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The Name of the Ruse: The Toss of a Ring to Save Life and Honor

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The death of the Mother and her Seven Sons is one of the most affecting and best known stories in ancient Jewish literature. It first appears in 2 Maccabees 7, is developed in 4 Maccabees 8-17, is presented in different forms in rabbinic literature, and finds a home in the Jewish folktales and historical writings of medieval times. It also entered the Christian literary tradition. The tale continues to attract scholarly attention, from students of history, folklore, literature, and rabbinics. In this essay I would like to focus on a little-discussed detail that appears in several of the rabbinic versions.ⁱ

Here is the story according to Lamentations Rabbah:ⁱⁱ

It is related of Miriam, the daughter of Tanhum, that she was taken captive with her seven sons. The emperor took and placed them in the innermost of seven rooms.

He had the eldest brought and said to him, "Prostrate yourself before the image." He answered, "God forbid! I will not prostrate myself before an image." "Why?" asked the king. "Because it is thus written in our Torah ..." He immediately had him taken out and slain.

[Each of the next five brothers is similarly slain after quoting an apposite verse from the Bible explaining his refusal to bow to the image.]

He had the seventh brought, who was the youngest of them all, and the king said, "My son, prostrate yourself before the image." He answered, "God forbid!" "Why?" asked the king. "Because it is thus written in our Torah... Not only that, but we have sworn to our God that we will not exchange him for any other god..."

The emperor said to him, "Your brothers had had their fill of years and of life and had experienced happiness; but you are young, you have had no fill of years and life, and have not yet experienced happiness. Prostrate yourself before the image and I will bestow favors upon you." He replied, "It is written in our Torah... You are of no account and so are his [God's] enemies..."

The emperor said to him, "See your brothers are slain before you. Behold, I will throw my ring to the ground in front of the image; pick it up so that all may know that you have obeyed my command." He answered, "Woe unto you, O emperor! If you are afraid of human beings who are the same as yourself, shall I not fear the supreme King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be he, the God of the universe!" [The conversation continues, the youth citing numerous biblical verses to prove that the gods of the gentiles have no power.]

The king immediately ordered him to be put to death. [The youth and his mother bid each other a fond farewell.]

Other recensions of Lamentations Rabbah differ somewhat from the text translated here, but these differences are not germane to my discussion.ⁱⁱⁱ In this essay I am interested in the ruse of the ring, the emperor's offer to the young man that he save his life by bowing down to retrieve the emperor's ring, thus pretending to bow down before the image. A midrashic collection known as Lamentations Zuta has this version of that episode:^{iv}

The Caesar said to him, "I see that there is much wisdom in you. You are young. I have pity on your life. Come here." The youth went to him. He [the Caesar] said to him, "Come, I will throw you my signet ring before the idol; you go and bring it. Let them [the onlookers] see you and say, 'It is on account of the Caesar^v that he is worshiping the idol.' Thus you will save yourself and we shall not kill you, the way we have killed your six brothers. But please do me honor before my enemies."^{vi} He said to him, "Woe to you, Caesar. If your own honor is so important, how much more so is the honor of the King of the kings of kings, who lives forever and ever!"

Here is the Bavli's version:^{vii}

The emperor said, "I will throw down my seal before you and you can stoop down and pick it up, so that they will say of you that you have conformed to the desire of the king." He replied, "Woe to you, Caesar, woe to you, Caesar;

if your own honor is so important, how much more the honor of the Holy One, blessed be He!"

Other versions offer further variations, and some versions omit the ring episode altogether; none of these is my concern here.^{viii}

Why does the persecutor offer a ruse?

Why does the persecutor offer the martyr a ruse? The answer is threefold: the persecutor offers a ruse in order to save face; to save the martyr's life; and to win the contest. I shall discuss each of these points in turn.

The persecutor offers the ruse to save face and preserve his authority in front of the crowd of onlookers. In *Lamentations Rabbah* the persecutor wants the martyr to pick up the ring "so that all [the onlookers] may know that you have obeyed my command." In *Lamentations Zuta* the persecutor tells the youth, "Let them [the onlookers] see you and say, 'It is on account of the Caesar that he is worshiping the idol' ... please do me honor before my enemies." In the *Bavli* he says, "so that they [the onlookers] will say of you that you have conformed to the desire [lit. the order] of the king." The martyr flouts the persecutor's authority, and the persecutor wants it back if only for appearance's sake.

