He enjoyed an illustrious career as scholar, diplomat, and historian, ending his life as bishop of Lucera in southern Italy.⁴⁴

In his history, Ranzano tells about his discovery of an ancient "Chaldean" inscription he saw on a tower in Palermo, which included the following statement:

He who commands this tower is Sepha (Zepho) son of Eliphaz, who was the son of Esau brother of Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham.⁴⁵

The genuine inscription found on the tower in Palermo was written in Arabic characters and lacked any reference to Zepho or the *Sefer Yosippon*.⁴⁶ But Ranzano's interpretation is clearly based on the myth of Zepho ben Eliphaz, which is found in all complete versions of the *Sefer Yosippon*.⁴⁷ This myth enjoyed wide circulation among Jewish scholars of the Renaissance period, who by turn attributed to Zepho the founding of a European city in addition to Rome (Milan, Genoa, Palermo, Paris).⁴⁸ Here it is used in a Christian narrative, but clearly inspired by Jewish intermediaries who "helped" interpret the mysterious inscription. Although Ranzano does not name *Yosippon* explicitly, he

43 Ranzano, *Delle origini e vicende di Palermo*.

44 On Pietro Ranzano's career, see Coniglione, *La provincia domenicana di Sicilia*, 30–34; Figliuolo, "Ranzano, Pietro."

45 Text of the inscription: Ranzano, *De auctore et primordiis ac progressu felicitis urbis Panormi* in Morso, *Descrizione di Palermo antico*, 48–49. For the vernacular version, see Ranzano, *Origini e vicende di Palermo*, 63. The English translation is mine.

46 Zeldes, "The Last Multi-Cultural Encounter in Medieval Sicily," 159–191; Zeldes, *Reading Jewish History in the Renaissance*, 55–63.

47 On the figure of Zepho/Sefo in SY, see Cohen, "Esau as Symbol," 19–48; Sela, "The Genealogy of Sefo," 138–143; Holo, "Byzantine-Jewish Ethnography," 924.

48 Zeldes, *Reading Jewish History in the Renaissance*, 63–70.

tells of a very old Hebrew book he was shown by a Jew of Palermo named Isaac Guglielmo. The book was probably *Yosippon*, the main source for the myth of Zepho.

This reading, attributing the founding of Palermo to Zepho, is completely spurious, and further study enabled scholars to reconstruct most of the original text, which was actually in Arabic script. It contained Quranic verses and a date: 331 to the Hegirah (942 CE).⁴⁹ The biblical names of Sepha (i.e., Zepho), Eliphaz, and Esau, however, do not appear in any of the Arabic transcriptions, leading to the inescapable conclusion that the reading offered by Ranzano was a forgery. The importance of Ranzano's story lies mainly in the role played by *Yosippon* in the false interpretation of the inscription. In response to his inquiries, the Jews of Palermo told Ranzano: "There is a very ancient Hebrew book that has survived to the present in which their ancestors described something similar."⁵⁰ At that point, Ranzano recounts his visit to the home of a Jew, where he was shown the ancient book:

A certain Jew, of the Pisan nation and an inhabitant of Palermo, named Isaac Guglielmo, invited me to his home on several occasions and showed me a book in which everything we have talked about had been written; and after having heard the reading of the inscription in Hebrew he [the Jew] translated it into the vernacular.⁵¹

This story indicates that the Jews of Palermo were familiar with the contents of *Yosippon* and, perhaps by playing on Ranzano's ignorance of the Arabic script, they dared offer a false interpretation to the inscription incised on the stones of the old tower. The fact that *Yosippon* contains the myth of Zepho as founder of Rome may explain the work's importance in this context. Even before discussing the inscription in his narrative on the origins of Palermo, Ranzano draws parallels between Palermo and Rome. Just as Rome was called "the city" (*urbs*), said Ranzano, Palermo was named the "happy city" (*urbs felix*), the only other city in the world to bear the designation *urbs*.⁵² The supposed appearance of the biblical figure of Zepho in the inscription allowed Ranzano to calculate

49 A fragmentary copy of the text of the inscription was preserved in a manuscript by the Sicilian Martines, *De situ Siciliae*, Bcp, 3 Qq B 70.120. For the history of the deciphering of the inscription, see the discussion in Morso, *Descrizione di Palermo antico*, 57–67.

