

THREE TYPOLOGICAL THEMES IN EARLY JEWISH MESSIANISM: MESSIAH SON OF JOSEPH, RABBINIC CALCULATIONS, AND THE FIGURE OF ARMILUS

by

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The messianic dream owes its roots to biblical prophecy and its rich development to generations of sensitive and creative exegetes anxiously awaiting redemption. Scripture itself is less than generous in providing detailed information about the end of days, so ungenerous, in fact, that some modern scholars have expressed skepticism about the very appearance of a messianic figure in the biblical text.¹ While this skepticism is excessive, it reflects a reality which troubled the ancients no less than the moderns and left room for the diversity and complexity that mark the messianic idea by late antiquity.

In the first centuries after the destruction of the Second Temple, many Jews were no doubt content to leave the messianic hope as an article of faith whose precise contours would be elucidated at the time of its fulfillment.²

1. Some examples are cited in James H. Charlesworth, "The Concept of the Messiah in the Pseudepigrapha," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II. 19.1, ed. Wolfgang Haase (Berlin and New York, 1979), p. 189, n. 4.

2. Jacob Neusner's *Messiah in Context* (Philadelphia, 1984) argues at length for the relative insignificance of the Messiah in most early rabbinic works.

For others, however, it exercised a fascination that sometimes bordered on obsession, and such Jews looked with both eagerness and frustration at the messianic material available in Scripture. The paucity of detail was simultaneously discouraging and stimulating, serving as obstacle for the faint-hearted and catalyst for the daring. The intense desire to know the events, the time, the nature, the heroes, and the villains of the end of days could not be satisfied by an examination of the explicit record of biblical prophecy, and the determined messianic theorist turned perforce to more creative approaches. The most fruitful of these was the enterprise we know as typology—the utilization of the figures, events, and periods of the past to illuminate the messianic age.

The crucial “type,” which left its mark on virtually every aspect of messianic speculation, was the great redemption of the past. “As in the days of your exodus from the land of Egypt will I show him marvelous things” (Mic. 7:15). On the most obvious level, this meant that the overt miracles of the period of the exodus could be expected to return. Hence, “the Holy One, blessed be He, will in the future bring upon Edom all the plagues that He inflicted on the Egyptians.”³ As in the desert, Jews will enjoy the manna and will have no need of the light of sun or moon.⁴ Theudas, like Joshua, was to split the waters of the Jordan,⁵ a Jewish prophet would repeat the miracle of Jericho at Jerusalem,⁶ and a man would arise who would again command an obedient sun to stop in its tracks.⁷

It is not, however, only in the realm of the overtly miraculous that themes of the first redemption will recur in the future. The Midrash informs us that the final redeemer, like Moses, will make himself known to his people and then become hidden from them before revealing himself once again at the end.⁸ The prophet who was going to bring down the walls of

3. *Tanḥuma*, ed. Buber, II, p. 43 and parallels. See L. Ginzberg, *Eine Unbekannte Jüdische Sekte* (New York and Pressburg, 1922), p. 334 (hereafter cited as *Sekte*) = *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 58 (1914): 412 (hereafter cited as *MGWJ*) = *An Unknown Jewish Sect* (New York, 1976), p. 234 (hereafter cited as *Sect*).

4. *Sekte*, pp. 335–336 = *MGWJ*, pp. 413–414 = *Sect*, p. 235.

5. Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.5.1.

6. *Ibid.* 20.8.6.

7. *Sibylline Oracles* 5.256–259. See H. M. Teeple, *The Mosaic Eschatological Prophet* (Philadelphia, 1957), pp. 10–11 (and note the references on pp. 29–31 concerning the exodus as a prototype of the final redemption). Cf. also G. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (New York, 1973), p. 98.

8. *Be-Midbar Rabbah* 11:3; *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* 2:22; *Ruth Rabbah* 5:6; *Pesikta Rabbati* 15, ed. Friedmann, p. 72b (cf. esp. n. 63 there); *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana*, ed. Buber, p. 49b. See also *Sekte*, p. 335 = *MGWJ*, p. 413 = *Sect*, p. 234.

Jerusalem hailed, like Moses, from Egypt.⁹ Matthew places Jesus in Egypt in a passage whose dubious historicity makes its typological scheme all the more striking.¹⁰ Like Moses, Jesus fasts forty days and forty nights in the desert,¹¹ and messianic forerunners in the first century were to fulfill the words of Hosea (2:16–17) and Ezekiel (20:35–36) by bringing the Jews into the wilderness in preparation for redemption.¹² Finally, the rabbis inform us that in light of God's promise that He will give us joy in accordance with the duration of our suffering (Ps. 90:15), the messianic age will endure as long as the forty-year sojourn in the desert or the four-hundred-year period of the Egyptian exile.¹³

While the significance of typology in Jewish messianism is beyond question, there are several areas where its role has been inadequately appreciated, and a reexamination of three controversial messianic topics through the prism of typology will, I think, yield valuable and intriguing results.

