

Newcastle University e-prints

Date deposited: 7th March 2012

Version of file: Author final

Peer Review Status: Peer reviewed

Citation for item:

Lähnemann H. [The Maccabees as Role Models in the German Order](#). In: Signori, G, ed. *Dying for the Faith, Killing for the Faith: Old-Testament Faith-Warriors (1 and 2 Maccabees) in Historical Perspective*. United Kingdom: Brill, 2011, pp.177-193.

Further information on publisher website:

<http://www.brill.nl/>

Publisher's copyright statement:

© Brill

'[Contributors retain] the right to allow the institute employing the Contributor to post the post-refereed, but pre-print version of the Contribution free of charge on its website with the appropriate acknowledgment and link to the Brill website.'

The definitive version of this article is published by Brill, 2011 and is available at:

http://www.brill.nl/dying-faith-killing-faith#TOC_1

Always use the definitive version when citing.

Use Policy:

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not for profit purposes provided that:

- A full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- A link is made to the metadata record in Newcastle E-prints
- The full text is not changed in any way.

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

**Robinson Library, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Newcastle upon Tyne.
NE1 7RU. Tel. 0191 222 6000**

The Maccabees as Role Models in the German Order

Henrike Lähnemann (Newcastle University)

Across the different genres of literary and pragmatic texts used in the German Order, the Maccabees, especially Judas Maccabeus, figure prominently as forerunners of the Teutonic Knights on a historical, typological and allegorical level. The main focus of this paper will be on how the *Maccabäer*,¹ the most comprehensive vernacular version of the Books of the Maccabees ever prepared,² adapts that material for the Order.³ The framework for understanding the way in which biblical epic is presented is provided by the prologues to the *Statuten des Deutschen Ordens*, in which the Maccabees occupy a key position:⁴

Wir gedenken ouch des lobeliches strîtes, der wert vor Gote was, der ritter, die dâ heizent Machâbei, wie sterclîche die durch ir ê unde umme den gelouben strîten mit den heiden, die sie twingen wolden, daz sie Gotes verlougenten, unde mit sîner helfe sie sô gar überwunden unde vertiligeten, daz sie die heiligen stete wider gereinegeten, die sie hêten geunreint, unde den vrîde macheten wider in dem lande.

We also remind you of the laudable struggle, pleasing to God, by the knights called Maccabees, and how because of their covenant and because of their faith they fought valiantly against the heathen who were intent on forcing them to renounce God; and how, with His help, they conquered and extirpated them completely so that the sacred sites which they had polluted were purified again, and how they restored peace in the country.

Disen strîten hat nâchgevolget herteclîche dirre heilige ritterliche orden des spîtales sente Marien von dem Thûschen hûse unde hat erarnet, daz er ist gezîret mit manigeme êrsamen gelide, wanne sî sint rittere unde erwelte strîtere, die durch minne der ê unde des vaterlandes vertiligent die vîende des gelouben mit einer starken hant.

These struggles were vigorously prosecuted by this holy order of chivalry of the Hospital of Saint Mary of the German House, which has fully deserved that it should be distinguished by many an honorable member, for they are knights and elect fighters who, because of their love of the covenant and of their fatherland, are exterminating the enemies of the faith with a strong hand.

The Middle High German *Maccabäer*, its redaction, and its reception need to be understood against this backdrop. The substantial text (14,410 lines) was probably

written in the 1330s but only survives in the one manuscript containing biblical epics from the Commandery in Mergentheim, now in Stuttgart.⁵

The large parchment codex was obviously well planned as a presentational volume containing a survey of books used in the German Order for refectory readings, perhaps in an attempt to recreate the lost libraries of Prussia (which we only know about through the inventories). Three independent biblical epics from the thirteenth century, *Judith* of 1254; *Hester*, the rhymed paraphrase of the Book of Esther, a little later; and Heinrich of Hesler's *Apocalypse* of ca.1300, were combined with three books from the mid-fourteenth century that take up this tradition: the *Maccabäer* and *Daniel* under Luder of Brunswick (Grand Master 1331–1335); *Esra und Nehemia* under Dietrich of Altenburg (Grand Master 1335–1341), who also commissioned Nikolaus of Jeroschin to continue his chronicle account of Prussia.

