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Herod or Alexander Janneus? A New Approach to the *Testament of Moses*

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Abstract

In recent years a consensus has emerged that the *Testament of Moses* is to be dated in the early first century C.E., at least in its final form, and the primary basis for that consensus is the apparently perfect match between the reference to a ruler ruling for 34 years and the years of the reign of Herod the Great. While acknowledging that much can be explained on that presupposition, I have sought to show that a fit equally as strong as with Herod may be found when chapter 6 is read as alluding to the reign of Alexander Janneus and Alexandra Salome. The figure 34 matches with as much accuracy as one could expect. But much else also matches, including the fact that his sons did reign for shorter periods than their father, unlike Herod's sons, and that many of the details, including depictions of depravity and assumptions of religious conflict, better match what we know of the reign of Alexander, Alexandra, and their sons.

Keywords

Assumption of Moses – *Testament of Moses* – Herod – Alexander Janneus – Salome Alexandra – Hyrcanus – Aristobulus – thirty-four years

The *Testament of Moses* has come down to us in a single Latin manuscript, found in the Ambrosian Library in Milan, and published by Antonio Ceriani in 1861, and even then, not in its entirety.¹ It portrays itself as Moses' parting words

1 For the most recent discussion of the identity of this text in relation to mention of both a *Testament of Moses* and an *Assumption of Moses* in later Christian authors see Fiona

to Joshua within the framework of Deut 31-34 and reflecting deuteronomic theology.² It is most commonly understood to have been written in Greek³ in the early first century B.C.E. Many follow Licht⁴ and Nickelsburg⁵ in arguing that the work was composed originally in the first half of the second century B.C.E. in the aftermath of Antiochus Epiphanes' action against Jerusalem but before the success of Judas Maccabeus' revolt in 164 B.C.E., and was subsequently revised by interpolation of at least chapter 6 after the death of Herod the Great in 4 B.C., the intervention of Varus in 4 B.C.E., and the removal of his son Archelaus in 6 C.E. (to which they see this chapter referring).⁶ Those who, in light of the latter arguments, see the entire composition as dating from

Grierson, "The Testament of Moses," *JSP* 17 (2008): 265-80. See also Richard Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 235-80 and the discussion in James R. Davila, *The Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha* (JSJSup 105; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 150-52.

- 2 For the Latin text I use David M. Miller, ed., "Assumption of Moses": Edition 1.0," in *The Online Critical Pseudepigrapha* (ed. Ken M. Penner, David M. Miller, and Ian W. Scott; Atlanta: SBL, 2007) n. p. [cited 11 November 2013]. Online: <http://ocp.tyndale.ca/assumption-of-moses>. For the English translation I use Johannes Tromp, *The Assumption of Moses: A Critical Edition with Commentary* (SVTP 10; Leiden: Brill, 1993). See also John Priest, "Testament of Moses," *OTP* 1:927-34.
- 3 For a detailed discussion of the proposal that its few Hebraisms may indicate a Hebrew original, see Tromp, *Assumption of Moses*, 81-85; cf. Priest, "Testament of Moses," *OTP* 1:920, who argues that it was composed originally in a Semitic language.
- 4 Jacob Licht, "Taxo, or the Apocalyptic Doctrine of Vengeance," *JJS* 12 (1961): 95-103.
- 5 George W. E. Nickelsburg, "An Antiochan Date for the Testament of Moses," in *Studies on the Testament of Moses* (ed. George W. E. Nickelsburg; SBLSCS 4; Cambridge, Mass.: SBL, 1973), 33-37; and more recently Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Literary and Historical Introduction* (2nd ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 74-77, 247-48.
- 6 John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 243-47, whose initial rejection and then acceptance of the proposal is documented in Collins, "The Date and Provenance of the Testament of Moses," in Nickelsburg, *Studies on the Testament of Moses*, 15-32, and Collins, "Some Remaining Traditio-Historical Problems in the Testament of Moses," *ibid.*, 38-43, in response to George W. E. Nickelsburg, "An Antiochan Date for the Testament of Moses," *ibid.*, 33-37. See also Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ: A New English Version* (rev. and ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Martin Goodman; 3 vols.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 3:278-88, esp. 282-83; Gerbern S. Oegema, "Himmelfahrt Mose" in *Apokalypsen* (*JSHRZ* VI.1.5; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2001), 33-48, esp. 34-36. Adela Yarbro Collins, "Composition and Redaction of the Testament of Moses 10," *HTR* 69 (1976): 179-86 finds additional support for the theory in the claim that reference in 10:8 to "the wings of the eagle" is a redactional addition alluding to the pulling down of the golden eagle over the temple gate shortly before the campaign of Varus (Josephus, *Ant.* 17.155).

shortly before or after 6 C.E. interpret the subsequent allusions to the suppression under Antiochus Epiphanes in chapter 8 as functioning as a prototype of Herod and the Herodians⁷ or of a future enemy,⁸ in much the same way as in Mark 13 where reference to the abomination which makes desolate serves as a type for describing eschatological woes.⁹

There is widespread agreement that the determining factor in setting the date for the final composition is the statement in 6:6 which reads:

et faciet in eis iudicia quomodo fecerunt in illis aegypti per xxx et iiii annos et puniunt eos

And he will judge them like the Egyptians for 34 years, and he will punish them.