I

The messianic precursor from the tribe of Ephraim who goes by the name Messiah son of Joseph is an anomalous figure who has properly aroused intense scholarly interest. In the most common scenario, he fights the enemies of Israel with considerable success, only to fall on the field of battle shortly before the triumphant advent of Messiah son of David. No such figure makes anything resembling a clear appearance in the Hebrew Bible, and since a dying Messiah is both inherently mysterious and superficially related to Christian belief, unremitting efforts to trace his origins have produced an abundance of diverse and creative theories.

A recent article by Joseph Heinemann proposing a revolutionary re-interpretation of this redeemer begins with an excellent summary and evaluation of the major theories, and the interested reader can consult this

9. Or at least he said so. See *Antiquities* 20.8.6.

10. Matt. 2:14–15. The fact that the plain meaning of Hosea 11:1 refers to the exodus means that Matthew's citation of that verse strengthens rather than weakens the typological interpretation.

11. Matt. 4:2. This, of course, is a miracle, but not a redemptive one.

12. *Antiquities* 20.8.6; *War* 2.13.4. On the typology of Moses, see Teeple, *Mosaic Eschatological Prophet*, passim; S. Isser, *The Dositheans: A Samaritan Sect in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, 1976), pp. 131–142; Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, pp. 97–98, and esp. his references in n. 61.

13. B. *Sanhedrin* 99a; *Pesikta Rabbati* 1, p. 4a.

compact and convenient analysis.¹⁴ One of these theories, which Heinemann (along with most other scholars) rejects, is a typological one suggested long ago by Louis Ginzberg. The rabbis, Ginzberg noted, believed that the tribe of Ephraim had left Egyptian bondage for the land of Israel before the appointed hour, and the Ephraimites' efforts at military conquest had ended in death on the field of battle. Since the ultimate recapitulation of the first redemption is at the very heart of rabbinic messianism, such an event could not go unreflected at the end of days; hence, there will arise an Ephraimite Messiah whose early struggle for redemption will end in death at the hands of the enemies of Israel.¹⁵

The essential argument against this extremely attractive proposal was made by Viktor Aptowitz and is endorsed by Heinemann. The Ephraimite exodus, Aptowitz wrote, was a "sinful undertaking" because of its effort to effect a premature redemption, and messianic parallels are to miracles, "not sacrilegious undertakings, not catastrophes."¹⁶ In Heinemann's paraphrase, "The technique of 'analogy' is applied only to miracles and the like, not to events given a negative evaluation."¹⁷ Finally, the sources demonstrate no negative attitude toward Messiah son of Joseph, who, unlike the Ephraimites, is far from a total failure.

Let us leave this explanation for the moment and proceed to an examination of the core of Heinemann's article, which will inadvertently lead us toward a reaffirmation of Ginzberg's typological interpretation. Heinemann's striking thesis is that the story of Messiah son of Joseph did not originally envision his tragic death; on the contrary, this Messiah was a successful warrior hero whose genesis requires no special explanation in light of the proliferation of messianic figures in this period (Elijah-Phineas, Melchizedek, and the Priestly Messiah of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the

14. "The Messiah of Ephraim and the Premature Exodus of the Tribe of Ephraim," *Harvard Theological Review* 68 (1975): 1–16. A Hebrew version of the article had appeared in *Tarbiz* 40 (1971): 450–461, and has been reprinted in Heinemann's *Aggadot ve-Toldoteihen* (Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 131–141. References here will be to the version in *HTR*, where the summary of earlier theories appears on pp. 1–6.

15. Ginzberg, *Sekte*, pp. 336–339 = *MGWJ*, pp. 414–417 = *Sect.*, pp. 235–238. The rabbinic sources about the Ephraimites are noted by Ginzberg and discussed by Heinemann, "Messiah of Ephraim," pp. 10–13.

16. *Parteipolitik der Hasmonäerzeit im Rabbinischen und Pseudoepigraphischen Schrifttum* (Vienna and New York, 1927), p. 107.

17. "Messiah of Ephraim," p. 4. In the Hebrew, "and the like" was the stronger "and acts of salvation" (וּמַעֲשֵׂי יְשׁוּעָה), which reflects Aptowitz's assertion more closely. Whether neutral acts, which are neither redemptive nor sinful, would be recapitulated is left ambiguous.

Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs). Even though the earliest datable discussion of Messiah son of Joseph refers to his death,¹⁸ the original form of the story is preserved in those later Midrashim which make no such reference. This follows from two considerations. First, "if the death in battle of the Messiah son of Joseph was a generally accepted doctrine, it is quite inconceivable that a good many of the sources should ignore it; this is not the sort of 'detail' which may accidentally be omitted." Second, some of those sources speak of this Messiah as a victorious redeemer. The failure of scholars to notice the absence of the death motif results from "a kind of 'optical illusion' which makes one see what is said explicitly in some of the sources also in the ones which know nothing of it."¹⁹

Since the death of Messiah son of Joseph could not have been ignored once it was known, it follows that although the passages oblivious of his death are embedded in later sources, they must predate the second-century source which knows that he will die. The question now becomes not where Messiah son of Joseph comes from but what it was in the second century C.E. that brought about the motif of his death. To this Heinemann replies: the Bar Kokhba experience. Disappointed Jews attempted to retain faith in some sort of messianic role for their slain leader, and so they associated him with the heroic Messiah son of Joseph, now transformed into a tragic hero who will fall in battle.