These texts were written down in four separate parts which were then arranged in the historical order as given in the *Historia Scholastica*.⁶ They offer a particular perspective on history, focusing on the turbulence of what, from this Christian perspective, is considered late Jewish history. This phase starts with the struggle to defend the faith and Holy Land after the Temple's loss, moves onto the period of Babylonian and Persian ruler, then plunges into the "end times" in a dramatic climax. These last Apocalyptic times is the only fully illuminated part of the manuscript showing the final battle in the Eschaton in very bright colors, and, echoing the apocalyptic scenes of the Book of Daniel. Both the Old and New Testaments of the Christian Bible are explored from their final stretches, with the Time of Grace completely omitted. This marks a distinct shift from the approach taken in biblical epics such as those collected in Early Middle High German manuscripts: these consider the beginnings of salvation history with versifications of Genesis and Exodus, while the Mergentheim Codex reads that history from its blood-drenched ending.

Part I = quire 1–3	f. 1–26	<i>Daniel</i>
Part II = quire 4–6	f. 27ra–37ra	<i>Esra & Nehemia</i>
	f. 37ra–45vc	<i>Judith</i>
	f. 45vc–51vc	<i>Hester</i>
Part III = quire 7–11	f. 52–96	<i>Maccabäer</i>
Part IV = quire 12–18	f.97–172	Heinrich von Hesler: <i>Apokalypse</i>

The five books of the Old Testament and the Apocalypse in rhymed German couplets are written in elaborate textura, in an impressive three-columned folio layout (36.5 x 49.5 cm), with historiated initials and full page miniatures for the Apocalypse, in which Teutonic knights figure as fighters.⁷

This volume was long taken as proof that there was an effort to compile a full German Bible for the German Order.⁸ The textual evidence for this was taken from the epilogue of the *Maccabäer* which states that the books should work as a *bant* (tie), a knot for the Old Testament and an opening for the New Testament (ll. 14244f). And indeed, with direct prose biblical translation, the existence of translations of apocryphal books like the Book of Judith or the Books of the Maccabees can be seen as indicating that the group of translators at least intended to cover the whole of the Bible rather than only the parts used in the liturgy or a specific biblical group, like the prophets. But a full version of the Bible presented in the same manner as was the Book of Maccabees and the codex's other biblical texts would have resulted in a whole library of books. While straightforward translations went "for everything" if they were not focusing on popular single books, for biblical epics, the choice of material is a programmatic statement. We should thus read the designation of the Maccabees as a crucial link between the two Testaments as an assurance of orthodoxy, which is always an important issue, especially with apocryphal books

The passage with this description is remarkable in another respect: the praise of the unifying potential of the book is mirrored in the effect of a continuous line built up by two rhymes sustained over 48 lines, culminating in hymnic praise of the joys provided by the New Testament, which is hailed as inaugurating *tempus gracie* (l.14.311). This passage spans the gap between the last centuries B.C.E. and the immediately following apocalyptic vision, offering the counterpoint of Christian hope.

All the biblical epics known to have been read in the German Order, especially the Mergentheim Codex, share a distinctive profile for which the *Maccabäer* provides a key. What has been chosen are not the established bestsellers of monastic life, the Psalter and the liturgically structured gospel and epistle readings; rather, the focus is on action-packed narratives based in the Holy Land, stories that could be seen as historical forerunners of the German Order's early days in Palestine and their fight against the

“heathen” in their own time in Prussia. The passage from the *Statutes* shows how the Maccabees provided a perfect match for this literary interest, so that the knights could be seen as *alteri Maccabei* in a typological sense: they fulfilled the historic prefiguration of the Old Covenant under the auspices of the New.

The selection of biblical books allowing an easy identification of this sort was adopted by a group of authors not part of the intended audience, namely, people who were illiterate in the sense of not having any training Latin or theology. This was the case at least until the fifteenth century when Jörg Stuler, himself a Teutonic Knight, prepared a prose digest of earlier reading matter for the order, using only vernacular sources⁹ with the possible exception of the mid-fourteenth century author of the *Historien der alden ê* (*Stories from the Old Covenant*), who had a rudimentary knowledge of Latin at best. Although no author can be named for most of the biblical epics of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the literary profile of nearly all of the extant works is clearly that of theologically learned clerics, well versed in Latin. They came to the task of preparing biblical material for table readings with a different set of values and interests. For them, “battles” were in the first instance spiritual struggles, the way to victory was prayer. The Old Testament, in particular, had to be read allegorically. This clash of interests is made very clear by another book in the Mergentheim collection, the epic version of the Book of Judith.¹⁰ The *Judith* of 1254 (2814 extant lines) represents the earliest biblical epic used in the German Order; it became a model for the following commissions. The unknown author addresses a “dear brother and friend” and stresses the canonicity of the book, which, like the Maccabees, is set on the Bible’s apocryphal fringes (ll. 101–108):

Nu stille ich diner bete ruch,
also daz ich dir tichte ein buch
zu dute, so ich beste kan
und mirz die gotes liebe gan.
des name ist genant *Judith*,
der heiligen schrift ein gelit
ersam und geneme.