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- 7 So Kenneth R. Atkinson, "Herod the Great as *Antiochus Redivivus*: Reading the *Testament of Moses* as an Anti-Herodian Composition," in *Of Scribes and Sages: Early Jewish Interpretation and Transmission of Scripture* (ed. Craig A. Evans; 2 vols.; SSEJC 9-10; London: T & T Clark, 2004), 1:134-49 at 135, who sees the author seeking in chapters 8-9 "to present Herod as the model of the enemy of the end of time," based on "material adapted from fictitious accounts of Antiochus Epiphanes' persecutions." Atkinson sees in chapter 6 a reference to Herod's death and to his sons' initial reign, assumed to be short (138) and describes chapters 8-9 as indicating what was from the author's view still to come and by association with Antiochus demonising "Herod and current Herodian rulers" (143). This is difficult if chapter 6 already refers to Herod's demise. Rather awkwardly Atkinson must argue that the Antiochus typology of chapter 8, which does not there refer to Herod, will have inspired the author to think of Herod as an Antiochus *redivivus* (though chapter 6 leaves no such traces) and that chapter 8, "actually written in the Herodian era" (144) (but after Herod) draws its inspiration for depicting impending future woes from the two connected models, Antiochus and Herod. Chapters 8-9 "are an eschatological tableau inspired by events of the Antiochan and Herodian periods" (146), which also accounts for "their precise parallels and historical inaccuracies" (146). The arguments are repeated in Kenneth R. Atkinson, "Taxo's Martyrdom and the Role of the *Nuntius* in the *Testament of Moses*: Implications for Understanding the Role of Other Intermediary Figures," *JBL* 125 (2006): 453-76, esp. 465-67.
- 8 So Tromp, *Assumption of Moses*, 121-23, 215, who rather sees a future figure modelled on Antiochus Epiphanes; similarly, Priest, "Testament of Moses," *OTP* 1:920-21 and Davila, *Provenance*, 153.
- 9 Atkinson, "Taxo's Martyrdom," 463 writes: "Although these travails are reminiscent of the Antiochan persecution, they are perhaps closer to the eschatological woes found in Mark 13." But see the critique in Nickelsburg, "Antiochan Date," 34-35 (conceded by Collins, "Some Remaining Traditio-Historical Problems," 39) of using the Markan parallel on grounds that the Testament is too specific in its detail. Atkinson, "Taxo's Martyrdom," 463-64 counters by noting similar use of Antiochus legends in 4Q248, which on grounds of its Herodian script he dates to no earlier than the first century B.C.E. and is a similar mix of fact and fiction.

The neatness of the figures, *xxx et iiii*, leaves it not beyond suspicion, but, with only a single manuscript to go by, most take them literally as a *vaticinium ex eventu* referring to the 34 year reign of Herod the Great, 37-4 B.C.E.¹⁰ The allusion to oppression in Egypt, which lasted 430 years (Exod 12:40-41), makes it likely, however, that the figure 34, if playing on this by reversing the digits, is not a scribal corruption, though this may secure only the digits not their order. This reference comes within the section of the document which moves beyond the return from exile (4:5-9) to describe when “the times of judgement will approach” (*cum adpropriabunt tempora arguendi*) (5:1). The depiction of these times follows in chapters 5-6, concluding with reference to the coming of “a mighty king from the West” (6:8). After a lacuna we then read in chapter 7 of “pestilent and impious men” who rule over the people, followed in 8:1 by the prediction that “suddenly revenge and wrath will come over them” and a description of suppression which echoes descriptions of Antiochus Epiphanes’ intervention in 167 B.C.E.

Chapter 6 is usually taken as having specific reference to Herod. The passage reads as follows:

Then kings will arise for them to assume government, and they will proclaim themselves priests of the Most High God. They will act most impiously against the Holy of Holies. ²And a petulant king will succeed them, who will not be of priestly stock, a wicked and cruel man. And he will rule over them as they deserve. ³He will kill their men of distinction, and he will bury their corpses at unknown places, so that no one knows where their corpses are. ⁴He will kill old and young, and he will not spare. ⁵Then there will be bitter fear of him in their land. ⁶And he will judge them like the Egyptians for 34 years, and he will punish them. ⁷And he will bring forth children who will succeed him. They will rule for shorter periods. ⁸Cohorts will come into their territory, and a mighty king from the West, who will defeat them, ⁹and lead them off in chains. And he will burn part of their temple with fire, some he will crucify near their city. (6:1-9)

If the reference to “the kings” who “proclaim themselves priests of the Most High God” and “act most impiously against the Holy of Holies” (6:1) well fits the Hasmonean dynasty,¹¹ then Herod can certainly be said to “succeed them”

10 Tromp, *Assumption of Moses*, 202 observes: “If the textual transmission of *As. Mos.*, has not caused damage to the number, the reference indeed seems unmistakable: in this era there was no other king who ruled for this exact number of years in Palestine.”

11 *Ibid.*, 198.