At the same time, Heinemann argues, another, unrelated legend was undergoing a radical metamorphosis. The *Mekhilta* in *Beshallah* regards the Ephraimites who left Egypt prematurely as arrogant rebels who "kept not the covenant of God and refused to walk in his law" (Ps. 78:10); other sources, however, regard them as victims of an error in calculation, not apparently as sinners, while one source, which identifies them with the dead resurrected by Ezekiel, must surely consider them "essentially righteous men."²⁰

The generation of Bar Kokhba, Heinemann says, cannot have been responsible for a story that reflects "complacent, righteous condemnation" of people who attempt to hasten redemption, with all that such condemna-

18. The second reference in B. *Sukkah* 52a. On the problems of dating the earlier reference on that page, see J. Klausner, *Ha-Ra'ayon ha-Meshihi be-Yisrael* (Jerusalem, 1927), pp. 318-319.

19. Heinemann, "Messiah of Ephraim," pp. 6-8.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-13. Heinemann attributes special significance to this last source (B. *Sandrin* 92b and elsewhere); I have downplayed it somewhat for a reason that will soon become evident.

tion would imply about so many members of that generation, including R. Akiva. Thus, the uncompromisingly negative attitude must have preceded the Bar Kokhba experience, while those who shared that experience transformed the old view of the Ephraimites and regarded them as victims of an error or even as tragic heroes. Finally, Heinemann suggests that because the Ephraimite exodus came to be associated with contemporary events, Bar Kokhba himself became connected with that tribe and was ultimately identified with the old, newly transformed figure of Messiah son of Joseph.

This is a stimulating, often brilliant article which is nonetheless only partly persuasive. The revolutionary thesis about Messiah son of Joseph stands or falls on a single assertion: sources that speak of him as a successful, redeeming warrior without mentioning his death cannot have known of that death. To sustain Heinemann's thesis, this assertion must be more than plausible; it must have the overwhelming force necessary to compel a rearrangement of the chronological order of the sources at our disposal by dating the relevant material in the later Midrashim before the tannaitic statement about this Messiah's death. To make matters worse, the tannaitic source refers to his death in a matter-of-fact fashion as something which is apparently common knowledge.²¹

Moreover, Heinemann must concede that the later rabbis who "faithfully transmit" what he considers "the older version . . . must already have been aware of the new conception of the death of Messiah ben Ephraim."²² In short, they too were presumably victimized by the same optical illusion that has afflicted modern scholars. Though the point is not decisive, it is worth noting that the later apocalyptic Midrashim explicitly describe an often victorious Messiah son of Joseph who is nevertheless killed before the final redemption and almost immediately resurrected by Messiah son of David.

Most important, the psychological process by which a messianic warrior who will be killed nevertheless comes to be described as a conquering hero seems perfectly understandable. Whatever the origins of such a figure, Messiah son of Joseph is after all a Jew fighting the forces of evil at the dawn of the messianic age. How could the Jewish messianic imagination fail to hope for his success? And, of course, it need hardly be said that the desires of

21. "When [Messiah son of David] saw that Messiah son of Joseph was killed, he said before God, 'Master of the Universe, I ask you only for life'" (B. *Sukkah* 52a). The point was made by Klausner, *Ha-Ra'ayon ha-Meshihi*, p. 318.

22. "Messiah of Ephraim," p. 8, n. 31.

the messianic imagination do not go unfulfilled in the texts that we are examining. A Messiah son of Joseph whose *raison d'être* is to fight and die would nonetheless be transformed almost inevitably into precisely the warrior hero that confronts us in the Midrashim that Heinemann cites. If everyone knew that this Messiah would die—and the chronological order of our sources gives us every reason to think that this is so—then there is no need to mention this in each story of his exploits; the “optical illusion” of modern scholars may well have been the reality of the third-, fourth-, and fifth-century reader. Finally, I would not even rule out the possibility that someone caught up in the triumphs of Messiah son of Joseph might have come to believe that his death in battle is only one possible outcome and that sufficient merit might render it avoidable.²³ Whether or not this is so, Heinemann has allowed a brilliant but speculative reconstruction to overpower the extant progression of sources.

On the other hand, Heinemann's insightful discussion of the Ephraimite story is, with one important exception, thoroughly persuasive. The supposed wickedness of anyone who hastened the end would simply have to be rethought in the wake of the Bar Kokhba revolt;²⁴ even if the messianic pretender could be considered a villain, his renowned rabbinic supporter could not. Unfortunately, Heinemann's direct evidence for a positive evaluation of the Ephraimites will not do. As my former student David Strauss has pointed out, the same page of the Talmud which records the view that Ezekiel resurrected the Ephraimites also reports other identifications of these revived “dry bones”: they are those who denied the resurrection, those who have no enthusiasm for the commandments, or those who covered the Temple with abominations. Nevertheless, the basic point remains; for most Jews in the mid-second century, the Ephraimites were not and could not have been sinners.