The persecutor is not a pathological monster. He does not want the martyr to die; he wants the martyr to be reasonable and to live. In *Lamentations Rabbah* he tells the martyr, "Your brothers had had their fill of years and of life and had experienced happiness; but you are young, you have had no fill of years and life, and have not yet experienced happiness. Prostrate yourself before the image and I will bestow favors upon you."^{ix} The narrator provides no sign that these blandishments are insincere; on the contrary, the persecutor wants the martyr not to be a martyr.

The persecutor offers the ruse in order to win the contest. He does not demand the conversion of the martyr. For the martyr the confrontation with the persecutor is a battle between Right and Wrong, Good and Evil. For the persecutor, however, the

confrontation is simply a struggle to get the martyr to obey the laws of the empire. The martyr wants to convert the persecutor to the Truth (hence the strings of biblical verses that flow out of the mouths of the seven sons); the ruse demonstrates that the persecutor will be satisfied with mere compliance. If the martyr would just bow down to the idol the persecutor would declare victory, everyone would go home, and the would-be-martyr could continue to believe in whatever God he wished. For the persecutor this is a battle about compliance; formal compliance, even if insincere and via a ruse, suffices.^x

In other words, the ruse and all that is implied by the ruse humanize the persecutor, making him almost a sympathetic figure. Why then does the narrator, who obviously regards the martyr as the hero of the tale, include the ruse? Wouldn't it have been simpler to make the persecutor wicked through and through? The answer is twofold: the narrator is beholden to literary tradition, and the narrator knows how real persecutors behave.

The narrator is beholden to literary tradition. In 2 Maccabees, the ultimate source of the rabbinic story, the persecutor offers the brothers various rewards if they accept his demands (he does so in 4 Maccabees too).^{xi} What is more significant, perhaps, is that 2 Maccabees and 4 Maccabees also tell of a persecutorial ruse, not in the story of the Mother and her Seven Sons but in the story of Eleazar which precedes it. The king's agents try to compel the aged Eleazar to eat pork; he refuses. Then:^{xii}

Those in charge of that unlawful ritual meal took the man aside privately, because of their long acquaintance with him, and urged him to bring meat of his own providing, such as he could legitimately eat, and to pretend to be eating some of the meat of the sacrifice prescribed by the king; in this way he would escape the death penalty, and be treated kindly because of their old friendship with him.

Here too the persecutor offers a ruse in order to save the martyr's life. Formal compliance with the persecutor's demands (in this case pretending to eat pork while really eating kosher meat) will suffice.

A humane persecutor who does not wish to execute the martyr is an image that our narrator inherited from his sources. The historical reality of religious persecutions in the Roman empire contributed as well. When confronted by would-be Christian martyrs, Roman persecutors – at least some of them, at least some of the time – begged the martyrs to reconsider, and even on occasion suggested a ruse by which the martyr could give the impression of sacrificing to the emperor while not actually doing so.^{xiii} Rabbinic literature too knows of a ruse that was offered by a Roman persecutor to two Jewish martyrs. The story appears in a discussion in the Yerushalmi about the conditions that mandate martyrdom. In private, that is, when a gentile compels a Jew to violate a commandment of the Torah in a one-on-one situation, the Yerushalmi says that the Jew should violate the Torah in order to save his life, unless the gentile is compelling the Jew to violate the prohibition of idolatry, or murder, or prohibited sexual intercourse, in which case the Jew should surrender his life. But, continues the Yerushalmi, in public, that is, in the presence of other Jews, the law is different:^{xiv}

In public he [the Jew] should not listen to him [the gentile] even as to a light commandment. [Rather he should allow himself to be killed.] Just like Lulianus and his brother Pappus, who were given water in a colored glass and did not accept it from them.

Lulianus and Pappus are remembered in any number of rabbinic texts as martyrs in the period of Trajan or Hadrian.^{xv} This Yerushalmi passage gives a one-sentence summary of what must have been originally a much longer story, which, alas, is not extant. Lulianus and Pappus were offered a ruse (water in a colored glass) in order to allow them to pretend that they were violating a “light commandment” when they were not actually doing so. Apparently this means that the persecutor was trying to compel them to drink gentile wine; this they refused to do. The persecutor then offered them a ruse: do not drink wine; drink water from a wine colored glass instead. This would give the illusion of compliance. The martyrs refused, because in a time of persecution and in the presence of other Jews, loyal Jews may not give the appearance of violating even a “light” commandment of the Torah. If I have interpreted the story correctly, it too has a

persecutor who offers the martyrs a ruse in order to give them a chance to save their lives.^{xvi} His behavior conforms to the behavior of Roman persecutors in Christian stories.