(6:2), in the sense of coming after them. Josephus' detailed accounts certainly justify identifying Herod as "petulant," "wicked and cruel," who killed "old and young" and evoked "bitter fear" (6:2, 4-5). He was "not . . . of priestly stock" (6:2), but an Idumean, half-Jew.¹² When he entered Jerusalem he executed forty five leading opponents belonging to Antigonos' party, thus killing "men of distinction" (6:3a) and confiscating their wealth (Josephus, *Ant.* 15.5; *War* 1.358), though Josephus makes no reference to their corpses being hidden (6:3b).¹³ He did rule for 34 years (6:6), though Josephus puts it at 37 years (*War* 1.665; *Ant.* 17.191), but only because he takes as his starting point his appointment, rather than when his reign in Jerusalem actually began. He was succeeded by children, Archelaus (4 B.C.E.-6 C.E.), Antipas (4 B.C.E.-39 C.E.), and Philip (4 B.C.E.-33/34 C.E.), though the latter two did not "rule for shorter periods" (6:7). The "mighty king from the West" (6:8) could fit the intervention of Roman governor of Syria, Varus, in 4 B.C.E., even though strictly speaking he came down from the north, from Antioch.¹⁴ First, Sabinius' Roman soldiers burned the temple porticos (*Ant.* 17.261; *War* 2.49) and some considerable time later when Varus (*War* 2.72; *Ant.* 17.292) arrived, he had 2,000 of the rebels crucified (*War* 2.74; *Ant.* 17.295). One would need to understand the author as having merged the two events in 6:9.¹⁵

In a recent paper, while noting such correspondences Jan Willem van Henten argued that the allusions to Herod's reign are best taken, like those to the reign of Antiochus in chapter 8, as a type rather than as direct references to the work's context.¹⁶ He grounds this conclusion in part because, as with the references to Antiochus, some of the allusions to Herod are uncertain or inexact. The words "he will rule over them as they deserve" (6:2) have no apparent connection, though that could reflect the author's moralising deuteronomistic assessment that God used Herod's wickedness to punish the people. He notes that Josephus says nothing of secret burials and gives the reign as 37 years, not 34 (*War* 1.665; *Ant.* 17.191). He also points out that the figure of 34 years is associated with ill

12 On this see Benedikt Eckhardt, " 'An Idumean, That Is, a Half-Jew': Hasmoneans and Herodians between Ancestry and Merit," in *Jewish Identity and Politics between the Maccabees and Bar Kokhba. Groups, Normativity, and Rituals* (ed. Benedikt Eckhardt; JSJSup 155; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 91-115.

13 Josephus does refer to secret killings by Herod, but not in this context (*Ant.* 15.366); see Tromp, *Assumption of Moses*, 201.

14 Tromp, *ibid.*, 202 notes that it matches the king from the east in 3:1-3.

15 Tromp, *ibid.*, 204 acknowledges that "that the description of the Roman intervention in *As. Mos.* 6:8-9 covers the events under Varus only superficially."

16 Jan Willem van Henten, "Moses about Herod, Herod about Moses? *Assumptio Mosis* and Josephus' *Antiquities* 15.136," forthcoming.

treatment of Israel by the Egyptians, so could be symbolic, not least because it is reminiscent of Exod 12:40-41, which depicts the Israelites stay in Egypt as lasting 430 years.¹⁷ This looks suspiciously like a typological allusion: people suffered under this petulant king as their forbears had in Egypt. The figure 430 in Greek, he notes, “is fairly close to the number 34 (ἔτη τετράκοσια καὶ τριάκοντα / ἔτη τέσσαρα καὶ τριάκοντα).” However, had it been purely symbolic one might have expected 43 not 34. Additionally, he points out, the prediction that the king’s children will rule for a shorter period does not fit Herod, except for his son, Archelaus. The usual explanation of this anomaly is that the author must have been writing shortly after Archelaus’ removal and the intervention of Varus in 4 B.C.E. and been assuming that Antipas’ and Philip’s reign would soon end,¹⁸ but this is highly speculative. One might add that the reference to leading the sons off “in chains” (6:9) does not fit the identification with Herod well. Van Henten concludes that the reference to Herod is far from secure, so that the text may at most refer to a stereotype inspired by Herod, but perhaps not to Herod at all.¹⁹

While the traditional identification of chapter 6 with Herod, however inexact at points, has obvious merits, no one to my knowledge has pointed to an alternative which also has significant merit, namely that the passage is referring to the rule of Alexander Janneus (104-76 B.C.E.) and his wife Alexandra (76-67 B.C.E.; often named Salome Alexandra) and to their two sons Aristobulus (69-63 B.C.E.) and Hyrcanus (69 B.C.E.). The reign of Alexander and of Alexandra are best reckoned together because Alexandra was co-regent with Alexander for at least the final three years and Josephus identified them as acting conjointly, for instance, in appointing Antipas head of Idumea (*Ant.* 14.10).²⁰ Together their reigns add up to 36 or 37 years, but since both Aristobulus and Hyrcanus were involved in co-ruling with their mother from

17 As Tromp, *Assumption of Moses*, 202 notes, the allusion also makes sense when one takes into account that Moses is the fictive speaker.