If we now step back and look at the broader picture, we suddenly discover that something very interesting has happened. Heinemann has unwittingly refuted the centerpiece of Aptowitz's argument against Ginzberg. If the Ephraimites are not sinners, then the typological explanation of Messiah son of Joseph no longer involves the recapitulation of a “sinful, sacrilegious undertaking,” and we have already seen abundant evidence that it is not

23. Precisely this conviction is attested in sources from a much later period; see M. Kasher, *Ha-Tekufah ha-Gedolah* (Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 428–431.

24. Though there are imperfections in the analogy, one cannot help but think of the Zionist reevaluation of the *ma'pilim* of Numbers 14:40–45 in Bialik's *Metei Midbar*.

only miracles that will be repeated at the end of days.²⁵ If there existed a favorable evaluation of the Ephraimites, the point would of course grow even stronger.

Because of the structure of his article, Heinemann was virtually precluded from recognizing the implications of his own argument. By the time he reached the discussion of the Ephraimites, he had already argued that Messiah son of Joseph did not originate as a dying Messiah; if this is true, then Ginzberg's thesis is automatically refuted and is no longer a live issue. Hence, Aptowitz's argument, which Heinemann had endorsed earlier, is no longer relevant, and the destruction of its major premise can go unnoticed. However, if we reject the article's novel thesis about Messiah son of Joseph (as I think we should) and accept its observation about the Ephraimites (as we also should), the typological genesis of Messiah son of Joseph reemerges in all its considerable attractiveness.

If Ginzberg is correct, we should expect the first references to this Messiah to deal primarily with his death in battle without any heroic overtones; the Ephraimites, even to second-century Jews, were not necessarily great heroes. The glorious victories would result from a psychological process that we have already discussed and should make their appearance only as the story develops. Though we have only one certain source as early as the second century, it is at least interesting that it fulfills this expectation to perfection.²⁶ The typological explanation, which fits the central, established pattern of rabbinic messianic thinking, has unwittingly been rescued, and it deserves first place in any discussion of the origins of Messiah son of Joseph.²⁷

25. See nn. 8–13 above and cf. n. 17.

26. See n. 21 above. The same can be said about the possibly tannaitic source a bit earlier in *Sukkah* 52a.

27. Let me make it clear that I consider Heinemann's point about the likely attitude toward the Ephraimites in the post-Bar Kokhba period to be extremely useful but not absolutely indispensable for a defense of Ginzberg. A weaker defense might maintain that a condemnatory and a neutral attitude toward the Ephraimites coexisted in the pre-Bar Kokhba period and that the latter (which saw them as mistaken calculators) produced the typological figure of Messiah son of Joseph. One might even regard the severe condemnation in the *Mekhilta* and elsewhere as a later development—a reaction to the Bar Kokhba revolt by one (minority) faction that was so concerned to prevent a repetition of this disaster that they were indifferent to the implication for R. Akiva's reputation. Nevertheless, I agree with Heinemann to the extent that I cannot imagine this as a majority view. (For a new typological explanation that does not persuade me, see Raphael Patai's suggestion that Messiah son of Joseph dies because Moses died short of the promised land [*The Messiah Texts* (New York, 1979), introd., p. xxxiii].)

II

Whether or not the Ephraimites of the Aggadah are models for Messiah son of Joseph, they are surely the precursors of a long line of messianic calculators doomed to disappointment. In the rabbinic period, attitudes toward this seductive enterprise ranged from a famous curse against the calculators to a series of messianic dates, some of which appear on the same folio of the Talmud as the curse itself.²⁸ A careful examination of these dates will reveal once again the overwhelming impact of typology on Jewish messianic thought.

The destruction of the Second Temple inevitably inspired messianic calculation, and one obscure report tells us of three such calculations apparently referring to the period between the destruction and the Bar Kokhba revolt. The details, however, are too sketchy to facilitate a reconstruction of the precise dates except to say that the one ascribed to R. Akiva no doubt pointed to the 130s.²⁹

Between the Bar Kokhba revolt and the end of the talmudic period, we have precisely five (or perhaps four) clear rabbinic statements concentrated on two pages of the Talmud indicating the year, or in one case the jubilee, in which the Messiah will come. (1) The world will last six thousand years: two thousand chaos, two thousand Torah, and two thousand the messianic age, though our sins have delayed the long-awaited hour.³⁰ (2) After the four hundredth year of the destruction of the Temple, if someone offers you a field worth a thousand dinars for just one, do not buy it.³¹ (3) Do not buy it after the year 4231 A.M.³² (4) After the year 4291 A.M. the world will enter a period of wars leading to the messianic age.³³ (5) Elijah informed a certain rabbi that the world would last no fewer than eighty-five jubilees, and in the

Shimon Toder's "Mashiah ben David u-Mashiah ben Yosef," *Mahanayim* 124 (1970): 100–112, came to my attention after this article was completed. Though it contains no reference to Ginzberg, it maintains the typological origin of Messiah son of Joseph and notes that the attitude toward the Ephraimites in the Aggadah is not uniformly negative.

