

Shulamit Sela. *Sefer Yosef ben Guryon ha-'Arvi*. 2 vols. Jerusalem: Mekhon Ben-Zvi le-ḥeḳer ḳehilot Yiśra'el ba-Mizraḥ, Yad Yitshaḳ Ben-Tsevi veḥa-Universiṭah ha-'Ivrit bi-Yerushalayim, 2009. 685 pp. 210 New Israeli Shekels, cloth, ISBN 978-965-235-133-3.

Reviewed by Steven Bowman

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Commissioned by Jason Kalman (Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion)

Sepher Yosippon is a unique history of the Second Temple period of ancient Israel first extant in a Hebrew manuscript dated to mid-tenth-century southern Italy. Whether it was copied or written then is as yet unresolved. It has influenced Jewish culture and literature for the subsequent millennium. A scholarly edition of the Hebrew *Yosippon* was published by David Flusser in 1978 and a subsequent volume of notes, commentary, and interpolations in 1980. A second edition of the text appeared in 1982. Flusser called for a scholarly edition of the Arabic version of *Sepher Yosippon* in order to clarify aspects of this composite text. He might have added a call for a scholarly edition of the Syriac version that sheds its own light on the Hebrew *Yosippon*.

Shulamit Sela took up Flusser's challenge in her comprehensive 1991 dissertation under the direction of Moshe Gil at Tel Aviv University. Her untimely demise interrupted publication of this important edition, which has been edited by her colleagues and published by the Mekhon Ben Zvi in Jerusalem. These two handsome volumes present a near complete edition of the Arabic *Yosippon* and include the version that Ibn Khaldun found in Cairo among the Copts that he summarized in his *Ibar* (fourteenth century); and the Judeo-Arabic fragments of *Sepher Yosippon* found

in the Cairo Geniza that Gil, among others, identified and that he entrusted to his doctoral student. Sela weaves these two sources together (the Genizah material is in brackets *ad locum*) in her Hebrew translation that comprises volume 1 of the edition.

These two texts, the Hebrew *Yosippon*--first evident from a manuscript either copied, translated, or written in 953--and the Arabic *Yosippon*--whose chronology is also evident from tenth-century sources--are intertwined in a double helix of translation and counter-translation according to Sela's analysis. As has long been known, there are three major Latin sources for *Sepher Yosippon*: Maccabees, Josephus's *Jewish War*, and Pseudo-Hegesippus's *De excidio urbis Hierosolymitanae*. The Hebrew author (or authors, as Sela argues), who was fluent also in Latin, had access to the Vulgate, its Apocrypha, and some ancient (Livy and Virgil's *Aeneid*) and late antiquity sources (e.g., Orosius, among others).

Sela's edition offers two important innovations to the study of the Hebrew *Yosippon*. First and foremost is an edition of the Coptic Church's text of the Arabic *Yosippon* already analyzed by Julius Wellhausen along with the Hebrew *Yosippon*. She also adds an edition of the Judeo-Arabic fragments of the *Yosippon* salvaged from the Ge-

nizah, which helps us understand its diffusion and restores a more complete text. Her second contribution is a detailed analysis of the growth of the *Yosippon* tradition, beginning with its origins as a brief history of the Maccabeans, through the chronicle of Herod and his progeny, and the later additions that came to characterize the *Yosippon* tradition more familiar to the continuing millennium of readers. As part of this analysis, she provides a critical line-by-line literary discussion to Flusser's Hebrew *Yosippon* and his own detailed critical historical commentary.

As part of her analysis of the Arabic *Yosippon*, Sela revisits the scholarship on the near lost Arabic *Book of Maccabees*, which is partially preserved in the Coptic Bible and in fragments from the Genizah, and in particular the contributions of Wellhausen. She argues that the Arabic translation from a Hebrew *Book of the Hashmanim* (sic) is early (post-Pseudo-Hegesippus) and that it indeed resolves some of the literary and plot difficulties in the Hebrew *Yosippon*, e.g., Philo's mission to Caligula. She also identifies an Arabic *Book of Joseph ben Gurion/Kuryan*, which also bears a secondary title of *Book of the Maccabees*.