18 Tromp, *ibid.*, 203; Atkinson, “Herod the Great,” 138; G. Anthony Keddie, “Judaean Apocalypticism and the Unmasking of Ideology: Foreign and National Rulers in the *Testament of Moses*,” *JSJ* 44 (2013): 301-38. It frequently serves as the basis for setting the year 30 C.E. as the *ad quem* for dating of the writing; e.g. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 247; Egon Brandenburger, “Himmelfahrt Mose,” in *Apokalypsen* (*JSHRZ* 5.2; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1976), 57-84, esp. 60.

19 Van Henten, “Moses about Herod.”

20 See the evidence in Kenneth R. Atkinson, *Queen Salome: Jerusalem's Warrior Monarch of the First Century B.C.E.* (Jefferson and London: McFarland & Company, 2012), 146-48, that Salome was co-ruler with Alexander at least during the last three years of Alexander's reign and was herself, according to the Byzantine Chronographer George Syncellus,

69 (*War* 1.117, 120; *Ant.* 13.422), thus reducing that figure by 2 years, the reign of Alexander and Alexandra on a non-inclusive reckoning (104-69 B.C.E.) lasted 34 or 35 years. Precision should not be pressed, but the figure is sufficiently close to qualify as a match for the allusion to 34 years in 6:6, as much as is the case with Herod. One should not then assume that 34 years could refer only to Herod's reign.

The sons of Alexander certainly did rule for "shorter periods" than their father (6:7), unlike those of Herod. The identification with Alexander is a better fit. Alexander, too, was declared by some to be "not be of priestly stock" (6:2), grounded in the allegation that his mother had been a prisoner of war (Josephus, *Ant.* 13.372). Alexander also killed "men of distinction," notoriously through his crucifixion of 800 Pharisees in 89 B.C.E., whom Josephus described as *δυνατώτατους* (*Ant.* 13.380; cf. also *War* 1.97; 4Q169 3-4 i 1-8), a more impressive fit than just the 45 of Antigonus' followers. As with Herod, we are not told of hidden burials. Alexander was certainly wicked and cruel. He killed 6,000 insurgents on one occasion and 50,000 on another (Josephus, *War* 1.88, 91; *Ant.* 13.373, 376). Famously, we find in response to his asking what the people wanted, "they replied, 'Die!'" (Josephus, *War* 1.92; similarly *Ant.* 13.376). Matching 6:8-9, after his sons' reigns in 63 B.C.E. "a mighty king from the West" (6:8)—in this case truly from the west unlike Varus from the north—namely, Pompey invaded the land with cohorts, entered the city, damaged the temple (including by fire, attributed perhaps for apologetic reasons to renegade Jews: *War* 1.150; *Ant.* 14.70), entered the Holy of Holies (*War* 1.152; *Ant.* 14.71-72), and led them, at least Aristobulus and his family, off to Rome "in chains" (explicitly so according to Josephus, *Ant.* 14.79; cf. also *War* 1.157): a much closer fit than with Herod and his sons and alluded to independently in *Ps. Sol.* 17:12. While the direct reference to burning the temple and to crucifixions (6:8-9) finds a reasonable match with the events of 4 B.C.E. at the end of Herod's life, on the other hand the identification with Pompey has the advantage that we are not dealing with two separate occasions—fire with Sabinus and, quite some time later, crucifixions with Varus. In addition, as Tromp notes, the match is not strong between "some he will crucify" (6:8) and Josephus' statement that Varus crucified not just some but 2,000 (*War* 2.74 *Ant.* 17.295).²¹

Seeing in chapter 6 a reference to the reign of Janneus and his wife thus has much in its favour. It fits the difference in length of reigns between the king and his sons, whereas the identification with Herod does not. It matches other

a successful military commander warrior. I acknowledge Jan Willem van Henten for drawing this to my attention.

21 Tromp, *Assumption of Moses*, 205.

features just as well: the killing of elites, the cruelty, the non-priestly descent, the defeat by a king from the West and damage to the city and the temple by fire. Aristobulus was taken off to Rome with his family, literally “in chains”, not true of Herod’s sons. As with Herod there is no match for hiding the corpses of slaughtered elite.

There are further advantages in seeing the “petulant king” (6:2) as Alexander. According to 6:2 he is to “succeed” those “kings” of whom 6:1 writes that they “will arise for them to assume government, and they will proclaim themselves priests of the Most High God. They will act most impiously against the Holy of Holies” (6:1). Alexander is in the Hasmonean succession. The author would belong among those who disputed the legitimacy of the Hasmoneans, not least their claims to priesthood (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 13.291-292). If, as we suggest, one takes Alexander’s and Alexandra’s reign together, then this author would need to belong to a party which favoured neither, certainly a realistic possibility given what we know of dissent at the time, especially since the recovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

If one reads “then” (*tunc*) in 6:1 not as meaning “after that” but “at that time,” one can read chapter 5, with Tromp,²² as also describing the situation depicted in chapter 6.²³

