



Saskia Dönitz. *Überlieferung und Rezeption des Sefer Yosippon*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013. xii + 339 pp. \$169.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-16-152663-3.

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Sefer Yosippon: From Hebrew to German

The *Book of Yosippon* (*Sefer Yosippon*, henceforth SY) has been a popular and influential history of the Second Temple period for over a millennium. The extant manuscripts were first identified and edited by David Flusser and published in his eclectic edition (*The Josippon/Josephus Gorionides* [1978]); he dated its composition to 953 CE based on an internal colophon that he found in a thirteenth-century manuscript. Subsequent scholarship has used either Flusser's date or one in the early tenth century based on internal evidence in the first chapter of SY, which appears to be the latest section added to the text. Robert Bonfil in his critical review of Flusser's edition and Shulamit Sela in her edition of the Arabic Josippon as well as the author whose book is under review argue for the earlier date. The problem of using the 953 date is obfuscated by the lack of clarity in the citation: was the manuscript copied, edited, or translated in that year? The solution varies with the reader.

Saskia Dönitz's book, based on her recent dissertation, is the first systematic critical review of Flusser's now classic work. She reevaluates the manuscripts and examines a larger pool of Genizah fragments than those cited by Flusser. Indeed, she provides a scholarly research tome in German, the first study of the reception of SY in a Western language. She comes to a number of new perspectives on the book, including identifying several additional interpolations. Her work reflects the high standards of German scholarship.

Her longest chapter is a sustained analysis of the

three recensions that Flusser identified in his stemma and the plenitude of manuscripts, including those of the Genizah, the latter mostly eleventh- and twelfth-century fragments. Next, she analyzes the many interpolations that proliferate in this "open book" that was treated like other midrash by successive generations of scholars who added their contemporary expansions of SY; we should really speak of an SY tradition rather than an SY book since it changed with each new version in Hebrew or in translation. Even Abraham ibn Daud's rewritten SY (recently edited by Katja Vehlow, *Abraham Ibn Daud's Dorot 'Olam [Generations of the Ages] A Critical Edition and Translation of Zikhron Divrey Romi, Divrey Malkhey Yisra'el, and the Midrash on Zechariah* [2013]) proved to be a major source for Judah ibn Moskoni in his eclectic edition (based on Recension C) produced in the mid-fourteenth century, which was the basis of most subsequent editions prior to Flusser's. Unfortunately, Dönitz cites Judah according to an erroneous tradition of nineteenth-century German Jewish scholarship as Yehudah Mosqoni; his signature identifies his real name as Yehudah/Leon ben Mosheh/Mosqoni, in other words, Mosqoni is the local Byzantine translation of Moshe just as Leon is translated as Yehudah.

Her extensive critique adds new facets to the complexity of the SY tradition and a valuable discussion on Flusser's conclusions and extensive commentary in the second volume of his edition (1980, rev. 1982). Additionally, her review of medieval Jewish historical texts rightly criticizes Yosef Yerushalmi for his bias against SY

and other texts of the period. In sum, she translates to a Western language much of the research in Hebrew over the past generation, thus making this seminal work and its environment and influence available to a broad range of scholars in various disciplines.

Chapter 3 summarizes the Arabic translations of SY: first, it covers the sixty fragments of the Jewish-Arabic translators, 2/3 of them as edited and translated to Hebrew by Sela under the direction of the recently deceased Moshe Gil and available in her Tel Aviv dissertation and volume 2 of her edition of the Arabic Josippon. Sela revisits Wellhausen (“Der Arabische Josippon”) and provides a literary analysis of the composition of SY. Dönitz, following Sela, notes that SY was canonized by the Coptic Church as the Fifth Book of the Maccabees and later follows its reception by the Copts and the Muslims beginning with Ibn Hazm (eleventh century), who cited SY on the execution of John the Baptist, through Ibn Khaldun (fourteenth century) and al Maqrizi (fifteenth century).

Chapter 4 summarizes the commentators who cited SY, beginning with Rashi and his pupils. Here SY is most useful for understanding the Book of Daniel and for the emerging Jewish-Christian polemic beginning with Sa’adia Gaon. The roster of scholars who have cited SY is legion and suggests that the book was read by nearly every literate male during the medieval period: Ibn Ezra; David Qimhi; Nachmanides; Samuel ben David Masmit; Joseph ben Kaspi; Tobiah ben Eliezer; Immanuel ben Salmis and his predecessors; Yerahme’el ben Shlomo, whose entire SY is preserved in the fourteenth-century *Sepher Zikhronoth*; and Nathan ben Yehiel; as well as Isaiah the Younger of Trani and Immanuel of Rome, among a host of others whom she does not list. Also in this chapter, she explores and summarizes the *piyyut* (liturgical poetry) tradition and its commentators beginning with the South Italians: Salomon Yehudah ha-Bavli of Rome followed by Gershom Me’or ha-Golah who made his own copy of SY later copied by Rashi and Simon bar Isaak, Joseph ben Shlomo of Carcasonne, and Menahem

bi-Rabbi Makhir of Ashkenaz. Many of these *piyyutim* (liturgical poems) were written for Hanukkah and thus, as with the Bible commentators, were indebted to SY for its section on Daniel. This chapter brings the oeuvre of Ezra Fleischer to further attention of Western scholars.

Chapter 5 follows SY through the medieval narrative of Hanukkah and the martyrdom of the (unnamed) mother and her seven sons from II Maccabees. Next, Dönitz treats SY and *Seder Olam*, following Chaim Milikowsky’s edition and commentary (*Seder Olam: Critical Edition, Commentary, and Introduction* [2013]); Abraham ibn Daud’s *Dorot ‘Olam* (Vehlow’s edition); and Gerson D. Cohen’s edition and translation of Daud’s *Sefer ha-Qabbalah: The Book of Tradition* (1967), in addition to other historiographical texts mentioned. Dönitz recalls the influence of SY on the Crusader-period reports (*Berichte*) and discusses its influence on the emerging martyrdom tradition (*kiddush hashem*, “sanctification of the Name”).

Finally, her summary chapter emphasizes the historiographic importance of SY and its continuing impact on Jewish and Christian scholars throughout the Middle Ages and, we might add, to the present day. In sum, this book is a model of scholarship and presents the findings of numerous scholars in Hebrew, English, and German. It is the basic research and reference tool for the study of SY, its contexts, and its influence for future scholars of this seminal contribution to Jewish identity since the tenth century.[1]

Note

[1]. Also worth mentioning is Dagmar Börner-Klein and Beat Zuber, *Josippon: Jüdische Geschichte vom Anfang der Welt bis zum Ende des ersten Aufstands gegen Rom* (Wiesbaden: Marixverlag, 2010). This German annotated translation with facing Hebrew text and scholarly introduction makes SY available in a handsome edition to contemporary Western scholarship.

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