

Fixing the Name, Shaping the Saint: The Mother of the Maccabees in Jewish and Christian Reception*

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Abstract: The Mother of the Seven Maccabean Martyrs offers a striking case of interreligious transformation in Late Antiquity. Anonymous in 2 Maccabees 7 and philosophically expanded in 4 Maccabees, she became a powerful symbolic figure in both Jewish and Christian traditions. This paper traces her reception from deliberate anonymity in Greek patristic texts – where she functions typologically as martyr, image of the Church, and Marian prefiguration – to the Syriac tradition, where she acquires the name Shamuni and a fully articulated martyrdom. Byzantine liturgy and art later stabilize the name Salomone, reflecting processes of saintly individualization and canonization. Meanwhile, Jewish adaptations in Midrash Lamentations Rabbah and b. Gittin reframe her story within post-Temple discourse, even renaming her Miriam in a context shaped by Marian devotion. Her evolving name and role reveal a dynamic field of entangled Jewish-Christian traditions in which martyrdom, motherhood, and identity are continuously renegotiated.

Keywords: The Mother of the Maccabees; Maccabean Martyrs; Motherhood; Identity; Name; Shamuni

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Introduction

The cult of the Maccabean martyrs and their mother is a unique phenomenon within the religious climate of late antiquity. Despite their Jewish origins and death for the laws of Moses, the Maccabean brothers and their mother were perceived in Christianity as archetypes of the sacrifice of Christ, becoming exempla for future Christian martyrs.¹ They were appropriated as

* Dear Jan, with this little contribution we want to congratulate you on your 80th birthday, and at the same time thank you for years of support, mentorship, and friendship at the Beyond Canon Centre for Advanced Studies in Regensburg. *Ad multos annos!*

1 For a sketch of the cult and veneration of the Maccabean martyrs and their relics in Antioch during Late Antiquity see Margaret Schatkin, “The Maccabean Martyrs,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 28 (1974), 97–113. Johannes Hahn, “The Veneration of the Maccabean Brothers in Fourth Century Antioch: Religious Competition, Martyrdom, and Innovation,” in G. Signori (ed.), *Dying for the Faith, killing for the Faith: Old-Testament Faith Warriors (1st and 2 Maccabees) in Historical Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 79–123, regarding

Christian saints already in the writings of Origen, Augustine, and Theophilus of Alexandria.

Late Antique texts on the Maccabean Martyrs show that the mother, though often overshadowed by her sons, played an important role in both Jewish and Christian traditions. This article traces the evolution of her character and the shifting values she embodied, following her trajectory from a minor figure in a Jewish text outside the biblical canon to a venerated Christian saint, and eventually back into Jewish tradition. Particularly revealing is the transmission of her name: once attested, it moves from Semitic origins to Graecized forms in early Christian art, is reshaped by patristic theology, and reappears in medieval Jewish contexts under a different name.

1. The Nameless Mother in Antique Sources

The books of the Maccabees describe the struggle of the Hasmonean family in the Seleucid kingdom and the beginning of the Jewish kingdom. There are four books of Maccabees: 1 Maccabees, written in Hebrew in Judea and 2 Maccabees, an epitomised version of Jason of Cyrene's Greek composition, were written around the time of the Hasmonean rebellion (second half of the second century BCE) and describe their events. The third book of Maccabees, written a little later, contains events of religious devotion in Judea and Egypt under Ptolemy. The fourth book of Maccabees is a Jewish philosophical tractate, probably written in Antioch or its surroundings in the first century CE.² This composition describes the persecution of the Jews by Antiochus IV 'Epiphanes' in 167 BC, which preceded the Maccabean revolt. All four books of Maccabees were preserved only in Greek and subsequently translated into other languages. None of the four books of Maccabees was included in the Jewish Bible, but due to their inclusion in the Septuagint, they are in parts deuterocanonical for Christians.³

the Synagogue of the Maccabees in Antioch, which was confiscated and transformed into their shrine. However, see discussion in Leonard V. Rutgers, *Making Myths: Jews in Early Christian Identity Formation* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 26–32.

- 2 David Arthur deSilva, *4 Maccabees: Introduction and Commentary on the Greek Text in Codex Sinaiticus* (Leiden, Boston: de Gruyter, 2006), xi; Tessa Rajak, "The Fourth Book of Maccabees in a Multi-Cultural City," in Yair Furstenberg (ed.), *Jewish and Christian Communal Identities in the Roman World* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 134–50, esp. 134.
- 3 1–3 Macc. are canonical in the orthodox church, 1–2 are deuterocanonical from the Catholic point of view. For reformed churches, all four books are considered apocryphal.

The name of the treatise in the earliest manuscripts is *4 Maccabees* (Μακκαβαίων δ', as in Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus). However, in church writers' compositions, such as Eusebius of Caesarea, and Jerome it was referred to as *On the Supremacy of Reason* (Περὶ αὐτοκράτορος λογισμοῦ).⁴ Eusebius and Jerome unjustly attributed it to Josephus Flavius, hence it was included in several early editions of his works.⁵ *4 Maccabees* is a philosophical Jewish sermon in Hellenistic style, and its purpose is to convince the audience that reason is superior to emotion, and that the Torah preserves the best philosophy, which can be truly tested even in death. To prove his point, the author recounts a harrowing tale of religious persecution under the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Faced with the edict to renounce their Jewish faith and partake of forbidden foods, a mother and her seven sons courageously defy the king's orders. Each son, in turn, endured horrific torture rather than compromise his beliefs, ultimately choosing martyrdom. Throughout this ordeal, the mother remains unwavering in her faith, offering constant encouragement and support to her sons. The story of the mother and seven sons, however, is already briefly narrated in 2 Macc. 7; our author adjusts it to his Hellenic audience and expands it, giving the mother an extensive role.

As part of the philosophical-Hellenistic adaptation of 2 Macc. 7,⁶ the author of *4 Macc.* took the liberty of making minor changes in the narrative. For example, this composition is characterized by the use of Hellenistic rhetorical terms as 'competition' and 'struggle', as well as other philosophical ideas, such as the four virtues, brotherly love, and more.⁷ The mother appears to be a personification of Sophia, the Greek concept of wisdom, often depicted as a female figure.⁸ The composition emphasizes her age, nobility, wisdom, and strength.

The most striking difference concerns the fate of the mother: while in 2 Macc. the mother is simply put to death, in *4 Macc.* the author takes the liberty to expand the narrative and notes that according to some of the

4 DeSilva, *4 Maccabees*, xiii–xiv.

5 See Jan Willem van Henten, "4 Maccabees," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Apocrypha*, G. Oegema (ed.) (Oxford, 2021), 200–216, esp. 201.

6 Rajak, "The Fourth Book of Maccabees," 135.

7 Van Henten, "4 Maccabees," 203–4, 206, 209.

8 See, e.g., Proverbs 1, 8, 9; and in Ananda B. Geyser-Fouché, "A Love Triangle Between God, Sophia, and the Righteous Interwoven in the Retelling of the Pentateuchal Stories in Wisdom 10," *Journal for Semitics* 30:2 (2022), 15 pp.; George R. S. Mead, *Pistis Sophia* (London – New York: Theosophical Pub. Society, 1896), and more.

guards, the mother herself jumped to her death, in order to not have her body corrupted by their touch (4 Macc. 18.1). This change is not accidental but intended to present the mother as a tragic mythical heroine.