28. B. *Sanhedrin* 97b. On rabbinic opposition to calculations, note the material assembled by A. H. Silver, *A History of Messianic Speculation in Israel* (Boston, 1959), pp. 195–206.

29. See the middle of B. *Sanhedrin* 97b, and note Klausner's emendation of R. Simlai to Rabbi Ishmael (*Ha-Ra'ayon ha-Meshihi*, p. 272).

30. B. *Sanhedrin* 97a–b; B. *Avodah Zarah* 9a.

31. B. *Avodah Zarah* 9b.

32. *Ibid.*

33. B. *Sanhedrin* 97b.

last jubilee the Son of David would come. When asked whether the Messiah would arrive at the beginning or the end of the jubilee and whether or not the jubilee would be completed before his advent, Elijah confessed that he did not know.³⁴

It has long been recognized that the first of these dates is dependent upon a typological scheme in which the six-thousand-year duration of the earth is derived from the six days of creation; since Abraham came upon the scene not far from the year 2000, another period of two thousand years until the Messiah seemed to make typological sense.³⁵ The typology of the second date is also blatant; the final exile will last precisely as long as the four-hundred-year Egyptian bondage (Gen. 15:13).³⁶

The next date, however, is an enigma. The simplest solution was formulated most explicitly by P. Volz, who informs us matter-of-factly that 4231 is four hundred years after 3831, which is "the year of the destruction of the Temple according to the Israelite calendar."³⁷ The only trouble with this is that it isn't true. The rabbis dated the destruction in 3828,³⁸ and the Talmud

34. Ibid. Because of a misreading of three rabbinic passages dealing with the *duration* of the messianic age, Silver presents three other dates for the time of its advent; see his *Messianic Speculation*, pp. 19–20, #3 (and contrast his correct reading of analogous material on p. 14, #2), and pp. 25–26, #1 and 2. Silver's misreading was endorsed by Yehudah Even Shmuel, *Midre-shai Ge'ullah* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 1954), introd., p. 42; the proof-texts cited in these passages, however, rule out this interpretation. A rabbinic statement which could be considered typological describes Balaam's speeches as taking place at the midpoint of world history; though some medievals cited this as a messianic calculation (and the proof-text tends to support such a reading), it may tell us only when the world will end. See *J. Shabbat* 6:9, fol. 8d, and cf. A. Halkin's introduction to Maimonides' *Epistle to Yemen* (New York, 1952), p. xiii. For what may be another typological calculation with details unclear, see the last statement in section 21 of the introduction to *Eikhah Rabbati*.

35. Whatever Iranian influences may have affected this calculation (see the reference in E. Urbach, *Hazal: Pirkei Emunot ve-De'ot* [Jerusalem, 1969], pp. 610–611 = *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* [Jerusalem, 1975], p. 678) cannot be allowed to overshadow the straightforward relationship with the days of creation. Cf. the associated talmudic statement (B. *Sanhedrin* 97a) about a six-thousand-year period followed by a one-thousand-year "Sabbatical" destruction.

36. The discussion of this point in Neusner's *Messiah in Context*, p. 180, creates the impression that the only duration assigned to the sojourn in Egypt by Scripture is 430 years (Exod. 12:40).

37. *Die Eschatologie der jüdischen Gemeinde im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter* (Tübingen, 1934), p. 144.

38. Or 3829. See the Ba'al ha-Ma'or's comments on *Avodah Zarah* 9b (= fol. 2b of the Rif), s.v. *amar R. Huna*. In either case, the last official year of the Temple is considered 3828, and 3829 is the first year of destruction; hence, the four hundredth year remains 4228. The years 3828 and 3829 are 68 and 69 C.E. according to the current Jewish calendar; nevertheless, the

explicitly notes that there is a three-year discrepancy between 4231 and the four hundredth year after the destruction.³⁹ Among the medievals, the tosafists maintained that 4231 was a majority of the eighty-fifth jubilee (apparently counting by decades), while Abravanel argued the same point, suggesting that the number was obtained by adding a sabbatical cycle of seven years to the midpoint of the eighty-fifth jubilee ($4225 + 7 = 4232$, and the Talmud, after all, speaks of the year *after* 4231).⁴⁰

The fundamental basis of this date, however, may really be quite simple. It is, I think, a typological date identical with four hundred years after the destruction with a three-year delay resulting from a passage in the Book of Daniel. The basic period of exile is in fact the four hundred years of the very first exile; Daniel, however, specifically says that we shall have to wait 1290 or 1335 days, here taken as additional days (Dan. 12:11–12). Though most later calculators understood these days as years, there is a recurring midrash which unequivocally understands them as days which pass during the final messianic scenario.⁴¹ Thus, Daniel 12:11, which reads, “From the time that

common view that the rabbis miscalculated the destruction of 70 C.E. by one or two years is mistaken, because their calendar differed by a year or two from the one that became standard among medieval Jews. See the Ba'al ha-Ma'or, loc. cit., and E. Frank, *Talmudic and Rabbinical Chronology* (New York, 1956). This affects other rabbinic dates as well and means, for example, that the eighty-fifth jubilee is not 441–490 C.E., as scholars routinely indicate, but 442–491 or 443–492.