Literary tradition and the behavior of Roman persecutors gave our narrator the image of a reasonable persecutor who wished to save the life of the martyr if he could, even by a ruse.

Why does the martyr refuse the ruse?

The persecutor offers the martyr a ruse by which to save his life, and yet the martyr refuses. According to 2 Maccabees the refusal of the aged Eleazar to accept the ruse that would have saved his life made his former admirers look upon him as insane.^{xvii} Indeed, Christian martyrologies are filled with passages showing that Christian martyrs were looked upon by their persecutors as, at best, completely unreasonable, and, at worst, completely mad.^{xviii} Why, in fact, does the martyr of our story refuse the ruse of the ring? Why does he prefer death to pretence?

The narrator does not have to explain this point because it would have been obvious to rabbinic readers. The abhorrence of images and image-worship was deeply ingrained among rabbinic Jews, as is evident from Mishnah tractate Avodah Zarah ("Idolatry") and numerous other texts. This abhorrence is well attested also in second temple times.^{xix} Perhaps if the martyr had been alone in a room with the persecutor, he might have accepted the ruse, but he was not alone. Although the martyr does not refer to the onlookers in his reply to the persecutor, surely the narrator wants us to understand that their presence was an important consideration for the martyr (cf. Pappus and Lulianus). The martyr does not want to give them the impression that he is bowing to the idol because if he does, they may conclude that under duress violating the law is permitted, thus weakening their own resolve to resist the persecutor. This is the argument by which the elderly Eleazar in 2 Maccabees explains his refusal to accept the persecutor's ruse, and we may assume that the same logic is at work here.^{xx} If this is

correct, the martyr's decision is illuminated by the following text from the Babylonian Talmud:^{xxi}

If a thorn becomes seated in one's foot in front of an idol, he must not bend over to remove it because he might appear to be bowing to the idol. But if he [can bend over in such a way that he] does not appear [to be bowing to the idol], it is permitted.

If one's coins became scattered on the ground in front of an idol, he must not bend over to retrieve them because he might appear to be bowing to the idol. But if he [can bend over in such a way that he] does not appear [to be bowing to the idol], it is permitted.

If a fountain [or: spring] flows before an idol, one must not bend over to drink from it, because he might appear to be bowing to the idol. But if he [can bend over in such a way that he] does not appear [to be bowing to the idol], it is permitted.

The text continues with a fourth paragraph in the same vein. Appearing to bow to an idol is just as prohibited as actually bowing to it, so much so that our martyr is prepared to die rather than give such an appearance. In the eyes of the narrator this stance is clearly heroic; the martyr is a religious virtuoso, setting an example of piety and determination to which we, the readers, should aspire.

In other contexts rabbinic narrators do approve of a ruse to save one's life, even if the ruse gives the impression that one is violating Jewish law. In a long, fantastic, and picaresque Aramaic tale, the Talmud describes how R. Meir, the hero, facilitates the escape of his wife's sister from a brothel to which she had been consigned by the Romans as punishment. As a result R. Meir is a wanted man. The story continues:^{xxii}

They [the Romans] then engraved R. Meir's likeness on the gates of Rome and proclaimed that anyone seeing a person resembling it should bring him there. One day [some Romans] saw him and ran after him, so he ran away from them and entered a harlot's house. Others say he happened just then to see food

cooked by gentiles and dipped in one finger and then sucked the other. Others again say that Elijah the Prophet appeared to them as a harlot who embraced him. God forbid [*has ve shalom*], said they; were this R. Meir he would not have acted thus! [They left him.] He then arose and ran away.