This philosophical infrastructure, alongside the Hellenistic ideals, and the re-occurring persecutions against Christians during the first centuries, led to the acceptance of the narrative of the martyrdom of the mother and her seven sons with enthusiasm, turning her into a symbolic figure in early Christianity and beyond, as an example for Entangled Traditions⁹ in both literature and visual art.

During the first centuries Eleazar and the mother and her seven sons served as a model for adherence to the Christian faith in a time of religious persecution. In the writings of Origen, Theophilus, and church fathers, such as Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, and Augustine, the Maccabean Martyrs were presented as proto martyrs who by their death testified the strength of their faith. In these compositions, however, the apologetic urgency for appropriating the Maccabees, and especially their mother, as Christian saints, is evident.¹⁰ These three great Christian scholars, active in the age of the formation of Christian religion and thought, had different agendas that could profit from this initiative.

9 Stephanie Hallinger, "Entangled Traditions about Judith: From Heroine to Vamp," in Jan Runggemeier, Elizabeth Shively (eds.), *Characters in Mind: The Migration of Characters in Early Jewish, Early Christian, and Greco-Roman Literature and Art* (Bonn – Leiden: Bonn University Press, forthcoming 2026), defines Entangled Traditions as "parabiblical traditions that include cultural manifestations in various media. They are defined by the interconnectedness of texts in the recipients' heads, their updating, reception, and presentation in all kinds of media. Those traditions usually center around a narrative that bears a special set of traits: A stable narrative core with unique, recognizable motifs is being transmitted over time, landscapes, religious and socio-cultural borders. During the process of transmission – orally, in written or artistic form –, these motifs are re-contextualized, so they fit into the new setting, offering potential for identification."

10 It is important to note that it is not sure whether some of these texts are referring to the Maccabean Martyrs of 2 and 4 Maccabees, Eleazar, the brothers and their mother, or the Hasmonean warriors.

According to van Henten, Hippolytus (Hippolytus: Comm. Dan. 10–11; PG 10, 649) refers in his commentary on Daniel explicitly to the Maccabees, implying 1 Macc. See Jan Willem van Henten, "The Christianization of the Maccabean Martyrs: The Case of Origen," in J. Leemans (ed.), *Martyrdom and Persecution in late Antique Christianity: Festschrift Boudewijn Dehandschutter* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 333–51, esp. 336, n. 16. The same goes for Tertullian's *Adversus Judaeos*, where he mentions the "*temporibus Machabeorum*" (Tertullian, *Adv. Jud.* 4).

(1) The first surviving source to appropriate the Maccabean Martyrs as Christian martyrs was Origen. According to Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, which contains the biography of Origen, in the time of the Neronian persecution, Origen's father, Leonides of Alexandria, was imprisoned because he was a Christian. Origen wished to join him in his martyrdom, but eventually, while he intended to give himself to the authorities, his mother took away all of his clothes, and hence he was forced to stay at home and abandon his plans.¹¹ In his treatise, Origen glorified the Mother for enduring her sons' death, unlike other mothers.¹²

(2) Gregory of Nazianzus delivered the first whole surviving sermon praising the Maccabean Martyrs, hence this oration is a pivotal point in the evolution of their veneration, as well as the mother as a separate symbolic figure.¹³ In this homily, Gregory stresses the urgent need to appropriate the Maccabean Martyrs as Christian ones:

the festival today is indeed in their honor, though not many recognize them because their martyrdom antedates Christ. 2 Yet they deserve universal recognition for their unswerving devotion to the ways of their fathers. (15.1)¹⁴

In paragraph 2 he addresses his audience directly:

Who were these people? Where did they come from? What kind of culture and education did they have so as to rise to such a peak of valor and renown that they are both honored annually with these festal processions and every heart treasures their glory in greater measure than these visible expressions indicate? (15.2)¹⁵

This question of Gregory, asked in the second part of his composition, lays the ground to praise their education, and more precisely, their educator,

11 Eusebius, *HE*, 6.1–2.

12 Origen, *Exhortation to martyrdom* 22–27. See Origen, *Prayer; Exhortation to Martyrdom*, trans. John J. O'Meara. Ancient Christian Writers 19 (Westminster: Newman Press, 1954), 162–67. Cyprian, *Fort.* 11 (CCSL 3:1, 205); Cyprian, *Ad Fortunatum* (CCSL 3, 183–216). And see Anna-Liisa Tolonen, *The Reception of the Maccabean Martyrs. Their Historiographical and Paradigmatic Functions in Antique and Late-antique Jewish and Christian Sources* (MA Thesis, Helsinki University, 2010), 5.

13 Martha Vinson, "Gregory Nazianzen's Homily 15 and the Genesis of the Christian Cult of the Maccabean Martyrs," *Byzantion* 64 (1994), 166–92, esp. 175–76.

14 Text: Migne, J.-P. (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus: series graeca*. Vol. 35 (Paris, 1857), 911–34; English translation by Martha Vinson, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Selected Orations* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 72.

15 Vinson, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 73.

the mother. Like Origen, he was in debt to his mother for his clerical career. As a son of a religiously mixed couple, Gregory's mother raised him to be a devoted Christian, despite his father's polytheistic belief, and in his view, she was responsible for his career as a churchman. In the same manner, the depiction of the Mother in his homily strengthens her sons' courage and their bold answers to Antiochus and even surpasses them. He dedicates most of his homily to her praise. Martha Vinson has convincingly shown that in this homily Gregory intended to depict the mother, as well as his own mother, Nonna, in assimilation with Greek mythological heroines, such as Hecuba, Hector's mother (*Iliad*, 22.79–89).¹⁶

However, Gregory had more at stake. As the Constantinopolitan bishop in the times of emperor Julian the Apostate, Gregory fiercely criticised this emperor's initiatives against the Christian community. As an oration that was intended to influence the emperor and most of all the members of his congregation in times of persecution, he delivered his 15th oration (*In Machabaeorum laudem*), in December of 362 CE, close to the Jewish festival of Hanukkah, which celebrates the Maccabees' triumph over the Seleucids.

While successfully contextualizing the 15th homily of Gregory as a discourse against Julian's edict which forbids Christian educators from teaching Greek literature (*Cod. Theod.* 13.3.5, issued on June 17, 362 CE),¹⁷ Vinson almost completely neglects Gregory's discourse with Jews and Judaism, and particularly his claims against Julian's initiative to reconstruct the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, in 362 CE.¹⁸ In this homily, the Mother's depiction and the family metaphor go much further than Homeric allusions to prove his grasp of mythological education, as Gregory urges his audience to martyrdom, as brothers originated from one womb:

Let us show ourselves true brothers, in death as well as in birth; and let us face the danger all as one and each for all. Eleazar, welcome us; mother, follow after us; [...] Recite, if you will, our deeds and point out to posterity and to those who love you the sacred common sepulchre of men born of one womb. (15.7)

16 Vinson, "Gregory Nazianzen's Homily 15," 167–168. About twenty years later, the bishop of Antioch and Greek Church father, John Chrysostom also delivered a sermon at the feast of the Maccabean martyrs. He was also one of the first prelates to praise the Maccabean Martyrs in his homilies. Chrysostom's agenda is clearly to elevate his see by prompting the local pride for having their shrine in that city.