Now I am fulfilling your wish to write a book
for you in German, as well as I can and as I
am granted grace by God for it. Its name is
called *Judith*, an integral part of Holy
Scripture, honorable and delightful.

But more important is the author's insistence that a proper appreciation of the contents is only possible through a spiritual interpretation, which he is prepared to give: he assures the reader that he will compose even more than is written in the Book of Judith: "noch me tichten...dan in dem buche ist geschriben" (ll.110/123). He then proposes to do so in digressions because the story as such only forms the basis for what the book is about. He lays great emphasis on the argument that to understand the book in a literal sense is to misunderstand it completely (ll. 669–675):

wiltuz vor eine fabula han
und also blozlich verstan,
als ich dir schrieb ein mere, –
owe daz wurde mir swere
und machte mir wol werden zorn,
wand so were gar verlorn
die arbeit die ich leite an dich.

If you take it just as a fairy tale and would
understand it in a literal sense as if I were
making up a story for you, – fie, this would
seriously trouble me and might raise my anger,
since all my toils for you would be in vain.

Here *fabula* has to be taken in the sense of the Vulgate, where it is used as a translation for "myths" (cf. 2 Tim. 4:4 = *a veritate quidem auditum avertent ad fabulas autem convertentur*), which is to say in the sense of a tale without spiritual meaning. In the Mergentheim Codex, the only extant manuscript for either *Judith* or the *Maccabäer*, this clear demarcation of what is bare "fable" from what is "spiritual exercise" led to the reverse of what the anonymous author had promised: the digressions are left out, reducing the poem to precisely the literal narration scorned in the prologue. When the model of *Judith* was taken up by the German Order for table readings of biblical epics, the conflict between what the learned authors wanted and what the audience appreciated seems to have been taken up as well. In *Hester*,¹¹ the paraphrase of the biblical Book of Esther, which is heavily influenced by the rhetoric of *Judith*, the elaborate theology of the prologue matches the admonition in the epilogue, for the sake of understanding the book as a call to prayer "to our Hester: the virgin Mary" (l.1.950f: *unse hester anschrien, ... Marien*). As unconnected metatexts, these frame the verse paraphrase, which remains without any interpretation.

The same dynamic is at work in the *Maccabäer*: an impressive theological facade is built up by the complete translation of the dedicatory epistles from the commentary of Hrabanus Maurus and Jerome's prologue to his translation of the Book of Maccabees for the Vulgate.

The structure is as follows:

1	Prologue by the author to explain the textual history of the German work
45	Translation of the dedicatory letter by Hrabanus Maurus to Louis the Pious
157	and to the archdeacon Gerold
265	Author's preface
357	Jerome's Preface to the Vulgate version of 1 Maccabees
387	Rhyme paraphrase of 1 Maccabees
7014	Jerome's Preface to the Vulgate version of 2 Maccabees
7079	Rhyme paraphrase of 2 Maccabees
11263	Summary of 3 Maccabees, following the <i>Historia Scholastica</i>
14217	Epilogue

Each part of the book is marked by a rhymed rubric, as is the paraphrase of each chapter. This is a structural feature that the author designates as an important device from the very beginning, when he writes: "Swaz rubriken hie sint inne, die lis alle gar mit sinne", that is, "all the rubrics you find in here, read them with utmost care."

These rubrics give the text a simultaneously festive and scholarly appearance. However, they also keep strictly to the letter, furnishing the chapter number, providing short summaries of the following chapter, and so forth. These rhymed couplets, written in red, are the main structuring feature of the text, and the color is the very first indication of their importance as a guide to grasping its meaning. For the most part, they are the only interventions by the author, who otherwise retreats behind the text into his role as translator of the Vulgate, of Jerome's prologue, and of the dedicatory epistles by Hrabanus Maurus, to whom he delegates the explanation of the importance of a spiritual understanding.

This is in keeping with the whole disconcerting mismatch manifest in this text. After the weighty opening material, which also features historiated initials prominently,

the invoked authorities of biblical exegesis are completely dispensed with. Not one of the allegorical explanations furnished in Hrabanus' commentary figures in the book, neither in the way the story is told nor in digressions. The short explanations offered for Hebrew names and similar material keep strictly to the literal meaning and the historical facts, without venturing into the spiritual realm. The only digressions present are taken from the *Historia Scholastica*, with each digression marked *Scholastica* or simply “the gloss.” For example, the insertion of material related to Alexander, following 1 Macc. 1:11, is clearly marked as a digression taken from the *Historia Scholastica* (ll. 451–468):

Die Biblen lan wir nu ligen
etsliche wile verzigen,
ein teil muzen wir ummegan
unz wir komen her wider an.
Seht dise ummerede nu,
die wir ouch brengen da herzu,
Scholastica uns die sprichet
uz andren cronken sie brichet
von dem grozen Allexandro [...]
Uf daz uns die materie hie
allen dest vernemlicher si,
des wollen wir sie bescheiden
zwischen disen reden beiden.