R. Meir is wanted by the authorities in Rome. He eludes capture by acting conspicuously in a manner that so ill-befits the real R. Meir that the authorities conclude that he is not their quarry. And what un-Meir like act did R. Meir perform so as to give his chasers the slip? The story provides three versions, the first and third of which seem to be variations on the same idea. He was seen entering a whore house in version number one; he was seen being embraced by a whore – in reality the prophet Elijah in disguise – in version number three. (For some reason brothels and whores play a large role in this tale.) The middle version is the most interesting for our purposes. “He happened just then to see food cooked by gentiles; he dipped in one finger and then sucked the other.” His pursuers thought they saw him eating non-kosher food and concluded that he could not be R. Meir. By means of this ruse R. Meir escaped.

R. Meir’s ruse resembles the ruse offered to the aged Eleazar in Second Maccabees, the crucial difference being that R. Meir used the ruse successfully to save his life, whereas Eleazar refused. Why does R. Meir employ a ruse shunned by the aged Eleazar? Shall we conclude that the two stories stand in ideological opposition one to the other? Was forbidden food more of an ideological boundary marker for Greek-speaking Jews of the western diaspora (like the author of 2 Maccabees) than for the Aramaic speaking Jews of Babylonia? Note too that in its rabbinic version the tale about the Mother and her Seven Sons revolves around not the eating of pork, as in 2 Maccabees, but the worship of idolatry. So perhaps 2 Maccabees is tougher on forbidden food than the Babylonian Talmud. Perhaps. An alternative, and I think a more likely, explanation would be that Eleazar sets the paradigm of behavior in a time of general persecution and in front of Jewish onlookers. In this situation, as the Talmud itself says, the violation of even “a light commandment” is sufficient warrant for martyrdom. R. Meir’s incident, however, did not take place during a time of general

persecution, and the only onlookers apparently were his gentile pursuers. In this situation perhaps even Eleazar would have performed R. Meir's ruse to save his life.

The toss of a ring

In the rabbinic tale obeisance to an idol was the ultimate un-Jewish act; for Greeks, at least of the classical period, obeisance to a human being was the ultimate un-Greek act. Obeisance (*proskynesis* in Greek) was a gesture of submission not fitting for a human to give or receive. The fact that Persian monarchs and dignitaries regularly received obeisance from their inferiors was an unmistakable sign of their un-Greekness. When Alexander the Great demanded the Persian *proskynesis* from his Greek and Macedonian courtiers, they balked at his command. Such an act was appropriate for barbarians, not the free sons of Hellas.^{xxiii}

However, Greek states had much traffic with the Persian court in the classical period. What was a Greek legate to do when he came on a mission to the Great King? Should he perform obeisance, that most un-Greek ritual, or should he refuse, thereby preventing him from gaining proximity to the king? Here is a story told by Cornelius Nepos, the Latin biographer of the first century BCE, about Conon the Athenian. The story is set in 395 BCE:^{xxiv}

[After arriving at the Persian court] Conon went first, according to the Persian custom, to Tithraustes, chief of the Thousand, who held the highest power next to the king, and explained that he wished an interview with the monarch.

Tithraustes replied to his request: "There is nothing to prevent, but do you consider whether you prefer a personal interview rather than to communicate what you have in mind by letter. For it is essential, if you come into his presence, to do homage to the king (which the Greeks call *proskynesis*). As a matter of fact no one is admitted to the royal presence without that formality.^{xxv} If that is repugnant to you, you may equally well accomplish what you wish through me, by instructing me as to your wishes."

To this Conon answered: "To me personally it is not repugnant to pay any possible honor to the king, but I fear that my country may be shamed if, having come from a state which is accustomed to command the other nations, I should conform rather to the customs of barbarians than of Athens." Accordingly, he wrote out what he wished and handed it to the satrap.

All visitors to the royal court who wished to see the king in person were required to do obeisance; if they did not wish to do so, they could submit their requests in writing instead.^{xxvi} Conon would have been willing to do obeisance to the Persian king (when in Persia do as the Persians...) but he realized that this would not go over well back home in Athens. So he handled his business with the king via the courtier and not in person.

The events of 367 BCE, at least as remembered centuries later, illustrate this theme dramatically. In that year several Greek cities sent legates to the Persian king Artaxerxes Mnemon, who was then a power broker in Greek politics. Our earliest and best source, Xenophon, a contemporary of the events, reports that the Thebans, who had just been victorious over the Spartans at the battle of Leuctra, were the big winners, largely through the diplomatic skills of their legate Pelopidas. They received all that they requested. The big losers were the Athenians, so much so that the Athenian legate Timagoras was condemned to death on his return home. He had abandoned the rest of the Athenian delegation, it was said, and took counsel with their archrival Pelopidas.^{xxvii} In other words, at that moment the Theban star was on the ascendant, the Athenian star was in decline; Artaxerxes recognized this fact, as did Timagoras, but the Athenians refused to do so.