17 *The Theodosian Code and Novels and the Sirmondian Constitutions*. Transl., comm., gloss., and bibl. by Clyde Pharr (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 88.

18 See Vinson, "Gregory Nazianzen's Homily 15".

The mother's death gives birth to the spiritual kinship of all Christians, the new sons of Abraham, the new Israel:

We are both sons and disciples of men who were shown the way by a pillar of *fire* and *cloud* [Ex 13.21], for whom the sea parted [Ex 14.21] and the river stood still [Jos 3.16] and the sun was stayed [Jos 10.13] and the bread rained down [Ex 16.4] and who stretched forth their hands and, with prayers as their missiles, put thousands to flight [Ex 17.11]; who overcame wild beasts and whom fire did not singe and before whom kings, awed by their courage, gave way [Dn 3–4.6]. (15.6)

By deploying Abraham as a prototype of the mother (with both of them ready to sacrifice their sons),¹⁹ Gregory lays the foundations of replacement theology, and claims the un-carnal-familial brotherhood-like connection of the Christian nation.²⁰ Moreover, he declares that the mother's sacrifice is even greater than Abraham's, who was willing to sacrifice his own child: "The heart of a man in a woman's body! What an incredibly magnanimous act, a sacrifice the equal of Abraham's, unless we dare call it even greater!" (15.4)²¹, as she sacrificed not only one son, and not "almost", but true sacrifice of seven sons. Thus, the mother triumphs over the Jewish Patriarch not only with her sacrifice, but also with excellence. Throughout his homily, and especially in paragraph 5, Gregory emphasizes that her victory is the highest of them all:

The brave children did not flinch before a single one (of the persecutor's threats and tortures), nor did their even braver mother. Instead, she rose high above it all and, commingling courage and love, gave herself as a glorious funeral offering for her children by following after those who had already passed on [...]. Yet finer still were the words their mother addressed to them both when she was encouraging them and later when she buried them. (15.5)²²

The Mother surpasses her sons in answers, boldness, and her sacrifice. Yet, "she raised her chin and smiled broadly just like an Olympic champion high of heart." (15.9) Gregory once again uses the Hellenistic champion metaphor,

19 See Tessa Rajak discussion regarding the role of Abraham in 4 Macc., as the father of Jewish people, Tessa Rajak, "The Maccabean Mother between Pagans, Jews, and Christians," in Carol Harrison et al. (eds.), *Being Christian in Late Antiquity: A Festschrift for Gillian Clark* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 39–56, esp. 41.

20 Of course, these ideas are already to be found in the NT (e.g. Rom. 9:6–13, Gal. 6:15) as well as Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, 135. More sources could be added here.

21 Vinson, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 74.

22 Ibid., 76.

as he does with the other martyr protagonists of his homily, comparing her achievement as a suffering mother to her sons' heroic death. She does not lament her sons' death, as "ordinary mothers do, *mothers in flesh alone*, whose children die without any record of achievement" (15.9).²³

Her final achievement, according to Gregory, is her perfect martyrdom, despite the original doubtful tone of 4 Maccabees (4 Macc 17.1):

After she finished speaking, she advanced to join her children. How? By moving with eager anticipation to the pyre – this was the punishment decreed – as though to a bridal chamber; without even waiting for the guards to take her; lest any impure hand so much as touch her pure and noble body. (15.10)²⁴

By declaring the mother's original doubtful death in Greek 4 Maccabees 8.1 a suicide for higher reasons, the Mother is elevated to be the spiritual mother of all (future) martyrs, hence building a bridge between the Jewish past and Christian present, and from there developing a symbolic role in artistic reception.

2. From Syriac Sources to Early Christian Art

The mother as bearing the Christian future and as a symbol for Christian familial relations is emphasized even more in other two textual witnesses from the same area, both of which are ecclesiastical compositions written at the end of the fourth century in Greek and translated into Syriac, as part of the famous Syriac *Codex of Edessa* (British Museum, Add. 12150), which its colophon dates to the year 411 CE.²⁵

The first testimony for the mother's status in these originally Greek texts is the Syriac translation of the Greek, *Encomium for the Martyrs*, which is the fifth composition in this codex.²⁶ It is hard to overestimate the pivotal role of the Maccabean Martyrs in this Encomium. Their, or perhaps it would be better to say the Mother's, commemoration is situated in the text among

²³ Vinson, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 80–81.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁵ On this codex see Wright William, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum Acquired since the Year 1838*, 3 vols. (London: Longmans, 1870–1872), 2.631–33.

²⁶ See Luise M. Frenkel, "The 'Encomium of the Martyrs' and the Syriac Reception of Eusebius of Caesarea," in S. Talay (ed.), *Überleben im Schatten: Geschichte und Kultur des syrischen Christentums. Beiträge des 10. Deutschen Syrologentages an der FU Berlin 2018* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2020), 81–101.

other “Old Testament martyrs”, such as Noah, Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael (in this order), Daniel, Jeremiah, Zechariah and Abel, and New Testament martyrs, preceded by Peter the Apostle, only then Stephen the proto-martyr; then moving to the other Apostle, Paul, and ending with a long list of Antiochian saints. In fact, the Mother is placed after Abel and before Peter. Being a bridge between Old and New Testament saints, and old and new heavenly commands, these martyrs occupied the lion’s share of the Encomium.²⁷ However, despite their importance for the local Antiochian church, which possessed their relics, this extended passage opens with the declaration: “But the crown of victory in the great contest both for men and for women, who are in confession (*or become confessors*), the mother of seven sons put on.”²⁸ Despite her doubtful death she is crowned as the ultimate martyr by the author of the Encomium, who was eager to emphasize her central role in her sons’ death, celebrating her motherhood:

A wise mother... O blessed woman, who didst bring forth with hard pains, and without griefs didst restore, by prayer, the fruit thou didst rear; thou, without laments, didst send a messenger for thyself before God. For (ﻫﻰ) what time is there, or what day, or what godly congregation of the passion of Christ, and glorious day of the memorial of his resurrection, when the members of the resurrection of the confessor Christ may not be remembered and honoured by every mouth and by every tongue?²⁹

In this text, the mother is lauded as a wise and true mother and her female characteristics are praised. The mother’s role is emphasized by her repeated sacrifices, and by the image of sending her youngest son as a messenger to God, showing her true devotion for Him. Here, the conjunction “for” (ﻫﻰ) serves as a pivotal rhetorical and causal bridge between the mother’s individual sacrifice and the universal glory of the Church. The author utilizes this term to provide a theological justification for the mother’s remarkable lack of lamentation; although she brought forth her sons with “hard pains,” she is depicted as a “blessed woman” who restores her “fruit” to God “without griefs” and “without laments”. The transition from private bereavement to a state of spiritual exaltation is mediated by the rationale introduced by “For”: the assurance that the martyrs have become “members of the resur-

27 Frenkel, “The Encomium,” 91 and n. 45.

28 William Wright, “The Encomium of the Martyrs,” *Journal of Sacred Literature*, NS 5 (1864), 403–8 (Syriac text) and *Journal of Sacred Literature*, NS 6 (1864/65), 129–33 (English translation).