And when the times of judgement will approach, revenge will come through kings who participate in crime and who will punish them.² And they themselves will move away from the truth;³ wherefore it has been said: “They will avoid justice and turn to iniquity,” and: “they will defile the house of their worship with pollutions,” and that “they will go whoring after foreign gods”.⁴ For they will not follow the truth of God, but some people will defile the altar with the offerings they will bring to the Lord, (people) who are not priests, but slaves born of slaves.⁵ For the scholars who will be their teachers in those times will favour the persons that please them, and accept gifts; and they will sell legal settlements, accepting fees.⁶ And so their city and dwelling-place will be filled with crimes

22 Tromp, *ibid.*, 198 writes: “As. Mos. 6 describes the concrete historical circumstances which are regarded as the fulfilment of the prophecies of sinfulness quoted and interpreted in chapter 5,” though he cautions against precise identifications (see pp. 183-85); cf. Stefan Schreiber, “Hoffnung und Handlungsperspektive in der *Assumptio Mosis*,” *JSJ* 32 (2001): 252-71 at 256, who reads chapter 5 as referring to the time of the Ptolemies and Seleucids.

23 Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 75-76 sees it as leading up to the Antiochan persecution in chapter 8.

and injustice against God, since those who will do them will be impious judges: they will continually judge according to their own liking. (5:1-6)

To the author, the Hasmonean kings are criminal, but the people—presumably its leaders, who are almost certainly priests in their cultic, teaching, and judging roles (5:4, 5, 6)—will also perpetrate crime. Moses predicts divisions or distancing from the “truth,” a loaded term in the religious debate of the period.²⁴ Whether divisions or distancing,²⁵ the author disputes what is almost certainly an alternative interpretation of Torah to his own and has Moses declare through three unknown citations²⁶ that they will pollute the temple. “And they themselves will move away from the truth” (5:2) is taken up in the words “For they will not follow the truth of God” (5:4). There follows an interpretation²⁷ of the second citation, “they will defile the house of their worship *in genationibus*,” (5:3) in “some people²⁸ will defile the altar with the offerings they will bring to the Lord, (people) who are not priests, but slaves born of slaves” (*non sunt sacerdotes sed serui de seruis nati*) (5:4), an accusation made against Hyrcanus (Josephus, *Ant.* 13.291-292).²⁹ Priest paraphrases *in genationibus* as “with the customs of the nations”;³⁰ Tromp conjectures *inquinacionibus* and translates “with pollutions.”³¹ Both that which is being offered and the legitimacy of those acting as priests are questioned. The issue is defilement, probably related both to who is a legitimate priest and what purity laws are to be followed, but also to moral depravity as the instances of abuse of the

24 ¹ *Enoch* 98:14-15; 104:9-10; 1QS 3:19; 4:5-6, 23; 5:4b-5; 4Q416 1 10 (= 4QInstruction^b); 1QH^a 19:12-13; and see Tromp, *Assumption of Moses*, 189.

25 On the sense of *dividere* here as distancing see Tromp, *ibid.*, 189.

26 See *ibid.*, 189-90. Tromp notes the similar accusations in Jer 11:10 (which includes in the Vulgate: *post deos alienos*) and Deut 31:29; cf. also 31:16 (Vulgate: *fornicabitur post deos alienos*).

27 Tromp, *ibid.*, 186 discusses the way 5:2-3 is exegeted in 5:4-6 in a manner reminiscent of the peshet method. Similarly Atkinson, “Herod the Great,” 146-47, who draws attention to the use of images to depict key personages in present and future events, such as the lion of Alexander in Peshet Nahum and the Kittim of the Roman, and notes the hostility of the authors of those texts towards the Hasmoneans, as in 5:4-6.

28 Tromp, *ibid.*, 192 notes that *quidem* here is “a derogatory word” conveying something like “certain characters.”

29 Tromp, *ibid.*, 193 observes that while an allusion to John Hyrcanus fits (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 13.291-292), it was also a widely used form of abuse, such as that said of Alexander the Great in *Sib. Or.* 3.383; 5.7.

30 Priest, “Testament of Moses,” *OTP* 1:929.

31 Tromp, *Assumption of Moses*, 12-13.

judicial system illustrate. Disputes over legitimacy, purity, and depravity are well attested for the period. The *Psalms of Solomon* written in the aftermath of Pompey's invasion embraces a similar view of suffering as punishment to our author and frequently links moral depravity with defilement of the temple: "Their acts of lawlessness were worse than the Gentiles before them; they profaned the Lord's sanctuary" (1:1-8); "Because the sons of Jerusalem defiled the sanctuary of the Lord, they were profaning the offerings of God with lawless acts" (2:3; similarly 8:9-13, 22).³² The *Damascus Document* also links defiling of the sanctuary with greed and depravity, though of a sexual kind, as it sees it (CD 4:17-18; 8:4-9). Atkinson observes that "both *Psalms of Solomon* and CD 4.15-18 likely reflect some anti-Hasmonean propaganda that circulated in Jerusalem which was appropriated independently by the writers of both texts to denounce Jerusalem's priests for their immoral conduct."³³