50 Ranzano, *Origini e vicende di Palermo*, 65.

51 Ranzano, *Origini e vicende di Palermo*, 65.

52 Ranzano, *Origini e vicende di Palermo*, 76–77.

the age of the settlement of Palermo and prove that it existed for at least 3,350 years, which would place it on par with Rome.⁵³

4 Translations of *Yosippon*

One more facet of *Sefer Yosippon*'s reception by Christians is its translation into European languages. The earliest translations were made into Romance/Old Castilian rather than Latin. A manuscript formerly believed to be an Old Castilian translation of Josephus' *Antiquitates* proved to be a translation of *Yosippon*.⁵⁴ The presence of a passage describing the martyrdom of Anna (Hannah)⁵⁵ and her seven sons allows us to determine that this was indeed a translation of *Yosippon*, probably dating from the fifteenth century. The story, which appears in Chapter 9 of the manuscript, begins as follows:

[E]n estos dias vino el rey Antioco a Jehrusalem por atormentar e aflegir al pueblo de Israel, porque non se inclinavan a su imagen. E mandó prender una mugier, que llamavan Ana, e a siete sus hijos.

And in those days King Antiochus came to Jerusalem to torment and afflict the people of Israel for they were not prostrating themselves in front of his image. And he gave orders to arrest a woman called Ana and her seven sons.⁵⁶

The narrative shows that the Castilian manuscript is indeed a translation of one of the versions of the *Yosippon*. As it gives the mother's name as Hannah, it must belong to either Redaction B or C, or something in between. However, definite identification awaits further study.

53 On the foundation of Rome and the accepted chronology, see Grafton and Swerdlow, "Technical Chronology and Astrological History," 454–465; Forsythe, *A Critical History of Early Rome*.

54 Gutiérrez García, "Estudio lingüístico de un romanceamiento castellano," 259–284; Gutiérrez García, "La reescritura de la historia del segundo templo en la Castilla del siglo xv," 183–200; other observations regarding the identification of the manuscript are the result of a long exchange of personal messages between the author of this article and Santiago Gutiérrez García.

55 The mother's name is given as Hannah (Anna) in redaction C and in an exemplar of redaction B, Ms. Vatican, BAV, ebr. 408 (see note 27 above); in other versions the mother is nameless: Flusser, *Sefer Josippon*, 170.

56 The English translation is mine.

The Romance translation of *Yosippon* seems incomplete because it lacks the opening chapters that list the different nations existing in the author's times and the history of Italy that includes the myth of Zepho as founder of Rome. Could this omission in the Spanish translation indicate that it was based on a very early version of *Yosippon* that lacked these chapters? In her study of the Arabic *Yosippon*, Shulamit Sela questions the existence of Chapters 1 and 2 in the earliest versions of the book. In her view, the Arabic version represents the earliest or even the original version of *Yosippon*, whereas the first two chapters in the Hebrew text are later additions. Dönitz, nevertheless, argues that this conclusion cannot be clearly deduced from Sela's study.⁵⁷ At any rate, the omission of the first chapters cannot be used to prove that the translation was based on such an early version, whether Hebrew or Arabic. Moreover, the translation gives the martyr mother the name Ana (Hannah) and this indicates, in my opinion, that a later version was used.

Now, the reasons for this translation can be gleaned from the translator's prologue that emphasizes the points of interest for his potential audience:

In this book there are descriptions of the battles led by the priests of the Holy Temple (*casa sancta*) and by the Maccabees and afterwards by those who named themselves kings of Judea ... In this book one encounters the battles of the kings of Persia and Media with the house of Judea, and the battles of the house of Judea with other nations, until the coming of Titus, son of Vespasian, who, because of the sins of Israel, destroyed the Holy Temple.⁵⁸

The translator may have intentionally selected only those parts and omitted others. However, forming any theories regarding the original text that served the translator must await further study.

Yosippon was finally translated into Latin by the German Sebastian Münster (1488–1552). Münster's *Iosephus hebraicus diu desideratus et nunc ex Constantinopolitano exemplari iuxta Hebraismum*, printed in Basel in 1541, is the first Latin translation, but again it is an incomplete one. Since Münster was convinced that the first chapters of *Yosippon* were a later addition and could not have been authored by Josephus, he decided to omit them altogether from both the Hebrew text he published and from the Latin translation. Thus, Münster's

57 Sela, *The Arabic Josippon*, 37–46; Sela's arguments are discussed by Saskia Dönitz in Dönitz, *Überlieferung und Rezeption*, 111–112.