29 Wright, “The Encomium”.

rection of the confessor Christ". By situating her sons within the eternal Christian liturgical cycle – specifically alongside the “passion of Christ” and the “glorious day of the memorial of his resurrection” – the text argues that their perpetual honor by “every mouth and by every tongue” effectively transcends the mother’s earthly loss. Consequently, the rhetorical function of “For” is to validate the mother’s “wisdom” in exchanging a temporal, personal tie for the martyrs’ participation in a sacred and collective divine memory. Therefore, according to the author, “the crown of victory in the great contest both for men and for women, who are in confession (*or become confessors*), the mother of seven sons put on.”³⁰ Elsewhere, Osnat Rance argued that this *Encomium* was written in the vicinity of Antioch and was meant to be read in one of the sermons during November to December.³¹ This was apparently the original date of the day of veneration of the Maccabean martyrs. It is evident, from Gregory Nazianzus’s sermons that, at his time the Maccabean feast used to be held in December.

Vinson has convincingly shown that Gregory’s Homily 15 was delivered in December, among other reasons, reading the reference to “these annual processions and festivals” as an allusion to the eight-day Jewish festival.³² However, in those years, there was an attempt to separate the Christian feast of the Maccabees from the Jewish celebration of Hanukkah – symbolizing the victory of Judaism over its persecutors –, which was also celebrated in December. Instead, in the Christian calendar, the feast was attached to the Jewish mourning day of the Temple destruction, in the month of Av. It seems that in John Chrysostom’s days this shift was accomplished.³³ Moreover, according to Obermann, “some calendars of the Oriental church list the Memorial day

³⁰ Wright, “The Encomium”.

³¹ Osnat Emily Rance, “‘Although Their Names Escaped Me’: Local Patriotism and Saints Commemoration in Late Antique Syria,” in Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony and Martin Goodman (eds.), *Essays on Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity in Honour of Oded Irshai* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2023), 141–57.

³² According to Vinson, “Gregory Nazianzen’s Homily 15,” 188. See also John Chrysostom, *The Cult of the Saints: Select Homilies and Letters*, introduced, translated, and annotated by Wendy Mayer with Bronwen Neil (Crestwood: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2006), 119; W. Mayer, “John Chrysostom,” in Johan Leemans, Pauline Allen et al. (eds.), *‘Let Us Die That We May Live’. Greek homilies on Christian Martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine and Syria c. 350 – c. 450 AD* (London: Routledge, 2003), 111–26, esp. 116, regarding veneration of the Maccabean martyrs *within* the city walls of Antioch, already in the time of Chrysostom.

³³ See John Chrysostom, *The Cult of the Saints*, 119; Mayer, “John Chrysostom,” 115.

as the Eight of August".³⁴ This date demonstrates even more the Christian intention to adopt the Jewish mourning day as the Christian veneration day of the Maccabees, rather than the Jewish feast commemorating the heroic deeds of the Hasmonean family.³⁵

Indeed, the Syriac Menologion, which is the last text (and considered to be of a later date than all other texts) in the same Syriac codex, sets her feast, alongside her sons, for the first of Av (August).³⁶ In this text, the mother finally received a name: a significant achievement for a woman, and she is called Shamuni ("the sons of Shamuni, those who are written in Maccabees"). Here, the Maccabees are called after their mother, and not the mother after her sons as in her nickname "the Mother of the Maccabees", or "Mother of seven sons".³⁷ The origin of the mother's name is uncertain; in later Christian sources, it appears in the form of "Salomone" without further explanation (and therefore assumed to be generally known).

Only around that time (the end of the fourth century), and probably in the same region, 4 Maccabees was translated into Syriac, and immediately gained wide recognition, as the many Syrian ecclesiastical compositions prove that were written under its inspiration.³⁸ However, the Syriac translation of the composition reveals several unique issues. The most striking one is the

34 Julian Obermann, "The Sepulchre of the Maccabean Martyrs," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 50 (1931), 250–65, p. 250.

35 Mayer, *The Cult of the Saints*, p. 119, and above, n. 31.

36 On this martyrology see in Nicholson (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity*, s.v. "Martyrology of 411, Syriac," 976.

37 כְּנַנְיָהּ בְּרִיגְדָא מְרִימָא מְרִימָא מְרִימָא מְרִימָא מְרִימָא מְרִימָא מְרִימָא מְרִימָא מְרִימָא מְרִימָא
 כְּנַנְיָהּ בְּרִיגְדָא מְרִימָא מְרִימָא מְרִימָא מְרִימָא מְרִימָא מְרִימָא מְרִימָא מְרִימָא מְרִימָא מְרִימָא
 William Wright, "An Ancient Syrian Martyrology," *Journal of Sacred Literature and Biblical Record* 8/16 (1866), 423–32. The origin of the mother's name is unclear. According to Robert Bensly, *The Fourth Book of Maccabees and Kindred Documents in Syriac* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1895), xiii, her name is apparently a corruption of the name חַשְׁמוֹנַיִת (Hashmonaite), which could be derived from the name Hasmonean (Ἀσμοναῖος), as they are called by Josephus. However, this assumption must be taken carefully into consideration, as the sound SH does not exist in Greek, and so might indicate a possible Jewish origin of her late, Syriac name. For another view on the mother's name Shamuni, see Witold Witakowski, "Mart(y) Shmuni, the Mother of the Maccabean Martyrs, in Syriac Tradition," in R. Lavenant (ed.), *VI Symposium Syriacum 1992: University of Cambridge, Faculty of Divinity, 30 August–2 September 1992* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1994), 153–68, esp. 155–57, where he suggests that it derives from the Hebrew number eight (shmonē), marking the number of the martyrs, i.e., Shmuni and her seven sons.

38 Most of the Syriac treatises dealing with the Maccabees are collected in Bensly, *The Fourth Book of Maccabees*.

difference in the composition's title. While in the Greek the title is "On the sole rule of reason" (Περὶ αὐτοκράτορος λογισμοῦ), or simply, 4 Maccabees, according to Robert Hiebert, in the Syriac translation the title is "The fourth book of the Maccabees and their Mother".³⁹ The Syriac title signifies the mother's role, leading its readership to expect her appearance in the focal point of the story, and demands the audience's regard for her sacrifice. Moreover, the Syriac translator significantly alters the mother's fate to align with a different theological emphasis. Rather than following the Greek original, which suggests she committed suicide to preserve her honor, the translator depicts her death as the culmination of prolonged physical agony. This shift transforms her from a figure of self-preservation into a martyr of endurance (chapter 22). Thus, in the Syriac tradition, her character developed according to the patterns of martyrological literature: The mother is depicted according to a male hero, and her steadfastness (ܐܬܝܪܐܬܐ, the eastern manly "virtus") is emphasized while she is bearing her suffering. This change likely expresses the needs of local contemporary Christian communities, who suffered from repeated persecution.

