

Appendix N

Seder Olam's Date for the Bar Kochba Revolt

The various versions of the Seder Olam present us with some textual problems for the passage in chapter 30, which deals with the chronology of the Bar Kochba revolt. These texts in general suffer from interpolations, missing words, wanting sections, and interposing. It is no different when we come to the passage under consideration. Based upon the best versions, Chaim Joseph Milikowsky's edition gives the following translation:

From the war of Asverus until the war of Vespasian was 80 years, these were during the time of the Temple; from the war of Vespasian until the war of Qitos was 24 years; from the war of Qitos until the war of Ben Kozibah was 16 years; and the war of Ben Kozibah was 2½ years, 52 years after the destruction of the Temple.¹

This arrangement, nevertheless, reflects an inadequacy, since it would place the Bar Kochba revolt a mere 40 years (24 plus 16) after the destruction of the Temple (70 C.E.); and then it allows for a contradiction by saying that the Bar Kochba revolt took place 52 years after the destruction of the Temple. Another construction, based upon variant texts, is provided by Emil Schürer:

From the war of Asverus to the war of Vespasian: 80 years whilst the Temple existed. From the war of Vespasian to the war of Quietus: 52 years. And from the war of Quietus to the war of Ben Koziba: 16 years. And the war of Ben Koziba: 3½ years.²

In this reconstruction, based upon several variant texts, the 52-year period is correct, since it is the actual time between Vespasian and Quietus; and we must agree that this was obviously what the original text said. In a number of editions, but not all, it came to be transposed. Nevertheless, this construct does not explain the 24 years given in various accounts associated with the period up to Quietus; and the 3½ years favored by Emil Schürer, as we have demonstrated in our study, is clearly a later interpretation inserted in some variant and less reliable texts as a replacement for the 2½ years found in the best manuscripts. Heinrich W. Guggenheimer gives still another translation:

¹ SORC, 2, p. 547.

² HJP, 1, p. 534, n. 92.

From the war of Varus to the war of Vespasian 80 years. These were during the time of the Temple. From the war of Vespasian to the war of Quietus 24 years. From the war of Quietus to the war of Ben Koziba 16 years. The war of Ben Koziba 2½ years; that was 22 years after the destruction of the Temple.³

Again, the flaws are evident. Based upon all the evidence from the variant manuscripts it is certain that the original text contained a more detailed definition of the chronology, which over time was constricted and partly transposed. Combining the variants with known historical facts the following reconstruction best reflects what the original text said:

From the conflict with Asvarus (Varus) until the conflict with Vespasian: 80 years, while the Temple existed. From the conflict with Vespasian until (*the persecutions began under Domitian: 24 years after the destruction of the Temple. From the beginning of the persecutions by Domitian until*) the conflict with Quietus: 24 years. From the conflict with Vespasian until the conflict with Quietus: 52 years (total). From the conflict with Quietus until the war of Ben Koziba: 16 years. And the war of Ben Kosiba: 2½ years.

It would be an easy matter for a scribe to by-pass the entire section relating to Domitian and simply state, “the conflict with Vespasian . . . until the conflict with Quietus.” This deletion would explain the retention of the “24 years” until Quietus, since it was both 24 years after the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. until the Jewish persecutions began under Domitian in 94 C.E. and 24 years from the beginning of the persecutions until the dismissal of Quietus. Yet the “52 years” applied as a total from the beginning of the Jewish Revolt of 66 C.E. until the end of the conflict with Quietus would also be retained in numerous copies. The absence of Domitian in this chronology of troubles for the Jews is glaring; but since the figure of 24 years is still reflected in copies, it can hardly be doubted that the original texts contained a reference to it.

³ Guggenheimer, *S.O.*, p. 261.