The Bible we now leave for a while, since we have to digress a little before we return to it. Look at this digression, which we now supply in addition as spoken by the *Scholastica* who extracts from other chronicles information about the great Alexander [...]. To make this matter better understandable to everybody, we want to inform you about it in between these two discourses.

This historical explanation becomes the supreme authority for scriptural interpretation in the vernacular. The epilogue summarizes this role once more (14345-55):

Wer dise schrift wil irkunden,
der sal niht zu allen stunden
gevolgen deme texte na;
man sal sich vurhten hie und da,
wie man ez rehte verneme,

einen rat so geb ich deme:
er sal sehen an die glose
waz sie von der sache kose
(wand daz ist die rehte warheit
von den heiligen uz geleit),

so mac er geloubic besten.

He who wants to explore this Scripture should not at all times follow the text; one should be apprehensive here and there regarding how to comprehend it correctly; I give him one piece of advice: he should look and see what the gloss tells us about the topic (because this is the absolute truth, explained by the saints), then he can survive as a man of faith.

Other than with the *Judith*, this was not the result of editing done by whoever devised the program of the Mergentheim Codex or its source; it was rather a case of “self-censorship.” By the time the *Maccabäer* was written, more than half a century after *Judith*, it had become a staple feature of literary commissions for the Teutonic Order to leave out excursions into spirituality. Inserted between the dedicatory epistles taken from Hrabanus and the prologue to the First Book of Maccabees taken from Jerome, there are a hundred lines claiming to represent the voice of the author – only to be followed by the declaration that he has strictly refrained from any alterations to the literal text. For example, after the usual rhymed rubric (ll. 265ff) explaining that what follows represents that authorial voice (*rede des dutschen auctoris*),¹² and the usual humility *topos*, his non-intervention in the storyline is strongly emphasized (ll. 315-329):

Nu sult ir wizzen, daz ich man
von dirre beider buch angan
biz uz der capitel ende
keine rede darin wende;

ez ist gar der historien sin,
miner rede kumt niht darin;
ane ein weninc ist namen,
die unvernemelich quamen
und uz alden cronken here

der Juden Criechen Romere,
als sie die Scholastica treit
so vil ist darzu uzgeleit;
ouch ein teil geb ich underscheit
waz dirre und der hat geseit.

Wil ieman wizzen wer er si,
der dise rede nu tut hie,
sines namen man niht endarf,
wand er ist der sinne unscharf,
des mac er haben keinen danc, [...]

Now you have to know that I, the man, have no content whatsoever in it from the beginning of both of the books until the very end of the chapter; it is exclusively the essence of the story, without any opinion of mine; the only exception are names which seems to be incomprehensible and which have been supplied from old chronicles of the Jews, the Greeks and the Romans as given by Scholastica; I also report occasionally what one or the other of the authorities told.

Should you want to know who he is who now delivers this discourse – there is no need for his name since he is without sharp intellect, therefore he does not want any thanks for it [...].

This is followed by 26 lines, all rhyming with *-anc* (it is not the ending as such that is astonishing — rather one of the most common Middle High German end syllables – but its excessive use), that place the statement in the tradition of the highly rhetorical humility *topos*, especially popular with medieval monastic authors.

Ornamentation through rhyme and rhythm is prevalent throughout with a marked tendency towards embellishing the battles and fights linking the biblical epic with heroic romances that the knights would have known, thus highlighting a literal understanding of fighting. When Judas is introduced as a hero, his first battle (1 Macc. 9:17-19) contains a section (ll. 4091-4124) full of onomatopoeic splendor. It starts off with 18 lines rhyming with *-egen*, rattling along to characterize Judas' heroic attack. This is followed by the only instance where the constant beat of a strictly octosyllabic line is given up for what in modern German terminology is called *Schlagreime* ("hit rhymes"):

An sprenge Judas der degen,
strites wold er mit en pflegen,
lebens hat er sich irwegen. [...]

Wacha, wach, wie gienc er vegem
allen enden uf den wegen,
keiner dorfte da niht tregen,
swem er sich begunde negen.
Entfan

noch van
niht geschan;
ane wan
man mohte an
dan sehen slan

san manchen man,
swan er began,

gran zan was da bloz mit grisgran,
ran bran uz wunden heizer tran,
ban han todes wart sie an gan,

wan stan must ir vil satel lan.
Er warf die heiden uf den plan,
daz en daz leben gar entran,
so wol wart ez von im getan,
daz ez nieman volsagen kan.