The first citation (5:3) then receives its interpretation in 5:5-6, where the exercise of the roles of priests as teachers and judges in interpreting Torah is targeted as corrupt. The *Psalms of Solomon* similarly address judicial corruption (4:1-13), as does the tale of Susanna. The third citation (5:3) uses the familiar image of prostitution to describe idolatry: *fornicabunt post deos alienos* "they will play the harlot after foreign gods" (5:3; cf. Deut 31:16),³⁴ but it does not receive further elaboration, perhaps suggesting that this danger is not as contentious between the parties. The depictions of defilement and moral corruption in chapter 5 are at one level very general, but at another more appropriate in describing inner Jewish disputes in relation to temple worship

32 Kenneth R. Atkinson, *I Cried to the Lord: A Study of the Psalms of Solomon's Historical Background and Social Setting* (JSJSup 84; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 67. On Pompey's invasion as God's punishment see *Pss. Sol.* 2:7 ("He did [this] to them according to their sins"); similarly 2:22; 8:14-15; 17:9. On suffering as judgement in the *Testament of Moses* see 5:1 "times of judgement"; 8:1 "revenge and wrath." George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism* (HTS 26; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), 43-45 sees chapter 6 falling outside the pattern in Deuteronomy of sin (28:15), punishment (28:16-68), turning-point (30:2), salvation (30:3-10), matching *T. Mos.* 5, 8, 9, 10 (repeated in Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 74), but it can also be seen as under the umbrella of 5:1. See also Collins, "Date and Provenance," 17-18.

33 Tromp, *Assumption of Moses*, 194 writes: "It seems, then, that the author of *As. Mos.* intends to say that the priests' immoral behaviour makes the sacrifices they bring to God impure; moreover, their sinfulness testifies to their disregard for the Lord's will, which is the same as idolatry." Neglect of ritual purity should also not be ruled out.

34 On this see Norbert Johannes Hofmann, *Die Assumptio Mosis: Studien zur Rezeption massgültiger Überlieferung* (JSJSup 67; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 108-9.

and the role of Hasmonean rulers than they are as attacks on Herod and his administration.

Turning to chapter 7, only a few words from the opening statement in 7:1-2 survive.³⁵ They include numerals and ordinals, which are about divisions of time, and the phrase, *finentur tempora*, which apparently indicates that what follows in 7:3-10 and then the following chapters goes beyond the immediate past, described in chapters 5-6, and describes the immediate future, presumably the author's time and what he, as typical apocalyptic author, projects will soon happen.³⁶

And pestilent and impious men will rule over them, who proclaim themselves to be righteous. ⁴And they will excite their wrathful souls; they will be deceitful men, self-complacent, hypocrites in all their dealings, and who love to debauch each hour of the day, devourers, gluttons, ⁵ . . . ⁶who eat the possessions of . . . saying they do this out of compassion . . . ⁷murderers, complainers, liars, hiding themselves lest they be recognised as impious, full of crime and iniquity, from sunrise to sunset ⁸saying: "Let us have extravagant banquets, let us eat and drink. And let us act as if we are princes." ⁹And their hands and minds will deal with impurities, and their mouth will speak enormities, saying in addition to all of this: ¹⁰"Keep off, do not touch me, lest you pollute me . . ." (7:3-10)

If we read 6:8-9 as an allusion to the events of 63 B.C.E, then the reference to "pestilent and impious men" who "will rule over them, who proclaim themselves to be righteous" would refer to those in leadership in the years which follow, thus Hyrcanus and Antipater (but not necessarily restricted to them), and would be a better fit than as a reference to Herod's successors³⁷—so also with the attack on those who allege concern with their purity (7:10), which would

35 Tromp, *Assumption of Moses*, 206 writes that while 7:1-2 is largely illegible, it does indicate to readers "that the circumstances under which they are presently living and which have been described in chapters 5 and 6 lead directly to the beginning of the eschatological events," noting the link back to 5:1; cf. Atkinson, "Herod the Great," 143.

36 On 7:3-10 as referring to the author's time see Tromp, *Assumption of Moses*, 207 and Brandenburger, "Himmelfahrt Mose," 63.

37 Assuming a reference to Varus in 6:8-9, Keddie, "Judaean Apocalypticism," 314-16 argues that the reference is to the aristocratic circles to whom the Romans handed power in Jerusalem, arguing that the revolts were about tax: "The Varus incident represents the beginnings of the class struggle affecting the author's social circle at the time of composition," and this is reflected in allusions to the wealthy gluttons.

be hardly applicable to latter.³⁸ As McLaren notes, the allusions are, however, hardly specific.³⁹ The references to conflict over abuses by priests, probably implied in the references to purity, make good sense as part of the continuing conflict among religious leaders in this period, such as we find in the *Psalms of Solomon* and a number of sectarian documents from Qumran. It is noteworthy, as Collins observes,⁴⁰ that the historical allusions in the sectarian scrolls cluster around the period immediately before and immediately after Pompey's invasion. They include the allusions to Alexander Janneus as "the lion of wrath" in the *Nahum Pesher* (4QpNah 3-4 i 1-8); Alexandra Salome (4Q332); Pompey's general, Aemilius Scaurus (4Q333); Peitholaus, a Jewish general active in mid-first century B.C.E. (4Q468e); and frequently the Romans, but none to Herod, to events or persons of his reign, or to those after it. 1QpHab appears to have been written in the aftermath of 63 B.C.E. referring very probably to Alexander's exploits and demise (apparently having merged Alexander and Alexandra's reign), to the coming of the Kittim (Romans), and to Hyrcanus 2 and Aristobulus 2, with similar accusations about amassing wealth and drunken extravagance (1QpHab 8-9, 19; 4QpNah 3-4 i 11).⁴¹

Reading chapters 5-6 as a reference to the period before and chapter 7 as immediately after Pompey's conquest in 63 B.C.E. suggests that the following chapters are best seen as further elaboration of what the author projects as impending events.