When these events were told and retold centuries later, something interesting happened. The diplomatic triumph of Pelopidas and the diplomatic disaster of Timagoras became a morality tale. Plutarch, the famous essayist and biographer (ca. 100 CE), explains that the king favored Pelopidas because he had heard of the Theban's mighty exploits and was impressed by his probity and noble bearing. Pelopidas did nothing to shame or compromise himself and as a result enjoyed the king's favor all the more. Timagoras, in contrast, allowed himself to be bribed and bought by the Persian

monarch. Upon his return home he was executed for venality bordering on treason.^{xxviii} (Xenophon had said nothing of this.) Valerius Maximus, an orator and collector of anecdotes in the early first century CE, tells yet another version of the story:^{xxix}

The Athenians inflicted capital punishment on Timagoras because in the ceremony of saluting King Darius he had followed the adulatory custom of that nation. They were indignant that the glory of their whole city should be humbled before Persian dominion by the crawling flattery of a single citizen.

Timagoras was executed for doing obeisance to the king. Conon the Athenian had acted wisely in refusing to do so.

Between the uncompromising probity of Pelopidas and the venality of Timagoras was the cleverness of Ismenias the Theban. Plutarch narrates:^{xxx}

Ismenias the Theban also, and Pelopidas, who had just been victorious in the battle of Leuctra, went up to the king. Pelopidas did nothing to disgrace himself (*ouden aischron epoiêsen*); but Ismenias, when ordered to make the obeisance to the king, threw his ring down on the ground in front of him, and then stooped and picked it up, thus giving men to think that he was making the obeisance.

A fuller version of the story about Ismenias appears in the *Historical Miscellany* of Aelian (ca. 200 CE):^{xxxi}

I would not wish to conceal an action of Ismenias the Theban which was both ingenious and typically Hellenic (*sophon hama kai Hellênikon*). This man was an envoy for his country sent to the Persian king. On arrival he wished to meet the Persian personally to discuss the business for which he had come. The official who took messages in to the king and presented petitioners said to him, "But there is, Theban visitor (he spoke in Persian, using an interpreter, and the official's name was Tithraustes), a national custom in Persia that a person who has audience with the king should not converse with him before kneeling in homage. So, if you wish to meet him personally, this is the moment for you to do

what custom prescribes. Otherwise, if you do not kneel, the same result will be achieved by us on your behalf." Ismenias said, "Take me in." Entering and coming into full view of the king, he surreptitiously took off the ring he happened to be wearing and let it fall at his feet. Looking down quickly he knelt to pick it up, as if he were performing an act of homage. This gave the Persian king the impression of obeisance, but he had not done anything that causes Greeks a feeling of shame. He achieved everything he wished, and did not fail in any of his requests to the Persian king.

Plutarch and Aelian agree on the outlines of the story but disagree in assessing Ismenias' behavior. Plutarch says that Pelopidas did nothing shameful at the court of the great king, clearly implying that Ismenias did. Aelian, in contrast, says that Ismenias' action was "clever and Hellenic." Thus the events at the Persian court in 367 BCE, as remembered by writers of the Roman period, show us three responses to despotism: uncompromising resistance (Pelopidas); complete surrender (Timagoras); and something between resistance and surrender (Ismenias). That interstitial act was accomplished by a ruse, the toss of a ring, and was regarded by some as shameful (Plutarch), and by others as clever and quintessentially Hellenic (Aelian).

Whether shameful or clever, Ismenias's ring toss resembles the persecutor's proposed ring toss in the rabbinic version of the story of the Mother and her Seven Sons. Clearly the two stories are not the same. Ismenias tosses his own ring in order to comply with the demand of the king while simultaneously preserving (or, as Plutarch would have it, trying unsuccessfully to preserve) his own honor. Since this is not a martyrology, we miss the clash of wills that is the heart of the rabbinic story. On the rabbinic side, the ruse of the ring is offered by the persecutor to the martyr as a way for both of them to extricate themselves from the aporia in which they find themselves. Both the emperor and the youth will be able to save face; in addition, the emperor will be able to maintain his authority, and the youth will be able to save his life. But this is a martyr story, so of course the youth refuses the ruse of the ring. Better to die with

honor than to appear to have yielded to idolatry/tyranny. No doubt Ismenias the Theban would have taken the ruse.