39. Silver, *Messianic Speculation*, (p. 26), apparently oblivious of the Talmud's comment, also considers 4231 as the four hundredth year of the destruction, since in the current Jewish calendar it is “c. [this little letter deserves notice] 470 C.E.” In a puzzling passage, Urbach cites the talmudic remark about a three-year discrepancy between the four hundredth year and 4231, and in the first sentence of text following this footnote says that 4231 is identical with that year (*Hazal*, p. 613 = *Sages*, p. 682). Perhaps he is tacitly suggesting a new understanding of the talmudic statement which would take it to mean that there is a three-year difference in calculating the four hundredth year; he does not, however, say this explicitly, and it is not, in my view, a tenable reading of the passage.

40. *Tosafot Avodah Zarah* 9b, s.v. *le-ahar*; Isaac Abravanel, *Yeshu'ot Meshiho*, 1812, p. 10b. Abravanel explains 4228 (= 400 years after the destruction) in a similar fashion as a majority of the eighty-fifth jubilee in sabbatical units. (A typographical error in this edition of *Yeshu'ot Meshiho* has changed ר"ח into ר"י.)

41. See the references in n. 8. The discrepancy between 1290 and 1335 determines that the Messiah will be hidden forty-five days. Though Rashi on Dan. 12:12 understandably interprets this midrash as a reference to forty-five years, its plain meaning resists such an interpretation. For forty-five days, not years, in this context, see also the apocalyptic midrashim in Even Shmuel, *Midreshei Ge'ullah*, pp. 43, 81, 104, 195. Some of the apocalypses also take the reference to “time, times, and half a time” in Dan. 7:25 and 12:7 in the literal sense of three and a half years; see *Midreshei Ge'ullah*, pp. 103 and 470, and R. Bonfil's plausible suggestion in his “‘Hazon Daniel’ ki-Te'udah Historit ve-Sifrutit,” *Sefer Zikkaron le-Yizhak Baer* (= *Zion* 44 [1979]), p. 146.

the continual burnt-offering shall be taken away [*me'et husar ha-tamid*] and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days," *must* mean that from the end of the period of exile inaugurated by the removal of the burnt-offering there shall be an additional 1290 days culminating in some important event. Then, forty-five more days will pass, reaching a total of 1335. Since the period of exile is four hundred years, waiting an addition 1290 or 1335 days adds three and a half years and leads to the conclusion that the Messiah will come just after the year 4231. In sum, this date also reflects the typology of the Egyptian exile; indeed, the *'et* of Daniel 12:11 refers specifically to this period of time. The extra three years are simply an appendage forced upon us by the Book of Daniel.⁴²

Our fourth date (4291) can be dealt with quickly. Since I cannot explain it, and since the Hebrew abbreviations for 4231 (רל"א) and 4291 (רצ"א) can easily be confused, I am prepared to follow the lead of the Gaon of Vilna and emend it to 4231.⁴³ If this is correct, then there is nothing to explain, and our five rabbinic dates are transformed into four.

It should also be noted that had the rabbis taken these days as years, they would have been forced to delay the redemption unbearably. Indeed, their failure to use Daniel as an important basis for calculations may result precisely from the fact that they regarded the numbers there as references to events taking place within the final messianic process; such numbers cannot be useful in predicting when the process itself will begin.

42. Even Shmuel maintains, as I do, that the number 4231 is also based on the four-hundred-year period of exile, but he accounts for the three-year delay by a rather uncomfortable expedient. He argues that what begins after 4228 is the seven-year period during which the Messiah will come; and "after three years of this seven-year period have elapsed, normal life cannot continue" (*Midreshei Ge'ullah*, introd., p. 45).

43. So too Silver, *Messianic Speculation*, p. 26, and Urbach, *Hazal*, p. 613 = *Sages*, p. 682. Though I remain skeptical, it is worth recording a characteristically brilliant explanation proposed by Gerson Cohen when I was his student at Columbia; 4291, he suggested, may constitute a sabbatical unit of years for each commandment (613×7). An elaborate but unpersuasive effort to account for this date was made by Even Shmuel in his introduction to *Midreshei Ge'ullah*, p. 46. The setting up of the abomination of desolation in Daniel 12:11, he says, must have been taken as the establishment of the city of Rome, and from that point we must wait 1290 days (= years). The traditional date of the founding of Rome is 753 B.C.E., and this corresponds to 3008 A.M. (Even Shmuel [p. 54, n. 49] regarded this Hebrew equivalent, given in a late Jewish source, as approximate. In fact, it is precise; since there was no year zero, the Hebrew year 3000 = 761 B.C.E., even though the more familiar year 4000 = 240 C.E.) $3008 + 1290 = 4298$, when Rome will fall. But the rabbis often spoke of the seven-year period in which the Messiah will come, and that period will therefore begin in 4291. This is ingenious, but aside from the fact that we have no early evidence that Jews used or knew the date 3008 as the beginning of Rome (cf. the end of n. 74 below), the reference in Daniel 12:11 to the removal of the