Sela argues from her literary critical analysis of the Arabic text that both the Hebrew and the Arabic *Yosippon* are composite texts whose constituent elements were written at different times by separate authors. Here, she follows nineteenth-century scholarship among Jews and Christians as opposed to most twentieth-century scholars who presume a single author for the Hebrew *Yosippon*. She lists and discusses in detail six stages in the formation of the book: the kernel of the book erroneously ascribed to Yoseph ben Gurion, which retells the Great Revolt against Rome (this more than likely is taken from Pseudo-Hegesippus); Herod and the Maccabean period, the latter based on the Arabic *Book of Maccabees* (stylistically it draws from Mishnaic and Talmudic sources and from a Latin Josephus dated to 576); Alexander's history (not the interpolation of Pseudo-Kallis-

thenes, which is a product of the eleventh century); the period from Cyrus to Alexander; the introductory chapter that updates Genesis chapter 10 to the first half of the tenth century (this is the period of Arabic translation of *Sepher Yoseph ben Gurion* and may indicate a date for stages 3 and 4 as well); and a systematic editing (note date of 953) to unify the text (this stage is lacking in the two Arabic versions). Hence, she argues, that early tenth-century references to material in *Sefer Yosippon* likely comes from the different stages that were already in circulation prior to the final editing in the mid-tenth century. This final editing does allow for a single authorial voice that even admits that it is a composite text.

Sela acknowledges that sections of the Hebrew *Yosippon* are lacking in the Arabic version, e.g., the stories of Daniel and Zerubabel. Paulina's Affair in Josephus is expanded in Pseudo-Hegesippus from which the Hebrew author (in Flusser's edition chapter 57) develops a satirical polemic against Christianity, which he drew from pro-Christian allusions in Pseudo-Hegesippus. Also the conquests of Hannibal are lacking in the Arabic versions. Whether these omissions are due to lack of sources in Arabic, e.g., Livy, or to sensitivity in the case of Paulina is unknown. Lacking too are the clever word plays in Hebrew and the Hebrew author's midrashic adjustment of the sources, including Mattityahu's call for war against the Seleucids: "Be strong and let us be strengthened and let us die fighting and not die as sheep led to slaughter" (my translation from Flusser, vol. 1, p. 76). Herod's attempted suicide on the eve of his natural death is lacking in drama in the Arabic version. The section on the woman who ate her son is quite different in the Arabic and comes earlier in the sequence of the siege in connection with the famine. Many of the differences between the Arabic and the Hebrew then can be ascribed to the later reediting of the *Yosippon* texts by a master Hebraist (who does not show any knowledge of Arabic) in southern Italy, which was en-

joying a renaissance of Hebrew language in the ninth and tenth centuries, if not earlier.

Sela also recalls for the reader that Ibn Khaldun was influenced by the content of the Arabic *Yosippon* in his treatment of the ancient Jews in his *Ibar*. Unfortunately, she does not explore this facet of the Arabic *Yosippon*, which is part of the Coptic Bible, and the knowledge of Second Temple Jewish presence in Jerusalem, which is now being denied by contemporary mullahs. Interestingly, the methodological statements in the Hebrew version do not appear in the Arabic version and so it is unlikely that Ibn Khaldun may have been influenced by the Hebrew author. Nonetheless, Sela's edition suggests new avenues of research into the historical traditions of Jews in the Muslim world and their experience in the Land of Israel and Jerusalem during the Second Temple period.

The appearance of Hebrew and Arabic scholarly editions has stimulated renewed interest in this seminal medieval book whose influence has been profound on Jews, Christians, and Muslims for the past millennium. Readers can now appreciate even more the literary and dramatic style of the Hebrew *Yosippon* and the intellectual and linguistic skills of its author. There is no question but that this handsome and well-designed edition of the Arabic *Yosippon* opens a new chapter in the understanding of the literary traditions of *Sefer Yosippon*.

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