

BOOK REVIEW

FLUSSER'S *JOSSIPON*, VOL. II

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The Josippon (Josephus Gorionides), Edited with an Introduction, Commentary and Notes, by David Flusser. Vol. II, Jerusalem, Bialik Institute, 1980, xi + 404 p., 8 pl.

ספר יוסיפון. יצא לאור, סדר והוגה על-פי כתב-יד בלויית מבוא, ביאורים וחילופי גרסאות, מאת דוד פלוסר. כרך שני: מבוא, חילופי גרסאות, מפתחות. ירושלים, מוסד ביאליק, תשמ"א

The *Josippon* was a rare product of medieval Jewry which served during the Middle Ages as the main source for historical information among the Jews, was translated into many languages, and achieved a quasi-canonical status alongside rabbinic literature. The first volume of this work, reviewed in an earlier number of this journal (*Immanuel* 10 (1980), 66–68), presented Prof. Flusser's excellent edition of *Josippon*. It also heralded Flusser's great discovery of the original version, and his convincing demonstration of the gradual growth of the work in its various editions. Thus, the popular and even semi-scholarly editions available no longer represent the work of the original writer. This volume contains the introduction to that edition (pp. 1–252); textual variations (pp. 253–375) and the detailed indices (pp. 376–404). It is enhanced by eight plates taken from medieval manuscripts illustrating some of the themes of the book. Flusser's great erudition and linguistic skills are again demonstrated on the pages of this work.

The detailed introduction deals with the following subjects: the textual history of *Josippon*, with chapters describing the text available to Rabbi Gershom of Mayence; the other manuscripts of Version A; the Arabic version of *Josippon*; version B; Version C; the description of the coronation of the Roman emperor in version C; and the other versions of *Josippon*. Flusser deals with the differences among the various versions, the sources of additions and interpolations in the various editions and the meaning and referents of specific names and terms. Of

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particular interest is the discussion of the coronation, which is ultimately based on the coronation of Otto I in 962, a later interpolation found only in Version C. Flusser makes extensive use of recent research in late Byzantine and early medieval European history in his discussion of this and other facets of the work.

The next part of the introduction concerns the beginnings of Christianity and the search for Jesus' body in the *Josippon* narrative, the translations of *Josippon* and the promulgation of the book. In the subsequent section the main emphasis is on the author of *Josippon*, his date, his birthplace and his locale. Flusser reaches his conclusions on the basis of a careful study of the author's remarks about himself and the geographic references in the text. The Jewish and non-Jewish world that emerges from the narrative is described and analysed. The author superimposed upon the Roman world about which he spoke the habits, customs, thought patterns and attitudes of his own day. Flusser believes that the author was a contemporary and countryman of Shabbetai Donolo, a tenth century physician and author who lived in Southern Italy, in the area controlled by the Byzantines. He demonstrates that the author of *Josippon* was dependent on Donolo's writings and suggests that it was composed between 946–965, also offering internal evidence for this date. This will doubtless become a focal point of discussion among scholars in the future, for other dates and locales have been suggested in the past and still other data may be uncovered or extracted from *Josippon* itself.

Flusser demonstrates that one of the chief sources of the work was a Latin translation of Josephus, although the author did not attribute his work to Josephus. Although Greek was the cultural language of this part of Southern Italy at the time and was known to the author, his cultural language was Latin and he had a wide-ranging knowledge of both Christian and pagan sources. His Hebrew phrases were oft-times modified by the Christian background of the material which served as his sources. Flusser does not think that the author was a learned rabbi, or teacher by profession but rather, like Donolo, was a physician with wide erudition. He not only used the Latin translation of Josephus, but also made use of as difficult an author as Hegešippus and was familiar with the chronicles and histories circulating in his day, as particular stories may be shown to be dependent on one source or another. The author's purpose was to make the work of Josephus and other writers available to his coreligionists who read only Hebrew.

The discussion of *Josippon's* sources leads naturally to his role as a scholar and student of history. Flusser, in a chapter on the authors "world-view," analyses the *Josippon's* place in Jewish literature on the basis of the original text and the author's role as a historian. He disagrees with those who have tried to find a historical-philosophical basis to the narrative, a cycle of *galut* and *ge'ula* (Exile and Redemption). Rather, the author mirrors his sources and the ideas prevalent in his period. But Flusser also emphasizes the author's role as a historian who ex-

exercised clear and independent thought in approaching and treating his sources. Thus, he sees the war against the Greeks in the Maccabean period as a liberating act, but the war against the Romans as a disaster from the religious-national point of view — his emphasis being different from that of Josephus. However, the author was not a theologian, his mode of thought being concrete rather than abstract and his faith both unqualified and lacking in subtlety.

There is also an important chapter on *Josippon* as an artistic creation, which shows how affective and effective his narrative, his descriptions and his choice of words were in the original version. In this version, the close connection between *Josippon* and its Latin sources can be detected. The prose style of *Josippon* is analyzed, as well as the psychological development of character in the hands of the author. The portrayal of a character found in Josephus, often influenced by Josephus' own prejudices and those of his sources, is transformed into a fresh and attractive narration.

The final chapter of the introduction discusses the Hebrew Alexander tale, published by Flusser as a supplement in the first volume. The popularity of the Alexander saga is attested by the versions extant in many languages, from antiquity into the middle ages. In the course of time this tale was interpolated into *Josippon*. Flusser shows that it was originally an independent composition, probably translated from the Greek. Flusser again points to Southern Italy as the most likely origin for this composition in Hebrew and again notes its importance for the transmission and development of Jewish culture, in its many aspects, in Europe. This was the subject of a recent conference at Bari.

David Flusser put over thirty years of research and writing into these volumes. They were well worth waiting for and we are all indebted to him. One may strongly urge that it would be fitting to put out an edition of the basic text with a translation and a condensed introduction and notes in English or some other European language.

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