58 Gutiérrez García, "Estudio lingüístico de un romanceamiento castellan," 188–191 (quote at 190).

edition begins with *Yosippon's* rendition of the book of Daniel and has a different arrangement of chapters than the Constantinople printed edition on which he relied.⁵⁹ Unwittingly, Münster seems to have chosen to produce a version that arguably represented the arrangement found in the earliest versions of *SY*. This is ironic, given that it is precisely these chapters (4–6) that appear to be missing from the earliest versions of *SY*, as per Dönitz's 2009 article on *Sefer Yosippon* and the Greek Bible.⁶⁰ At any rate, his preface lists his doubts about the book's authorship:

It is clear, honest reader, from the very beginning of this book that one has to investigate whether or not this book of the Hebrew Joseph was written by the same Josephus Flavius; if the error is in the name, or if there was another [Joseph], if it was composed by the Hebrews in the Hebrew [language], or as it is said in the Latin version—which was translated many times by very learned men—that it was written by him for the Gentiles in the Greek language. And indeed, most scholars agree that Josephus did not write in Hebrew, but in Greek and some even argue that Josephus did not know Hebrew. That he wrote in Greek is attested to in the prologue to *the Jewish War*, and nowadays there are quite a number of books written by him in Greek that Rufinus [of Aquilea]⁶¹ long ago translated into Latin. Many offer arguments for the idea that he did not write in Hebrew.⁶²

Münster was the first Christian scholar who questioned the identification of *Yosippon's* author and the text's authenticity. In the end, however, he upheld the traditional view that Josephus authored the Hebrew *Yosippon*, and chose to explain away the anachronisms and fanciful narratives as later interpolations:

To those that refer to the nations who made their appearance in the world long after Josephus's times, that is the Franks, the Goths, the Lombards,

59 *Sefer ben Gorion*, Constantinople, 1510.

60 Dönitz, "Yosippon and the Greek Bible," 224, 231–232.

61 Rufinus of Aquilea (ca. 345–ca. 411). Rufinus has been wrongly credited with translating the *Antiquitates Judaicae* and *Contra Apionem*, but he did indeed translate large portions of Josephus' *Bellum Judaicum* as they appeared almost verbatim in Eusebius of Caesarea's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, which Rufinus translated into Latin. See Leoni, "The Text of Josephus's Works," 153–156; Leoni, "Text of the Josephan Corpus," 307–321; Leoni, "Translations and Adaptations;" Levenson and Martin, "The Ancient Latin Translations of Josephus," 322–344.

62 Münster, *Iosephus hebraicus*, preface. On Münster's translation of *SY* and his objections, see Zeldes, *Reading Jewish History in the Renaissance*, 140–143.

the Bulgars, etc., ... we dare suggest the following, that from the very beginning they were added to that author, and that many [of the stories contained therein] are fictitious (*fabulosa*).⁶³

The Latin translation, albeit an abbreviated version of the original text, allowed Christian scholars to read *Yosippon*, compare versions, and discuss the authenticity of the text. Moreover, Münster's objections came to the attention of later Christian (and Jewish) scholars such as Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540–1609) and Isaac Casaubon (1559–1614), leading them to conclude that *Yosippon* was in fact an original medieval compilation rather than the Hebrew version of Flavius Josephus' works.⁶⁴

5 Conclusion

Christian interest in *Yosippon* was typically motivated by the need to confirm certain basic tenets of belief such as the historicity of Jesus, the historical supersessionism of Judaism by Christianity, and confirmation of the truth found in the Jews' ancient writings, the *Hebraica veritas*, a notion expounded by Renaissance scholars. Even though Christian authors considered *Yosippon* the original version of Josephus' works, they were well aware that it was a shorter compilation. Some of them, like Gerald of Wales, thought that the Jews censored the text, intentionally omitting the passages on Jesus; much later, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola apparently suspected the same and dismissed its importance. And yet, Martini's *Pugio fidei* offers the most sophisticated use of *Yosippon* by a Christian, so far as we know at present. Beyond enriching our understanding of the Christian use of Hebrew sources, further examination of *Yosippon* texts cited or translated by Christian authors may reveal unknown versions or redactions of the text, as shown by the excerpts in the *Pugio fidei* and the Castilian translation. To conclude, the study of Christian reception of *Yosippon* is still in its early stages, and further examination of the works may provide a fuller picture of the uses made of the text, interpretations, censored passages, and more.

63 Münster, *Iosephus hebraicus*, preface.

64 Scaliger, *Elenchus trihaeresii*, 44; Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger*, 2.695–696; Grafton and Weinberg, *Isaac Casaubon*, 201–213. Zeldes, *Reading Jewish History in the Renaissance*, 147–152.

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