What is the relationship of the ring toss in the rabbinic version of the story of the Mother and her Seven Sons to the ring toss in the story of Ismenias the Theban as told by Plutarch and Aelian? I do not know. I see three possibilities. Perhaps the retrieval of a tossed ring, calculated to give the appearance of obeisance, is a common narrative motif in the literatures of antiquity. Or perhaps it is a Greek narrative device in a Jewish story, or a Jewish narrative device in a Greek story. Of these three possibilities my favorite would be the second. Wouldn't it be delicious if it could be shown that the ruse of the ring is a Greek narrative motif that appears in a rabbinic story extolling resistance, even resistance unto death, to the ways of the gentiles?^{xxxiii} Let others come and investigate the matter further.

ENDNOTES

Many thanks to my student Adam Strich for assistance in tracking down the Christian martyrological material; my colleague Prof. Christopher P. Jones for reading a draft of this essay; and especially my friend Prof. Jan Willem van Henten for numerous helpful references and suggestions.

ⁱ Recent studies (aside from commentaries on 2 and 4 Maccabees) include: Shmuel Shepkaru, *Jewish Martyrs in the Pagan and Christian Worlds* (Cambridge University Press, 2006) 19-25, 54-59, 69-73; Simha Goldin *The Ways of Jewish Martyrdom [Alamot Ahevukha, Al Mavet Ahevukha]* (Israel: Dvir, 2002) 81-84 [Hebrew]; Jan Willem van Henten and Friedrich Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death: Selected Texts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002) 66-70 and 145-151; Tessa Rajak, "Dying for the Law: The Martyr's Portrait in Jewish-Greek Literature," in her *The Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) 99-133; Galit Hasan-Rokem, *Web of Life: Folklore and Midrash in Rabbinic Literature* (Stanford University Press, 2000) 114ff; Eli Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale*, trans. J.S. Teitelbaum (Indiana University Press, 1999) 95-98; Jan Willem van Henten, *The Maccabean Martyrs as Saviours of the Jewish People: a Study of 2 and 4 Maccabees* (Leiden: Brill, 1997). On the figure of the mother in medieval Jewish retellings of the story see Elisheva Baumgarten in *Zion* 71,3 (5766/2006) 273-300 [Hebrew]. A classic study is Gerson D. Cohen, "Hannah and Her Seven Sons in Hebrew Literature," in his *Studies in the Variety of Rabbinic Cultures* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991) 39-60, first published in Hebrew in the *Mordecai M. Kaplan Jubilee Volume* (1953) 109-122. (Cohen's article is a response to an article, also a classic, by Yehoshua Gutman in *Commentationes Iudaico-Hellenisticae in Memoriam Iohannis Lewy* [Jerusalem 1949] 25-37 [Hebrew].) R. Doran, "The Martyr: A Synoptic View of the Mother and her Seven Sons," in J. Collins and G. Nickelsburg ed., *Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism* (Chico: Scholars Press 1980) 189-221, gives an English synopsis of some of the versions. On the Christian retellings of the story, see Raphaëlle Ziadé, *Les martyrs*

Maccabées: de l'histoire juive au culte chrétien: Les homélies de Grégoire de Nazianze et de Jean Chrysostome (Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 80; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007).

ⁱⁱ Lamentations Rabbah 1.16 section 50, as translated by A. Cohen, *Midrash Rabbah: Lamentations* (London: Soncino Press, 1939) 130-133. (This is a translation of the standard recension of Lamentations Rabbah.)

ⁱⁱⁱ The recension edited by Solomon Buber (Vilna 5659/1899, frequently reprinted) pp. 42b-43a differs in numerous minor details from the standard recension. It also differs in two large points that may be relevant here. First, in Buber's edition the Caesar incarcerates each of the brothers separately, and interrogates each of them separately, pretending in each case that the other brothers have yielded to his demands; this is a ruse of sorts, and there is no hint of it in the standard printed text. Second, Buber's edition omits the emperor's solicitude for the boy's youth and the offer to bestow favors upon him if he yields.