The different notions of the mother's fate seem to cause a split in the Christian view of the mother of the Maccabees, between Greek and Syriac Christian ecclesiastical texts: in Syriac literature, the mother is glorified for encouraging her sons to die and for her own martyrdom.⁴⁰ In Greek texts, however, there is no trace of her being tortured, and her good qualities and perfection as a woman and as a mother are emphasized. This division leads to different traditions in the Mother's reception, and forms the basis for her further development as a symbolic figure.

39 Robert J. V. Hiebert, "Preparing a Critical Edition of IV Maccabees: The Syriac Translation and the *Passio Sanctorum Machabaeorum* as Witnesses to the Original Greek," in F. García Martínez and M. Vervenne (eds.), *Interpreting Translation: Studies on the LXX and Ezekiel in Honour of Johan Lust* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 193–216.

40 The influence of 4 Maccabees on the production of *passio* literature is to be traced in martyrdom narratives from both, East and West. For western impact see discussion in van Henten, "4 Maccabees," 205 (regarding the Acts of Carpus, Pionius and Agape). See also Daniel Boyarin, "Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6.4 (1998), 577–627, esp. 612, 616.

3. First Appearances in Christian Art

It is surprising how little attention the Mother has retrieved from art history: The *Lexikon of Christian Iconography* dedicates two separate articles to “The Maccabees” and “The Maccabean Brothers”.⁴¹ However, their mother is only briefly mentioned in both – probably because outside biblical pictorial cycles she is almost exclusively shown amidst her sons. Nevertheless, she is featured most prominently in some of the earliest known works of art, such as the frescoes of Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome from the 7th century, naming her “Hagia Solomone” and showing her underneath Christ on the Throne.

The biblical account in 2 Maccabees 7 does not name the mother of the seven martyrs, therefore all later references to her name are secondary in terms of history of tradition. Neither Origen nor Gregory of Nyssa or John Chrysostom mention her name, as anonymity favours typological interpretations; thus, the mother figure appears here exclusively in functional descriptions: as a teacher of hope in resurrection (Origen, *Exhortatio ad martyrium* 27), a mother who “sends her sons into immortality” rather than losing them (Gregory of Nyssa, *De anima et resurrectione*, PG 46, 108) and as the proclaimer of the cross (John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Maccabaeos I*, PG 50, 617). She is understood as a typological figure by the Church Fathers.⁴² Even in the Coptic *Synaxarion*, the name is usually not mentioned; she appears under formulas such as “the mother of the seven Maccabees” or “the holy mother with her sons,” and therefore retains a more typological than individualized quality.

The name *Salomone/Salomonía* (a telling name that deliberately evokes associations with wisdom) is absent from early Byzantine iconography, in which the Maccabean brothers usually appear collectively: The fragment of an early Byzantine wall painting from the 6th–7th century at the Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, depicts her without inscription⁴³; the very early *Brescia Casket*, an ivory lipsanoteca from ca. 370 CE, from northern Italy, not even

41 J. Paul, W. Busch, “Makkabäer/Makkabäische Brüder,” in E. Kirschbaum et al. (ed.), *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*. Vol. 3 (Freiburg: Herder, 1992), 142–145, at 144.

42 On the mechanisms behind this typologization, see John Lowden, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 1997), Robin Darling Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Washington, D. C., 2004).

43 See Kurt Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

includes her.⁴⁴ The proper name *Σαλωμώνη, μήτηρ τῶν ἐπτά παίδων* (Salomone, mother of the seven sons) first appears in the Byzantine liturgical context of the 10th century, within the *Menologion of Basil II* (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Menologion Basilii II*, Vat. gr. 1613, fol. 366r; ca 985–995). With no other early name traditions except for “Shamuni” in the Syriac Menologion, it is highly plausible that Salomone is a graecized derivation from Shamuni (as feminine reference to the wisdom of Solomon, and therefore a significant name).⁴⁵

John Lowden notes that the close integration of text and image in Byzantine menologia helps stabilize the identity of individual saints, with inscriptions often supplying names absent from earlier traditions in order to secure liturgical classification.⁴⁶ Likewise, Henry Maguire argues that the explicit naming of saints in 10th–11th-century Byzantine art reflects a conscious shift from earlier unlabeled depictions, signaling both increasing individualization and liturgical appropriation.⁴⁷ In the accompanying illustration, the already executed mother occupies a central, prominent position in relation to her sons. Her inscription thus marks the transition from a functional type to a named saint – a development rooted in iconographic and liturgical practice rather than in exegetical tradition.

Standing within the Eastern line of tradition, although predating its earliest evidence, is the mural painting of S. Maria Antiqua (Rome, ca. 705 CE). As the oldest Marian church in Rome (and thus the foundation stone of Marian devotion in the West),⁴⁸ S. Maria Antiqua occupies a special place

44 See Robert L. McGrath, “The Martyrdom of the Maccabees on the Brescia Casket,” *The Art Bulletin* 47/2 (1965), 257–61.

45 In the Western Middle Ages, Solomon is attributed wisdom, insight, and exceptional abilities in dealing with people, animals, and plants, with the (para-)biblical Wisdom of Solomon (Σοφία Σαλωμώνος) creating a standing connection between the name and the property. See Norbert H. Ott, “Salomo,” in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 7 (Munich: Herder, 2002), 1310–14, at 1311. A derivation of the name from this is conceivable. On the wisdom of Solomon, see Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews 4 Bible times and characters from Joshua to Esther* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1968), 130–42.

46 See Lowden, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, 278–79.

47 See Henry Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies: Saints and Their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), especially the chapter “Naming and Individuality” (100–145).

48 Joseph Wilpert (ed.), *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV bis XII. Jahrhundert unter den Auspizien und mit allerhöchster Förderung seiner*

in the development of Christian iconography: built as an imperial vestibule under Domitian (81–96 CE), the church was used for Christian purposes by the 6th century at the latest and decorated with explicitly Christian images.⁴⁹ Until it lost its title to S. Maria Nuova in the 9th century (possibly due to destruction by an earthquake), the building served as a lively place of worship. This is evident from the entry in the *Liber Pontificalis* on Pope John VII (705–707), who was responsible for the decoration campaign during which the fresco of the Maccabees was created.