Onward came galloping Judas, the hero, eager to battle with them, not caring for his life. [...] Behold, behold! how he was a storm from all sides on their ways, nobody was allowed to be slow when he was advancing towards him. Neither his advancing nor retiring was shameful; doubtless, one could look at him slaying many men without a qualm, as soon as he started, there was a baring of angry teeth for gnashing, a hot stream of fire ran out of the wounds, the bane of death started to go against them (?), many were forced to quit their saddles. He threw the heathen onto the plain so that their life escaped them completely: everything was so well done by him that nobody can fully sing his praise.

This is part of a strategy for addressing a noble lay audience with an interest in stories but without the upbringing for and inclination towards learned exegesis. This is clearly stated in the epilogue, which delineates the share of work between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* in a way similar to the prologue to the statutes, where the role of the priests in the order is also added on at the end (ll. 14360-14370):

Niht sal er nach dem texte gen,
im queme davon schade groz
ob er volget dem texte bloz
sunderlichen doch den leien

die niht kunnen mancherleien
schrift hin unde here lenken,
sie kunnen ez niht bedenken
wie man ez rehte sal verstan,
des sullen sie die wisheit han,

daz en daz vragen sie bereit
die vil hochgelobten pfafheit,
von der uns allez gut bekumt,
daz uns zur sele dort gevrumt;
want werlich der gerehte sin

ganzes gelouben ist an in.

He should not follow the text, he would be greatly harmed if he were to follow the naked text, this is especially true of the laity who are unable to steer Scripture hither and thither; they are unable to consider how it is to be understood correctly,

therefore they should have the wisdom readily to ask the highly commendable clergy from whom all good comes to us that might be beneficial for our souls hereafter; for certainly the just sense of full faith can be found in them.

The formulations (“naked text,” “correct understanding”) take up the issues of the *Judith*-prologue but turn it in a different direction; its interpretation is not going to be delivered within the biblical epic, but everybody is bound to enquire into its spiritual sense by asking the priests, listening to sermons, and praying for enlightenment (ll. 14370-14390):

Davon darf sich nieman schemen,
daz die leien niht vernemen
gar die vorbenanden schrift hie
ob sie niht lere han dabi.

Ieclicher sal sich entladen
daz er iht gewinne schaden;
en betriegen der schrifte wort,
ob er niht vraget vurbaz vort
wie er die dinc sal vernemen,

daz sie dem gelouben zemen.
Die werde pfaheit allez gar
uns daz entrihten wol vurwar;
swie sie predgen unde leren,
also sal man die schrift keren,

want wir werden bewart daran
daz wir von gote lon entfan;
darzu vlehen unde bitten
sullen wir mit steten siten
als wir anheben nu ein teil,

von himle geb uns got daz heil.

Therefore nobody should be ashamed that the laity does not take in fully the aforementioned Scripture as long as they do not have instruction along with it. Everybody should free himself from this notion so that he is not damaged; he will be deceived by the words of Scripture if he does not continue asking how he is supposed to receive the information to make it conform to faith. The worthy clergy want to perform this task for us completely; Scripture is to be turned in whatever way they are preaching and teaching, because then we are preserved in that matter so that we will receive reward from God. To that end, we should beseech and implore God constantly, as we now start to do in part, may God in heaven grant us salvation.

This defends a clear division of labor between unashamedly illiterate lay-people and the clergy employed for interpretation; it thus reflects the singularity of the literary network

of the German Order in which the *Maccabäer* is firmly rooted. This is shown by the intertextual references as well. Besides the *Historia Scholastica*, there are also pointers to the *Passional*, a collection of saints' lives with emphasis on martyrs — again something as literal and historical as devotional literature can be. At the end of the biblical account offered in the last part in the shortening paraphrase of the *Historia Scholastica*, anybody curious to know more about the wickedness of Herod the Great is told to look first of all in the earlier part (ll. 14.187-14.190):

als man liset da vor ein drum
des ersten Machabeorum,
da vint man ez vil wol inne
nahen bi deme beginne

As you could read bits of it earlier on,
in the first Book of the Maccabees; there
it can be well found, near the beginning.

On the topic of Herod's death, further sources are provided (ll. 14.199-14.204):

Wie er irstab, daz vindet ir
in Josepho nach uwer gir,
Scholastica, Passional
beschriben ez gar uber al:
daz sult ir nu vurbaz suchen
swes ir begert uz den buchen.

How he died you can find in Josephus,
if you wish. The *Historia Scholastica* and
the *Passional* give an exhaustive account of it:
therefore, look up those books for any further
reading you might want.