Finally, we reach the most intractable date of all. One approach to the mysterious eighty-fifth jubilee (4201–4250 A.M.) is to regard it as a period so rife with potential messianic dates that it was a convenient way to subsume them all. Even Shmuel points to a Roman tradition predicting the end of the empire twelve hundred years after the founding of the city. This brings us to a point approximately seven years after the beginning of the crucial jubilee, and by subtracting the oft-mentioned seven-year period of the messianic advent, we can reach its starting point. Since no Jewish source mentions this Roman tradition, however, we would do well to remain skeptical. More to the point, Even Shmuel notes not only that 4228 and 4231 fall within the jubilee but that a typological calculation assigning to the exile a duration equal to that of the First or Second Temple (410 and 420 years respectively according to rabbinic chronology) would also culminate in the eighty-fifth jubilee.⁴⁴ It may well be that this approach is correct, but since the only persuasive dates (which are all typological) fall in the second half of the jubilee, and since this would then be the only calculation which in effect gives us a choice of calculations, it seems preferable to search for an explanation that would account for the number eighty-five jubilees itself.

There have been, as far as I know, only two efforts to accomplish this. In the Middle Ages, Abravanel made the striking suggestion that the number is derived from the eighty-five letters in Numbers 10:35–36; these verses con-

burnt-offering, which can have no association with the date of the founding of Rome, would appear to make Even Shmuel's proposal impossible.

44. *Midreshei Ge'ullah*, introd., pp. 45–46. Baron's summary of Even Shmuel (*A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, vol. 5 [New York, London, and Philadelphia, 1957], p. 366, n. 28) can leave the impression that this typological reasoning about the Temples is actually attested in the ancient sources. For such a calculation in the Middle Ages, see Nahmanides, *Sefer ha-Ge'ullah*, in Ch. D. Chavel, *Kitvei Ramban*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1963), p. 294, citing debatable evidence from section 21 of the introduction to *Eikhah Rabbati*.

Moshe Ber suggested that the messianic hopes associated with this jubilee may have been connected with the problems of Babylonian Jewry at the time; see *Sinai* 48 (1961): 299–302. On this talmudic passage, cf. also I. Levi's note in *Revue des Études Juives* 1 (1880): 110. Urbach (*Hazal*, p. 612 = *Sages*, p. 680) may have a point in stressing Elijah's uncertainty about the precise year of redemption, but that surely does not mean that there is no messianic calculation here. This explicit uncertainty, however, does have an important corollary: it prevents us from assuming that the Talmud has in mind only the last year of the jubilee, despite the fact that the Testament of Moses (1:2 and 10:12) appears to point to the year 4250 A.M. as the year of redemption. The connection of that text to our talmudic passage was already made by R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1913), 2:423, and was repeated by E. S. Artom in his commentary to 10:12 (*Ha-Sefarim ha-Hizzonim: Sippurei Aggadah*, vol. 1 [Tel Aviv, 1965]) and by S. B. Hoenig, "Dor she-Ben David Ba," *Sefer Zikaron li-Shmuel Belkin* (New York, 1981), p. 142.

stitute a separate biblical book according to the rabbis, they are enclosed by two reversed *nuns* (a letter with the numerical value of fifty in Hebrew), the Mishnah makes special reference to these eighty-five letters in a legal context (M. *Yadayim* 3:5), and, Abravanel might have added, the content of the passage deals with the dispersal of the enemies of God.⁴⁵ One can only admire the ingenuity of this proposal, but the connection with the messianic age remains tenuous at best. Much more recently, Even Shmuel advanced the conjecture that messianic calculators may have cited the verse “Hitherto [*ad po*] shall you come, but no further” (Job 38:11) in light of the fact that the numerical value of *po* is eighty-five. Nevertheless, he apparently means only that the date may have been further validated, not originated, by this numerical equivalence, which appears in a verse that has no redemptive context and no connection with jubilees.⁴⁶

In the absence of any satisfactory explanation of this number, it may be worthwhile to introduce a new, highly speculative typological suggestion. King David, and hence the final redeemer, had only one distinguished ancestor at the time of the first conquest of the land of Israel, which was, of course, the culmination of the first redemption. The rabbis inform us that no less a figure than Caleb, who was the prince of the tribe of Judah, was a forefather of David.⁴⁷ The typologically oriented messianist would almost inevitably look at Caleb as a possible prototype of the final redeemer or at least as a source of information about the final redemption.

As the conquest of the land reaches its completion, Caleb tells Joshua, “I was forty years old when Moses sent me to explore the land, and I brought back an honest report. . . . Moses swore an oath that day and said, ‘The land on which you have set foot shall be your patrimony.’ . . . It is now forty-five years since God made this promise to Moses, at the time when Israel was journeying in the wilderness, and today I am eighty-five years old” (Josh. 14:7–10).

Consider the following. First, the passage contains unusual, apparently unnecessary emphasis on Caleb’s age, even in light of the next verse, which tells us how his strength has remained unchanged; if forty-five years have

45. *Yeshu'ot Meshiho*, p. 12a.