The floor plan (image 1) architecturally juxtaposes the Seven Sons with their Mother to the Annunciation of Mary; a multi-figure composition decorates the southwestern pilaster – ‘the grouping of the figures is excellent’, as Wilpert⁵⁰ notes. The central figure of the mother (image 2) is dressed in a floor-length tunic, with a *palla* covering her hair. Her right hand is raised in a gesture of speech (as is often the case in depictions of teachers), while in her left hand she holds a folded cloth (*mappula*). Wilpert was the first to draw attention to the nail holes around the mother’s neck, which indicated a special distinguishing feature of veneration:⁵¹ they were used to attach a brooch that was placed around the neck of the painted saint figure. Per Jonas Nordhagen sees this as a special feature with regard to the veneration of the mother, whose image was given a heightened real presence by the jewellery and thus a greater potential for identification by believers.⁵²

The name “Salomone” is reminiscent of several characters named Salome from the narrative world of the New Testament: Mark 15:41 refers to a Salome who, together with Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James the Younger, witnessed the crucifixion; in addition, from Mark 6:17–28 and Matthew 14:6–11, we know of the daughter of Herodias, who demands the head of John the Baptist and who is also traditionally identified with the name Salome. Both offer little basis for the naming of the martyrs’ mother; However, in the extra-canonical *Protoevangelium of James*, there is a third

Majestät Kaiser Wilhelms II. Zweiter Band: Text: Zweite Hälfte (Freiburg: Herder, 1916), 656.

49 For a condensed survey of the church’s history, see Eileen Rubery, Giulia Bordi, John Osborne, “Introduction,” in *ibid.* (ed.), *Santa Maria Antiqua – The Sistine Chapel of the Early Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 5–8.

50 Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken*, vol. 2, 680.

51 *Ibid.*

52 Per Jonas Nordhagen, “In Praise of Archaeology: Icons before Iconoclasm,” *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 60 (2010), 101–13.

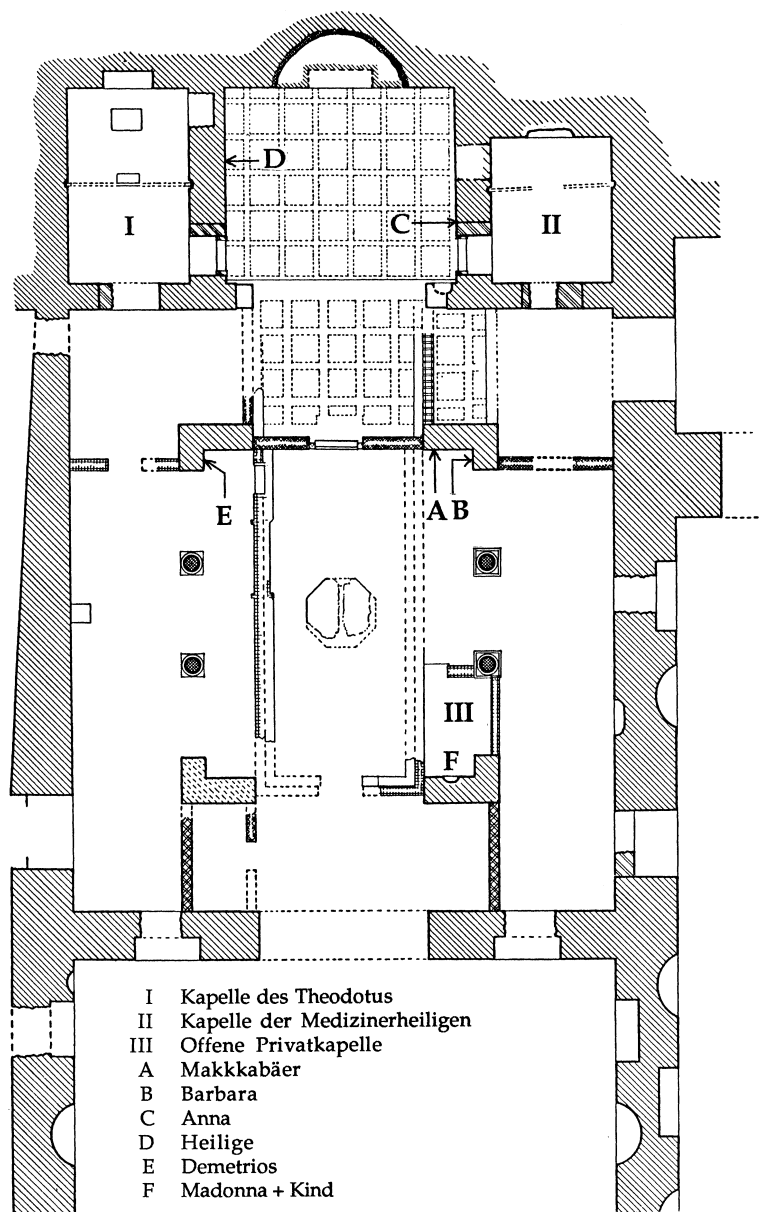


Figure 1: Floor plan of S. Maria Antiqua. – Hans Belting, “Eine Privatkapelle im frühmittelalterlichen Rom,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987), 55–69, at 55.



Figure 2: The Seven Sons with their Mother, S. Solomone, and their tutor Eleazar. Presbytery of S. Maria Antiqua, Rome (705). – Photograph by Dr. Steven Zucker for Smarthistory (<https://smarthistory.org/smantiqua/>). Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Salome who may be a possible reference (especially in terms of Mariology): after the birth of Jesus in a cave, the (unnamed) midwife emerges from the cave and suddenly encounters Salome, who tells her about the miraculous virgin birth (19:3). Like a doubting Thomas, Salome “inserted her finger into her to test her physical condition” (20:1)⁵³ – and as a consequence, her hand caught fire and fell away from her.

In response to her humble prayer and repentance, an angel of God appears and tells her to touch the child, “and you will have salvation and joy.” (20:3) Salome’s hand is healed and she leaves the scene. As Lily C. Vuong explains, “she functions to confirm and witness Mary’s virginal status after the birth of Jesus, but also to serve as an antithetical character to the eager-to-believe midwife, since unlike the midwife, Salome requires physical proof to believe.”⁵⁴ It is possible that the formation of tradition was also

⁵³ Translation from Lily C. Vuong, *The Protevangelium of James* (Eugene, OR, 2019), 99.

⁵⁴ Vuong, *The Protevangelium of James*, 99.

influenced by the *Protoevangelium Jacobi*, which was widely disseminated and received in late antiquity, due to its Mariological reference and the motif of “learning”/“recognizing.” In addition to her seven sons, Salomone is here (also recorded in writing) accompanied by “ΕΛΕΑΖΑΡ Ο ΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΕΥΣ” (Eleazar, the scribe), whose name is mentioned in 2 Maccabees 6:18; 7:41.⁵⁵

Within the overall iconographic program of Santa Maria Antiqua, the scene stands alongside other Old Testament models and depictions of martyrs as a martyr motif that focuses in particular on the exemplary nature of the mother. The function introduced here as an example of heroic faith in the time before Christ was later codified in the Menologion. The using of names was not yet common in the 7th century in the West and therefore – together with the cultic decoration of the mural – is evidence of the special veneration of the mother of the Maccabees in early Christian times. In this context, it seems all the more surprising that she does not have her own entry in many standard iconographic works (such as Louis Réau’s *Iconographie de l’art chrétien* or the *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*). This may be due to the fact that she was regarded as a type rather than an individual, representative of those who remained faithful to Christ and behaved in an exemplary manner, like the later Christian martyrs.