^{iv} Solomon Buber, *Midrash Zuta on Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, and Ecclesiastes* (Vilna, 1925, frequently reprinted) p. 31a. My translation.

^v Lit. "on our account." My thanks to Yosef Yahalom for assisting me on this point.

^{vi} Apparently the bystanders are the enemies of the emperor. I am not sure that I have understood this correctly.

^{vii} B. Gittin 57b, as translated by Maurice Simon, *The Babylonian Talmud: Gittin* (London: The Soncino Press, 1936) 268 (slightly modified).

^{viii} Other versions of the ring ruse: see esp. Seder Eliahu 28 (ed. Ish Shalom 151-153) and Micha Joseph Bin Gorion [Berdyczewski], *Mimekor Yisrael: Classical Jewish Folktales* (Indiana University Press, 1976) 1.272 (no. 130). Omit the ring ruse: Pesikta Rabbati 43 (ed. Ish Shalom 180b; ed R. Ulmer, vol. 2 p. 965-966) and *Mimekor Yisrael*

1.273 (no. 131). For an excellent discussion of many of these versions, see G. Cohen, "Hannah and her Seven Sons."

^{ix} The recension published by Buber omits this paragraph (see note 3 above), perhaps because its authors thought that it makes the persecutor look too good.

^x Well noted by G. Cohen, "Hannah" 43. The same point had been made by Edmond Le Blant with reference to Christian martyrologies; see his *Les persécuteurs et les martyrs* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1893) 144-45.

^{xi} 2 Maccabees 7:24 // 4 Maccabees 12:5 (to the youngest son), 4 Maccabees 8:5-11 (to all the sons together at the beginning of the ordeal). Whether the rabbinic narrator knew either 2 Maccabees or 4 Maccabees is an open question.

^{xii} 2 Maccabees 6:21-22 // 4 Maccabees 6:12-15 (New American Bible trans.).

^{xiii} Begged the martyr to reconsider: this is a common motif in the texts assembled by Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), as noted by J. den Boeft & J. Bremmer, "Notiunculae Martyrologicae," *Vigiliae Christianae* 35 (1981) 43-56, at 47-49 with references (my thanks to Jan Willem van Henten for alerting me to this article); see too Le Blant, *Les persécuteurs* 144. Offered a ruse: Le Blant, *Les persécuteurs* 145, to which I was referred by G. Cohen, "Hannah" 44-45, writes as follows, "Quelquefois même on renonçait à exiger un semblant de sacrifice. 'Renie seulement le Christ, ou laisse croire à la foule que tu l'as fait par écrit.'" In note 3 Le Blant documents this statement by adducing "Rufin. *Hist. eccl.* IV, 14; *Passio s. Platonis* § 11 (Bolland. 22 jul.)." Something is wrong with these references. Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* is simply a Latin translation of Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and HE 4.14 has nothing germane to Le Blant's point. Neither in section 11 nor anywhere else does the *Passio Sancti Platonis* (which is available online in the *Acta Sanctorum* of the Bollandists for 22 July) have the persecutor offer the martyr a ruse, although it does document well the kindly persecutor motif, who offers all sorts of blandishments and

arguments to the martyr in the hope of saving his life. So I am puzzled. Le Blant was a great expert in Christian martyrologies, and, if Le Blant says that ancient Christian martyrologies have persecutors offering ruses to martyrs, then I am sure that ancient Christian martyrologies have persecutors offering ruses to martyrs. But I cannot document this statement. Nor can I find the ruse motif anywhere in Musurillo's collection.

^{xiv} Y. Sheviit 4.2 35a and Sanhedrin 3.6 21b; see the edition of Y. Sheviit by Yehuda Feliks (Jerusalem: R. Mass, 5761=2000) vol. 1 p. 230. This passage was adduced by G. Cohen, "Hannah" 44-45 n. 24 ; Le Blant, *Les persécuteurs* 145 n. 4 also referred to it, on the basis of J. Derenbourg, *Essai sur la géographie et l'histoire de la Palestine* (Paris 1867) 422. The redaction of the passage is discussed at length by Alyssa M. Gray, "A Contribution to the Study of Martyrdom and Identity in the Palestinian Talmud," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 54,2 (2003) 242-272, but she does not discuss the Pappus and Lulianus story. My translation follows Gray p. 244-245.