A further reference to the *Passional* comes in l.14.144, again in the context of Herod, “the mighty murderer.” There are references to the *Maccabäer* and the *Apocalypse* in *Daniel*, the work that will open the later collection of the Mergentheim Codex (the temporal framework of the *Historia Scholastica* meant that *Daniel* came before *Esra und Nehemia*, which in turn preceded *Hester* and *Judith*).

Daniel, ll.6:216–6:219: swer nu disser rede gert
vurbaz, der suche die dort
Machabeorum dutscher wort
gemachet zum ersten an.13

Whoever is further interested in this explanation [referring to the gloss on Daniel 8 on the relationship between Darius and Alexander], look for it near the beginning of the German version made of the Book of the Maccabees [referring to the digression on Alexander around ll.961ff].

This is noteworthy since no other books, commentaries, or glosses are mentioned in *Daniel*. Equally, *Esra und Nehemia* in the Mergentheim Codex quotes *Maccabäer* and is quoted in turn in *Historien der alten ê*.¹⁴ The *Historien*, an Old Testament digest probably written around the same time the Mergentheim Codex was produced, provides some rather peculiar insight into the network of biblical epics, historical accounts, and hagiographical literature used in the German Order. The author is very clear about his interest in the basic story line (ll. 35-43):

Di bucher der nuwen e
Ich laze varn, und durch vle
Wil ich ein buch grifen an
Der alden e; ir sult verstan,
Di heilge scrift an allen wanc

Ist gar swer und alzu lanc;
Dorumme wil ich grifen an
Di historien und uberslan
Nach minen sinnen, als ich mag.

I leave the books of the New Testament aside, and because of popular demand I will start a book of the Old Testament; you must understand that Holy Scripture is, without doubt, very profound and much too long; therefore I will concentrate on the stories and eliminate as much as I see fit.

He then proceeds to define what he means by *historien* (ll. 51-53):

Historien, di wisen ien,
Sin werk, di da sint geschen
In der alden e hivor.

Histories, wise people claim, are
deeds that happened earlier, in the
Old Testament.

Before summarizing the Old Testament's historical books in very rapid fashion and with many errors. It is apparent that he worked as far as possible from pre-digested

vernacular sources such as *Esra und Nehemia* and had recourse for the rest to the *Historia Scholastica*, without understanding much of it. He probably had no access to a copy of the *Maccabäer*, since there are many factual errors and confused historical sequences. Nevertheless, the stories of the Maccabees were clearly among his favorite, receiving 400 out of the total of 6165 lines. He stresses the fact that the Maccabees were laymen (ll. 5389f: *Und ouch wizzet bi der schicht, / Die zwene woren phaffen nicht* [And by the way, you should know that the two of them were not priests]). In the main, the text is a quick succession of hit and miss (ll. 5135-5140):

Dornach gab Judas vorgeant
Eupatori sin rechte hant.
Alchimi besagen er vortrug,
Nycanori houbt er abslug,
Und dornach er aneving
Ein gelubde und aneging
Mit den Romern. Vort ungespart
Er van Bachide irslain wart.

Then the aforementioned Judas gave Eupator his right hand. He endured the claims of Alchimus, cut off the head of Nicanor, and then took a vow and aligned himself with the Romans. Then, without more ado, he was slain by Bacchides.

There is a clear confusion here with Judas' actual hacking off of Nicanor's hand (2 Macc. 15:30); this is followed by an account of Eleazar excavating a town called *Elephantum* (l.5146) — a rather odd reinterpretation of Eleazar killing the elephant in 1 Macc. 6:43-46.

Historien der alden ê is the exception, not the rule; in its authorial ignorance, it reveals poor literary quality. But in its crude abbreviations, some features of the literary network of biblical epic used in the German Order are foregrounded: the vulgarisation of the reception of theological knowledge in the vernacular, and the fascination with taking the literary models literally.

In the *Maccabäer*, the literal level is much more cautiously framed and presented. But notwithstanding the theological framework, the exhortation to seek spiritual mentoring in the reception of biblical stories, and the reliable presentation of text and sources by the author, the fact remains that what is transmitted most forcefully is a fascination with the Maccabees as prototypical godly heroes. Within the German Order,

the “de-allegorization” of the theological-commentary tradition has turned the genre of biblical epics into a form of entertainment that offers role models. The material selected for reception and imitation provides a pattern for action, not for meditation or interpretation. The ambiguity brought into the book by the epilogue, with its general warning against a literal understanding of Scripture, has no force in light of the sensationally presented individual historical facts such as the onomatopoeic fighting of Judas. How else should that be read than as a call to fighting for the faith?