4. The Mother, the Church, the Theotokos

By the time of Augustine of Hippo, the “pure and noble body” of the mother obtained a new quality, approaching the role of the ‘body of the church’:

One woman, one mother, how she set before our eyes our one mother, holy Church, everywhere urging her children to die for the name of the one by whom she conceived and bore them! In this way the world has been filled with the blood of the martyrs, and from the seed thus broadcast it has yielded the crops of the Church” (Aug. *Ser.* 301.2, delivered in 417 CE).⁵⁶

55 Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken*, vol. 4, 679. In this context, he refers to *Das Handbuch der Malerei vom Berge Athos* (translated from the original handwritten Modern Greek text with annotations by Didron the Elder and Godehard Schäfer [Trier, 1855], 318–319), under “§410 The Holy Maccabees” names “Eleazar, young and beardless” with the addition “Eleazar was a priest.” The painter’s book, compiled in the 18th century, goes back to much older sources and traditions, which are difficult to identify.

56 J. E. Rotelle (ed.), *The Works of Saint Augustine, Part 3: Sermons*, Vol. 8: *Sermons* 273–305A. Transl. and notes E. Hill (New York, 1994), 276–288, esp. 282.

crucifixion. And both, while mothers, are more men than men (as already ingrained in the Syriac tradition).⁶⁰

In the Greek sources, the Mother's nobility and preservation of her body so as not to be corrupted are emphasized. Thus, it is difficult not to find similarities between the ideas laying under the cult of the Mother of the Maccabees and her attributes in the Greek texts, and the cult of the Theotokos, the "bearer of God", aside for their common origin from Hellenized Syria.⁶¹ Like a mother, she witnessed her son's sacrifice, seeing him depart to the kingdom of heaven. And like the mother, who was also a pure virgin until her marriage,⁶² Mary's body remains uncorrupted both by original sin and death. Thus, it seems that there is a connection or even a mutual formation between the traditions of the Mother of the Maccabees and the Theotokos ('Mother of God'), a title which was officially affirmed at the Council of Ephesus in 431 CE, both evidently having been worshiped in Jerusalem already at the beginning of the fifth century.⁶³

5. Concurring Names in Hebrew Sources and Western Reception

As already mentioned, 4 Macc. was not accepted as part of the Jewish bible. Yet, this para-biblical tradition found its way into the Jewish milieu. There are two main Jewish re-adaptations of the narrative of the mother and

⁶⁰ According to the Gospel of Thomas 114, Mary will be saved thanks to her manliness under Jesus' instruction, "Simon Peter said to him, 'Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life.' Jesus said, 'I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven.'" And see David deSilva, *4 Maccabees: Introduction and Commentary on the Greek Text in Codex Sinaiticus* (Leiden, Boston, 2006), 226.

⁶¹ Brian E. Daley, "The Divinization of the Theotokos: Fifth-Century Christological Controversy and the Figure of Mary", in Don W. Springer and Kevin M. Clarke (eds.), *Patristic Spirituality: Classical Perspectives on Ascent in the Journey to God* (Leiden, 2022), 309–339, at 313; Vuong, 2019, p. 21–22 (Jewish origins). Hunter 1993, p. 63; Hunter 2008, p. 412 (Syrian cult origins).

⁶² 4 Macc. 18.7–8. See also van Henten, "4 Maccabees", 209.

⁶³ Steven Shoemaker, "Death and the Maiden: The Early History of the Dormition and Assumption Apocrypha," *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 50 (2006), 59–97. See also discussion in Daley, "The Divinization", 311–312, regarding her title as emphasizing Mary's unique role in the divine plan of salvation.

seven sons – a Palestinian one (*Midrash Lamentations Rabbah* 1:40), and a Babylonian one (*BT Gittin* 57b). The later Jewish versions are a contemporary adaptation for the story of the mother and seven sons: the previously (Hellenic) king is now (a Roman) “Caesar” (emperor, in Jewish sources), and his command changed from eating forbidden food to idol worship.

Both later Jewish adaptations follow the Greek version of the mother’s fate: In the end she commits suicide. Thus, it is interesting to note not only the unusual use of martyrdom narratives in these Jewish texts but also the fact that the narrative of the mother and seven sons is foreign to the Hebrew bible. Furthermore, the Palestinian adaptation demonstrates other influences from the Greek version: The nations of the world function as a kind of Greek chorus. However, while the Babylonian version only notes in the end that immediately after her youngest son’s death “she also went up to the roof, and fell, and died”, the Palestinian version undermines the mother’s heroism and concludes: “After a while, that woman lost her mind, fell from the roof and died.” Her act, once of extreme piety, turns into an act of misery and desperation in the Jewish Palestinian version.

A deeper examination of the Palestinian circumstances might shed light on the narrator’s agenda: The Palestinian adaptation is located in *Midrash Echa Rabbah* (*Lamentation Rabbah*), in a dossier of legends that were intended to be read during Tish’a B’Ab (the ninth of the month of Ab, more or less equivalent to the month of August), the Jewish day of mourning for the destruction of the Temple. Perhaps not coincidentally, that date is close to the Christian commemoration day of the Maccabean martyrs. More striking even is the fact that the mother’s name is Miriam in the Palestinian *Midrash Echa Rabbah*⁶⁴, written in the fifth century in Jerusalem, where the cult of Mary emerged.⁶⁵ This naming of the mother as Miriam is a very strong

64 This name is already attested in both versions/manuscripts of this composition, ms. Munich 229 (version A, ed. Buber, 1:47, p. 86 [Hebrew] which is considered to be more corrupted), and ms. Parma 2559 (version B, a more reliable version of this text. For ms. Parma 2559 see: [https://www.nli.org.il/he/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH990000869320205171/NLI#\\$FL17268418](https://www.nli.org.il/he/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH990000869320205171/NLI#$FL17268418))

This manuscript belongs to the Biblioteca Palatina di Parma, Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, Italy, The National Library of Israel. “Ktiv” Project, The National Library of Israel.

65 In the orthodox church calendar, the veneration of the Mother of Seven Sons is inserted into the same day as Mary’s, on the 1st of August: In the Eastern Orthodox Church: On 1 August, the Feast to the All-Merciful Saviour and the Most Holy Mother of God is celebrated. However, this feast was established only in medieval times.

indicator for the fact that the Syriac and Greek renaming and “re-framing” of the Maccabean Mother into an *antitypus* of Mary has influenced the continuing Hebrew tradition, in which the mother originally was unnamed.

The Maccabean Mother assumes the role of a prophetic figure, foreshadowing the coming of the Christian Messiah and the role of his mother – and from this starting point develops into an *antitypus* in Christian iconography in a complex interplay of cultural traditions which can only briefly be sketched here with a few examples from material culture.⁶⁶ The veneration of Mary evolved over centuries, shaped by theological developments, cultural influences, and popular piety. Her enduring appeal lies in her role as a compassionate mother and a powerful intercessor.

In the West, the narrative character became more pronounced from the High Middle Ages onwards: Salomone was emotionalized as a suffering mother, and the scenes took on more of the character of a hagiographic narrative. The *Martyrologium Romanum* lists the legends (already understood here as a single entity) *De SS. Martyribus Eleazaro sene, septem fratribus Machabaeis, et horum matre. Antiochiae in Syria*⁶⁷ on August 1, placing particular emphasis on the mother.