And suddenly revenge and wrath will come over them, such as there will never have been over them since eternity until that time, in which he will raise for them the king of the kings of the earth, and a power with great might, who will hang on the cross those who confess circumcision,² but who will torture those who deny it. And he will lead them chained

38 Schreiber, "Hoffnung," 259 notes the typically Jewish concerns with ritual purity (7:9), righteousness (7:3) and mercy (7:6), suggesting that this implies a reference to Jewish priestly aristocracy.

39 James McLaren, "Corruption among the High Priesthood: A Matter of Perspective," in *A Wandering Galilean: Essays in Honour of Seán Frayne* (ed. Zuleika Rodgers, Margaret Daly-Denton, and Anne Fitzpatrick McKinley; JSJSup 132; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 141-57, esp. 145, cautions against linking chapter 7 too closely with chapter 6 and especially against interpreting it as referring to high priests, since the evil-doers are never labelled priests; he argues that it "should be read in relation to T. Mos. 5 and/or 8."

40 John J. Collins, *Beyond the Qumran Community: The Sectarian Movement of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 98-99.

41 See Collins, *Beyond the Qumran Community*, 105-13; he goes on to argue the case for seeing Hyrcanus 2 as the Wicked priest.

into captivity, ³and their wives will be divided among the gentiles, and their sons will be operated on as children by physicians in order to put on them a foreskin. ⁴But they will be punished by torments, and with fire and sword, and they will be forced to carry publicly their idols, that are defiled, just like those who touch them. ⁵And they will also be forced by those who torture them to enter into their hidden place, and they will be forced with goads to disgracefully blaspheme the word. Finally, after these things (they will be forced to blaspheme) also the laws through the things they will have upon their altar. (8:1-5)

Reference to persecution of Jews, their being forced to participate in idolatry and blasphemy, and the allusion to removing the marks of circumcision are sufficiently specific for some to conclude that this chapter is describing the events of Antiochus Epiphanes' attempt at suppression of Judaism in 167 B.C.E. and thus date the work to that era, which in turn requires the theory that at least chapter 6 with its alleged allusion to Herod must be a later interpolation shortly after his reign (which, by the way, would equally apply if, as we argue, chapter 6 refers to Janneus). The alternative, which is more convincing, is that these allusions to that era are based on legendary reports of 1 and 2 Maccabees and function typologically to project that the days to come will match those days of horror,⁴² indeed exceed them, as days "such as there will never have been over them," a common apocalyptic topos (cf. Dan 12:1; Mark 13:19).

Seeing the author as employing the era of Antiochus as a model for projection of the future also helps makes sense of the looseness of some of the correspondences and the significant differences. "The king of the kings of the earth" (8:1) thus fits the dominant Roman power after 63 B.C.E.⁴³ much better than it does Antiochus Epiphanes.⁴⁴ Only Josephus mentions crucifixion of the circumcised under Antiochus (*Ant.* 12.256).⁴⁵ As Tromp notes, the notion

42 So Tromp, *Assumption of Moses*, 215; Atkinson, "Herod the Great," 143; Brandenburger, "Himmelfahrt Mose," 62; Keddie, "Judaean Apocalypticism," 312 and 319-20, who writes of an "Antiochus-like figure" and suggests that the author connects the three figures Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus, and Varus.

43 For those who take it as a reference to direct Roman rule after 6 C.E. and so the "king of the kings of the earth" as a reference to the emperor see Schreiber, "Hoffnung," 259; see also Tromp, *Assumption of Moses*, 217; Oegema, "Himmelfahrt Mose," 35; Brandenburger, "Himmelfahrt Mose," 60.

44 So Brandenburger, "Himmelfahrt Mose," 62.

45 Atkinson, "Herod the Great," 144; Atkinson, "Taxo's Martyrdom," 466; already noted by Collins, "Date and Provenance," 19.

that there will be “those who will confess their circumcision” or deny it is difficult to imagine if taken literally, so that it is more than likely using circumcision as a metonym for being a Jew.⁴⁶ The reference to having physicians add a foreskin to boys is not the same as men voluntarily seeking to remove the marks of circumcision (cf. 1 Macc 1:15, 48, 60; 2 Macc 6:10; *Jub.* 15:33-34).⁴⁷ The reference to idolatry might also allude to the account in 2 Macc 6:7 to Jews being forced to participate in pagan processions.⁴⁸ Being forced to enter the “hidden place” (8:5), doubtless the Holy of Holies, might be a vague allusion to the days of Antiochus or could be inspired by the fact that Pompey did so with his entourage (*War* 1.152; *Ant.* 14.71-72). Also if *Pss. Sol.* 17 alludes to this event had locals similarly done so, thus treating the sanctuary as a shrine?⁴⁹ Being forced to blaspheme and abandon the law in relation to proper sacrifice certainly recalls the days of Antiochus, but other elements such as taking people into captivity in chains, abducting women (8:3; cf. 2 Macc 5:24), and exposure to fire and sword (8:4) are typical of how one imagined dangers in the time.