The magnificence of the Mergentheim Codex suggests that, emerging at the end of the 14th century, it already contains an antiquarian and sentimental appeal to former glory: the times of heathen-bashing were over, not only in the Holy Land but also in Prussia. What remained was praise for the Maccabees in the vernacular idiom of the *alteri Maccabei*.¹⁵

¹ *Das Buch der Maccabäer in mitteldeutscher Bearbeitung*, ed. Karl Helm, vol. 233, Bibliothek des literarischen Vereins in Stuttgart (Tübingen: Laupp, 1904).

² The only parallel is a French verse paraphrase: *La chevalerie de Judas Macchabee de Gautier de Belleperche (et de Pieros du Riés): Ms. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Hamilton 363*, ed. Jean Robert Smeets (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1991).

³ For the use of the Maccabees as an example in the historical writing of the German Order, see Mary Fischer, “The Books of the Maccabees and the Teutonic Order,” *Crusades* 4 (2005): 59–72. The best surveys of the use of literature in the German Order are still the publications by Karl Helm and Walther Zieseemer, leading to the survey: *Die Literatur des deutschen Ritterordens*, vol. 94, Gießener Beiträge zur deutschen Philologie (Gießen: Schmitz, 1951). The only recent dictionary entry on the topic, by Irene Erfen-Hänsch, “Deutschordensliteratur,” in *Lexikon des Mittelalters* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1995), 3: col. 917ff., builds entirely on their work and that of Gerhard Eis, “Deutschordensliteratur,” in *Reallexikon* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1958), 1: 44–251. Recently, there has been a debate on whether the term *Deutschordensdichtung* is justifiable since most of the works read and used in the order were not written by Teutonic knights (a survey on that topic by Arno Mentzel-Reuters, “Bibeldichtung und Deutscher Orden: Studien zur *Judith* und zu Heinrichs von Hesler *Apokalypse*,” *Daphnis* 26 (1997): 209–261) but for my topic this is irrelevant, since it is the reception of the Maccabees that is important, not those involved in the reception. For a promising new project on the collective identity of the Teutonic knights, proposed by Edith Feistner, Michael Neecke and Gisela Vollmann-Profe, see: “Ausbildung korporativer Identität im Deutschen Orden: Zum Verhältnis zwischen Biblepik und Ordenschronistik: Werkstattbericht,” in *Deutschsprachige Literatur des Mittelalters im östlichen Europa: Forschungsstand und Forschungsperspektiven*, ed. Ralf G. Päsler and Dietrich Schmidtke, Beiträge zur älteren Literaturgeschichte (Heidelberg: Winter, 2006), 57–74.

⁴ *Die Statuten des Deutschen Ordens nach den ältesten Handschriften*, ed. Max Perlbach (Halle: Niemeyer, 1890) (reprint Hildesheim/New York: Olms, 1975), 25, § 3ff. My translation is based on the High German version; the Latin version emphasizes other episodes from the Books of the Maccabees: *Subit eciam animum illud laudabile et Deo dignum bellum Machabeorum, qui in deserto feni cibo pasti, ne participes fierent coinquinacionis [2 Macc 5:2], zelo legis et fidei repleti, Anthiochum Epiphanem, radicem iniquitatis, qui populum Dei ad ritus gentiles et lupanar epheborum pertrahere nitebatur [2 Macc 4:12], Dei suffulti iuvamine adeo contriverunt, ut sancta iterato mundarent, arcem Syon recipere et redderent pacem terre. 4. Quorum bella sacer hic ordo milicie, videlicet domus hospitalis Theutunicorum sancte marie in Ierusalem, strenue imitans membris honorabilibus meruit decorari, diversis ad diversa Deo digna officia laudabiliter ordinatis. Sunt namque milites et bellatores electi zelo legis patrie manu valida hostes fidei conterentes [...].*

⁵ Württembergische Landesbibliothek Stuttgart, HB XIII 11. The dating ranges from the second third of the fourteenth century to as late as 1400. See *Die Handschriften der ehemaligen Hofbibliothek Stuttgart*, vol. II, 4,2, *Die Handschriften der Württembergischen Landesbibliothek Stuttgart*, ed. Maria Sophia Buhl and Lotte Kurras (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1969), 90f. For a description of the manuscript with further literature in the *Marburger Repertorium*, see: <http://www.mr1314.de/5919> (last updated in November, 2009).