From there, the seven Maccabees and their mother found their way into the most influential collection of legends of the Middle Ages, Jacobus de Voragine’s *Legenda aurea* (*Golden Legend*) from the late 13th century. Its immense manuscript distribution disseminated the descriptions of saints and feasts so broadly that the iconography attached to them almost reached a level of unwritten “canonicity”. What Raphaëlle Ziadé writes about the literary character also goes for her artistic afterlife: “The mother of the Maccabees is first and foremost a figure subject to the hyperbolic aesthetics of epideictic rhetoric, where exaggeration was accepted as a necessary and appreciated device.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Brief and convincing introductions into the formation of *typus* and *antitypus* in Christian art are offered by Sabine Schrenk, *Typus und Antitypos in der frühchristlichen Kunst* (Münster, 1995) and Alexander Linke, *Typologie in der Frühen Neuzeit. Genese und Semantik heilsgeschichtlicher Bildprogramme von der Cappella Sistina (1480) bis San Giovanni in Laterano (1650)* (Berlin, 2014).

⁶⁷ *Acta Sanctorum Augusti. Ex Latinis & Graecis, aliarumque gentium Monumentis, servata primigenia veterum Scriptorum phrasi. Collecta, digesta, commentariisque & observationibus illustrata a Joanne Bapt. Sollerio, Joanne Pinio, Guilielmo Cupero, Petro Boschio e Societate Jesu Presbyteris Theologis. Tomus I* (Venice, 1750), 5; the passus on the praise of the mother at 8.

⁶⁸ „La mère des Maccabées est d’abord une figure soumise à l’esthétique hyperbolique de l’éloquence épideictique, où l’exagération était admise comme une figure obligée, et



Figure 3: The Martyrdom of the Seven Maccabees. Illustration of the *Alsacian Golden Legend* Cgm 6 (Strasbourg, 1362), fol. 129v. (https://api.digitale-sammlungen.de/iiif/image/v2/bsb00043859_00262/full/full/0/default.jpg)

Two illustrated Middle High German manuscripts of the *Golden Legend* demonstrate differing perceptions of the Maccabean mother: Cgm 6 (Bavarian State Library, Munich – image 3), probably produced in Strasbourg in 1362 for the Dominican convent of St Nikolaus in undis, presents a monastic type adapted to its devotional context. By contrast, Cpg 144 (University Library, Heidelberg – image 4), a paper manuscript from Diebold Lauber's workshop in Hagenau (1418), reflects economical urban production.⁶⁹ In the pen-and-ink

apprécie.“ – Raphaëlle Ziadé, *Les martyrs Maccabées de l'histoire juive au culte chrétien. Les homélies de Grégoire de Nazianze et de Jean Chrysostome* (Leiden, 2007), 255.

⁶⁹ For an analysis of the two manuscripts and their image programs, see Stephanie Rappel (= Hallinger), *Text und Bild in der Elsässischen Legenda aurea. Der Cgm (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München) und der Cpg 144 (Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg)* (Hamburg, 2015).



Figure 4: The Martyrdom of the Seven Maccabees. Illustration of the Alsatian Golden Legend Cpg 144 (Hagenau, 1418), fol. 46v. (<https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.2196#0109>)

drawing preceding the legend, the illustrator omits the mother and instead emphasizes the dualism between martyrs and persecutors by contrasting the enthroned brothers with King Antiochus. Individualization and hagiographic accuracy are secondary to an emblematic, abbreviated visualization of the legend through the seven brothers.⁷⁰

Medieval iconography thus continues the trajectory from the anonymous figure of early patristic literature – interpreted typologically in relation to Christ and the Church – to the personalized Saint Salomone⁷¹ of Byzantine art and liturgy. While early images stress theological function, later conventions stabilize memory through fixed name and narrative detail. Even so, the mother rarely appears independently of her sons and remains a secondary figure in her artistic reception. She is primarily presented as a model of heroic motherhood and as an *antitypus* to Mary, whose typological relationship to her, already articulated in patristic literature, persists throughout the Middle Ages.

This development culminates in Heloas Merz's *Chronik des Benediktinerklosters SS. Machabaeorum* (1525), composed for a monastery dedicated to the Seven Martyrs. In his earlier poem *Dat lyden der hilger Machabeen und afflaes tzo Mauren bynnen Colen* (1507), Merz shaped the narrative for a Cologne audience.⁷² Influenced by Marian piety, both texts downplay Jewish elements and intensify the comparison between Salomone and the medieval image of Mary with her heart pierced by seven swords.⁷³ Typology thus serves to promote the local cult of the Maccabees and their mother by aligning them with the ultimate exemplarity of Christ and the Theotokos.

70 It was common practice in the paper-manuscript workshop of Diebold Lauber to simplify scenes into strict dualistic compositions opposing a saint to an "evil" adversary; within this scheme, the mother was often considered dispensable. Comparable reductions occur earlier, for example on the Brescia casket. For a detailed study of the workshop, see Lieselotte E. Saurma-Jeltsch, *Spätformen mittelalterlicher Buchherstellung: Bilderhandschriften aus der Werkstatt Diebold Laubers in Hagenau* (Wiesbaden, 2001).

71 The Graecized form Shamuni/Salomone ultimately prevailed over alternative medieval names such as Miriam or Hannah, which left little trace in Christian art. On the use of Hannah as the mother's name in medieval Ashkenaz, see Elisheva Baumgarten and Rella Kushelevsky, "From 'The Mother and her Sons' to 'The Mother of the Sons' in Medieval Ashkenaz," *Zion* 71, no. 4 (2006): 273–300 (Hebrew).

72 Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkowi, *Christian Memories of the Maccabean Martyrs* (New York, 2009), 144.

73 See Joslyn-Siemiatkowi, *Christian Memories*, 145.

6. Conclusion: A Symbolic Figure with Many Character

Facettes

The Maccabee mother's transformation from a marginal biblical figure to a revered saint illustrates cultural exchange and religious appropriation. In Second Temple Judaism, she appears briefly in the brothers' struggle against Antiochus (2 Maccabees), but by first-century Antioch, in Greek *4 Maccabees*, she emerges as a heroine whose conduct, and also her presumed death – sometimes portrayed as suicide – model bravery, wisdom, and bodily purity, anticipating her typological link to Mary, the Theotokos. In the Syriac translation, her martyrdom is framed through suffering, highlighting her exemplary character within Eastern contexts. Jewish versions of the legend – Babylonian and Palestinian – reflect engagement with Christian traditions, with the Palestinian text particularly incorporating Mariological awareness through the assimilation of her name to Miriam. As a case of Entangled Traditions, her story was adapted for different communities' needs, a process visible in Christian iconography: in *Santa Maria Antiqua* she serves as an antitype of Mary, while in Middle High German manuscripts such as Munich Cgm 6 she exemplifies virtuous behavior, tailored to the work's audience. Studying her evolution illuminates the dynamic interplay between Jewish and Christian traditions.

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