If chapter 6 alludes to Alexander Jannaeus and his sons as well as to Pompey, then an author is writing in the period between that event and Herod's rise (who, therefore, as in the Qumran pesharim and in the *Psalms of Solomon* is unmentioned), deploring the depravity of his time, and predicting disaster at the hands of Rome. The typological employment of motifs from the era of Antiochus continues in the mysterious Taxo figure (9:1-7),⁵⁰ probably an antitype to Mattathias,⁵¹ to whom, as Collins suggests,⁵² he is set in contrast,

46 Tromp, *Assumption of Moses*, 217.

47 Atkinson, “Taxo's Martyrdom,” 466 uses the fact that epispasm was popular in the first century C.E. to argue that chapter 7 refers to the period after 6 C.E.

48 Atkinson, “Herod the Great,” 135 sees in the reference to idols a reference to Herod's abortive attempt to bring images into the temple (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 15.267-279), arguing that chapters 8-9 refer to Herod's reign, whom, he believes, the author is presenting as an Antiochus *redivivus*.

49 Atkinson, *I Cried to the Lord*, 138 suggests that *Pss. Sol.* 17:14-15 implies that Pompey thus treated the sanctuary just as a shrine to be entered and as a result locals also followed him.

50 Tromp, *Assumption of Moses*, 124-28 reviews thirty different interpretations of Taxo.

51 Atkinson, “Taxo's Martyrdom,” 147; cf. also 1 Macc 2:29-38, the account of the Hasidim who withdraw to a cave, which may also have influenced the typology.

52 Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 132-33. Similarly Schreiber, “Hoffnung,” 269-71, who notes (262-63) that Taxo represents a strong focus on Torah observance, reflected in his being of the tribe of Levi and matching the author's emphasis on the authority of Moses. Schreiber (266-67) also writes, “es handelt sich dabei um die kompromislose Orientierung am mosaischen Gesetz,” which he sees as also symbolised in the name which in Greek suggests order. Atkinson, “Taxo's Martyrdom,” 475 rejects the quietist model and instead

thus having not five but seven sons, and seeking not a military solution through human strength but looking to God and Torah observance. The author looks ultimately to a future incursion of God's reign, reminiscent, though very different from Jesus of Nazareth, accompanied by God's messenger, possibly the eschatological Moses (10:1-10).⁵³

Conclusion

In recent years a consensus has emerged that the *Testament of Moses* is to be dated in the early first century C.E., at least in its final form, and the primary basis for that consensus is the apparently perfect match between the reference to a ruler ruling for 34 years and the years of the reign of Herod the Great. While acknowledging that much can be explained on that presupposition, I have sought to show that a fit equally as strong as with Herod, may be found when chapter 6 is read as alluding to the reign of Alexander Janneus and Alexandra Salome. The figure 34 matches with as much accuracy as one could expect. But much else also matches, including the fact that his sons did reign for shorter periods than their father, unlike Herod's sons, and that many of the details, including depictions of depravity and assumptions of religious conflict, better match what we know of the reign of Alexander, Alexandra, and their sons.

Accordingly the case has been made that the *Testament of Moses* is best seen as emanating from that turbulent period which produced most of the Qumran pesharim and the *Psalms of Solomon*, that is, the years following Pompey's invasion in 63 B.C.E., to which all refer, and before the rise of Herod, to which they do not. The absence of any clear reference to the Parthian invasion may narrow the time frame even further. If one follows Josephus' portrayal of Alexandra's sympathy for Pharisees in contrast to Alexander's, then the author is to be found among those who approved of neither, and so neither Hyrcanus nor Aristobulus, but saw hope lying in strict adherence to Torah, trust in God for deliverance, and perhaps in reaction to militants, though this is debated. In any case, within the range of Judaism of the time, not least in such groups

speculates that the work indicates that "some Jews...believed that God required the shedding of innocent blood by an intermediary figure to save humanity."

53 So Jan Willem van Henten, "Moses as Heavenly Messenger in Assumptio Mosis 10:2 and Qumran Passages," *JJS* 54 (2003): 216-27, esp. 216, who suggests on this basis that the missing ending of the document probably included an account of Moses' ascension/assumption which would have led to the work being called, the *Assumption of Moses*. See Atkinson, "Taxo's Martyrdom," 473, who suggests an angelic priestly figure as in 11QMelchisedek.

as those we call Essenes, there would certainly be room for one such as our author without our necessarily being able to identify him with a specific movement. As demonstrated above, such an identification is able to give a coherent account of the sequence and logic of the writing without recourse to dislocation or interpolation theories and to reconstruct a viable account of the writing's likely historical context.