⁶ For the reception of the *Historia Scholastica* in vernacular writing see James H. Morey, “Peter Comestor, Biblical Paraphrase and the Medieval Popular Bible,” *Speculum* 68 (1993): 6–35, and Maria Sherwood-Smith, *Studies in the Reception of the Historia Scholastica of Peter Comestor: The “Schwarzwälder Predigten”, the “Weltchronik” of Rudolf von Ems, the “Scolastica” of Jacob van Maerlant, and the “Historiebijbel van 1360”*, vol. 20, *Medium ævum monographs*, n.s. (Oxford: Society for the Study of Mediaeval Languages and Literature, 2000).

⁷ Publications on the illuminated apocalypses: Heinrich von Hesler, *Die Apokalypse: Königsberger Apokalypse: (Mikrofiche-Ed. der Hs. Toruń, Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, ms. Rps. 64 und ms. Rps. 44)*, ed. Volker Honemann, vol. 27, *Codices illuminati medii aevi* (Munich: Ed. Lengenfelder, 2000); a survey in Norbert H. Ott, *Katalog der deutschsprachigen illuminierten Handschriften des Mittelalters* (Munich: Beck, 1987), 1: 234–236.

⁸ This reasoning begins with Arthur Hübner, *Daniel, eine Deutschordensdichtung*, vol. 1, Palaestra (Berlin: Mayer und Müller, 1911), 85, and is taken up by Helm and Ziesemer in their larger number of publications on the German Order. When parchment fragments of a German text with biblical content were found in Prussia, they were dubbed a “Preußenbibel” in an attempt to establish that there had been such a thing as a full German Bible before Luther.

⁹ *Judith: Aus der Stuttgarter Handschrift HB XIII 11, 2.*, nach der Ausgabe von Rudolf Palgen ed. by Hans-Georg Richert, vol. 18, ATB (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1969). On Jörg Stuler, see: Henrike Lähnemann, ‘*Hystoria Judith*’: *Deutsche Judithdichtungen vom 12. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert*, vol. 20, *Scrinium Friburgense* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2006), 233–255; and Gisela Kornrumpf, “Stuler, Jörg OT” in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon* (Berlin: de Gruyter, ²1995), 9: col. 464–466. The Maccabees are not present in his pick of historical examples, although he turned two other books from the Mergentheim Codex (*Judith* and *Hester*) into prose. Even the binding of the volume Württembergische Landesbibliothek Stuttgart, HB XIII 10, from 1569, is tied to the volume’s bellicose theme: the embossed leather shows Judith on the front, placing the head of Holofernes on a windowsill under which is placed a quote from Psalm 144: *voluntatem timencium es [recte: se] faciet dominus* (The Lord will do the will of them that fear him [Douay-Rheims translation of the Clementine Vulgate used here and in the following quotes; version consulted via the Clementine text project, <http://vulsearch.sf.net/>], Ps. 144:19); on the back is Jael with a quote from the *Song of Deborah*: *sic*

pereant omnes inimici tui Domine (Thus all your enemies should perish, Lord, Judges 5:31). The same combination of plates can be found in another manuscript from the Teutonic Order, Württembergische Landesbibliothek Stuttgart, HB XI 43, with pragmatic texts, by Ortolf of Baierland and Konrad of Megenberg, among others. Both of these manuscripts are from the Commandery in Mergentheim, like the collection of biblical epics containing the *Maccabäer*.

¹⁰ See Lähnemann, “*Hystoria Judith*”, 191–232.

¹¹ Manfred Caliebe, *Hester: eine poetische Paraphrase des Buches Esther aus dem Ordensland Preußen: Edition und Kommentar*, vol. 21, Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Ordens (Marburg: Elwert, 1985).

¹² Next to this line in the Mergentheim Codex, f. 52vc, is the Brunswick coat of arms. Helm, *Maccabäer*, 94, took this as a reason to attribute the work to Luder of Magdeburg. But it is more likely that he was the one who commissioned the work, as he did with *Daniel* and as was usual for Grand Masters.

¹³ Hübner, *Daniel*, 95.

¹⁴ *Historien der alden e*, ed. Wilhelm Gerhard, vol. 271, Bibliothek des literarischen Vereins in Stuttgart (Leipzig: Hiersemann, 1927). The only manuscript (Königsberg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Hs. 907) is lost. Ralf G. Päsler, *Katalog der mittelalterlichen deutschsprachigen Handschriften der ehemaligen Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Königsberg: Nebst Beschreibungen der mittelalterlichen deutschsprachigen Fragmente des ehemaligen Staatsarchivs Königsberg: Auf der Grundlage der Vorarbeiten Ludwig Deneckes*, ed. Uwe Meves, vol. 15, Schriften des Bundesinstituts für ostdeutsche Kultur und Geschichte (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2000), 105f., 276-278.

¹⁵ I would like to thank Timothy McFarland (UCL) for his valuable critical comments and extensive linguistic help.