^{xv} Lea Roth, "Pappus and Julianus," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 14 (1972) 69; William Horbury, "Pappus and Lulianus in Jewish Resistance to Rome," in *Jewish Studies at the Turn of the Twentieth Century. Proceedings of the 6th EAJS Congress, Toledo, July 1998, Vol. I: Biblical, Rabbinical, and Medieval Studies*, ed. J. Targarona Borrás and A. Sáenz-Badillos (Leiden: Brill, 1999) 289-95. Lulianus is sometimes spelled Julianus.

^{xvi} On the interpretation of this story see the note of Y. Feliks ad loc. and G. Cohen, "Hannah," 44-45 n. 24.

^{xvii} Cf. 2 Maccabees 6:29, "Those who shortly before had been kindly disposed, now became hostile toward him because what he had said seemed to them utter madness."

^{xviii} See e.g. Arthur Droge and James Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1992) 140 nn. 56 and 57, and 141 n. 59.

^{xix} E.g. see the refusal of the three young men to bow to an idol in Daniel 3. For discussion see e.g. Martin Hengel, *The Zealots*, translated by David Smith (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989) 190-196. There is enormous bibliography on this point and little reason to assemble it here.

^{xx} 2 Maccabees 6:24-25.

^{xxi} B. Avodah Zarah 12a. The text of the standard printed edition (translated here) is confirmed by the Spanish manuscript edited by Shraga Abramson, *Tractate Abodah Zarah Ms. Jewish Theological Seminary* (New York 1957). I have translated the text in accordance with the Talmudic discussion ad loc. These rulings find their way into the medieval halakhic tradition; see Tur, *Yoreh De'ah* 150.

^{xxii} B. Avodah Zarah 18b, as translated by A. Mishcon and A. Cohen in the Soncino Talmud translation (London: Soncino Press, 1935) (except that I have substituted "gentiles" for "heathens"). There are different versions of this story in the manuscripts and testimonia. A glossator has brought the text of the Spanish manuscript (see previous note) into conformity with the text of the printed edition. Maimonides too (in his *Iggeret ha Shemad*) knew a version of this story that differs somewhat from the one translated here; see Abraham Halkin and David Hartman, *Crisis and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985) 20. For the text see Yitzhak Shilat, *Iggerot ha Rambam* (Maaleh Adumim - Jerusalem: Shilat Publisher, third edition 5755/1995) vol. 1 pp. 37-41.

^{xxiii} "Proskynesis" in *Der Neue Pauly* 10.443-444. Persian monarchs: Herodotus 1.134 (and elsewhere). Alexander the Great: Arrian 4.11-12.

^{xxiv} Cornelius Nepos, Conon 3, translated by John Rolfe in the Loeb Classical Library edition. On Conon's mission to the Persian court see Josef Hofstetter, *Die Griechen in Persien: Prosopographie der Griechen im persischen Reich vor Alexander* (Berlin: D. Reimer, 1978; *Archaeologische Mitteilungen aus Iran Ergänzungsband 5*) 106-111; on the date see 108.

^{xxv} This sentence is out of place in the manuscripts. See the textual note in the Loeb edition.

^{xxvi} See below for other appearances of this motif. See too Plutarch, Themistocles 27.

^{xxvii} Xenophon, *Hellenica* 7.1.33-38. On Timagoras see Hofstetter, *Griechen* 183-184; on Pelopidas see Hofstetter, *Griechen* 146-147.

^{xxviii} Plutarch, Pelopidas 30-31; Artaxerxes 22; the accusation that Timagoras had been bribed, omitted by Xenophon, is attested in other fourth century BCE sources; see Hofstetter, *Griechen* 183.

^{xxix} Valerius Maximus 6.3.ext. 2, as translated by D. R. Shackleton Bailey in the Loeb Classical Library edition. Valerius incorrectly names the king "Darius."

^{xxx} Plutarch, Artaxerxes 22.4, as translated by B. Perrin in the Loeb Classical Library edition. On Ismenias see Hofstetter, *Griechen* 95-96.

^{xxxi} Aelian, *Varia Historia* 1.21, as translated by N. G. Wilson in the Loeb Classical Library.

^{xxxii} At least this suggestion has chronology in its favor. Plutarch and Aelian antedate *Lamentations Rabbah* and the *Bavli* by at least two centuries.