46. *Midreshei Ge'ullah*, introd., p. 46. Once again, Baron’s summary (*History*, 5:167) can leave the impression that this is more than a conjecture.

47. B. *Sotah* 11b; *Sifrei* Numbers 78, Friedmann’s ed., p. 19b. There seems, however, no alternative to the conclusion of the Maharsha (*Sotah* ad loc.) that the Talmud is referring to descent through one of David’s female ancestors.

passed, of course he is now eighty-five years old. Second, the number forty is strikingly suggestive and could have drawn the attention of a numerologically oriented reader all by itself. Can it be a coincidence that Caleb was forty years old when the decree of a forty-year exile in the desert was issued, and can it be that Scripture tells us this merely to satisfy our idle curiosity? If his age at the time of the exile reflects the length of that exile, might not his age at the time of redemption, which we have been told in such a verbose and striking way, contain information about the time of redemption? Finally—and this is what removes this suggestion from the realm of sheer speculation—the Talmud informs us that the conversation between Caleb and Joshua took place close to the time when Jews began to count jubilees, and that the numbers in these verses are there to enable us to calculate precisely when the count began.⁴⁸ The rabbis, in other words, explicitly connect jubilees with this number eighty-five, and a messianic calculator may well have asked himself whether the connection is more than just exoteric.

If this is correct, then all messianic dates in rabbinic literature pointing to the post-Bar Kokhba period result from typological reasoning. The first is based on the typology of the days of creation, the next two on the typology of the first exile and its four-hundred-year duration, and the fourth on the typology of a redemptive figure, an ancestor of the final redeemer, and his age at the culmination of the initial redemption.⁴⁹

III

The eschatological monster with the mysterious name Armilus has long fascinated students of early medieval apocalyptic. Born of a union between Satan and a beautiful statue, this final ruler of Rome-Edom will kill the Messiah son of Joseph only to fall victim to the ultimate, Davidic redeemer. Bald and with a leprous forehead, with one small eye and one large one, his right arm grotesquely short and his left unnaturally long, his left ear open and his right ear closed, Armilus is a figure of menacing terror.⁵⁰

48. B. *Arakhin* 13a. I have formulated this sentence fairly strongly in light of what I think is the correct observation at the end of *Tosafot* ad loc., s.v. Caleb.

49. Finally—a reminder that if my speculation about Caleb is rejected, the most reasonable explanation of the eighty-fifth jubilee remains the proliferation of messianic dates within that fifty-year period, and every one of those dates is typological. Needless to say, this proliferation of dates could have enhanced the suggestiveness of the passage in Joshua as well.

50. While none of the sources portrays Armilus as Prince Charming, I have reproduced one

Since there is general agreement that the two references in the Targumim may well be later additions,⁵¹ Armilus makes his first datable appearance in the third and fourth decades of the seventh century. Whatever the relevance of a few enigmatic terms in *Sefer Eliyahu* and *Perek Eliyahu*,⁵² Armilus appears as a major actor in the eschatological drama in the Hebrew apocalypse *Sefer Zerubavel* (ca. 628)⁵³ and is mentioned as a matter of course in several sections of the Greek polemic *Doctrina Jacobi Nuper Baptizati* (ca. 634).⁵⁴

While the notion of a monstrous final ruler of Rome could have arisen directly from Daniel 7:7–8, 23–25 in conjunction with Ezekiel 38–39, it is especially likely that the Jewish apocalyptic imagination was inspired by the elaborate Christian descriptions of Antichrist as an evil Roman emperor, often taking the form of Nero *redivivus*.⁵⁵ The Christianization of the Roman Empire created an ambivalence which required Christians to envision the defeat of this monstrous figure by a good Roman emperor who is the major agent of redemption.⁵⁶ Jews, however, were under no such constraints. A single, Satanic ruler was all that Rome would produce in its final days, and stories of such a figure could be assimilated, reworked, and expanded without any of the usual inhibitions about the adoption of Christian legends; indeed, the myth was even more congenial to Jews, whose hatred of Rome was unalloyed and whose hope for its destruction was untainted by ambivalence.

of the most elaborate descriptions from *Midrash va-Yosha'*, *Midreshei Ge'ullah*, p. 96. See also pp. 79, 131, 136, 320. For an English translation of some of the Armilus texts, see Patai, *Messianic Texts*, pp. 156–164.

51. Pseudo-Jonathan to Deut. 34:3, Isa. 11:4. Cf. A. Kohut, *Arukh ha-Shalem* (Vienna, 1878), p. 292.

52. For הרמלא, הרמילא, and הרמלת, see Even Shmuel, *Midreshei Ge'ullah*, pp. 42 and 51, and cf. his discussion on pp. 34–35, n. 12, 18.

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 74, 79–83.

54. Διασκαλία Ἰακώβου Νεοβαπτίστου, ed. N. Bonwetsch, *Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, phil.-hist. Klasse, n.f., vol. 12, no. 3 (Berlin, 1910), pp. 4–5, 66, 70–71, 86, and more.

55. See W. Bousset, *The antichrist Legend* (London, 1896); J. Berger, *Die griechische Daniel. Exegese—Eine altkirchliche Apokalypse* (Leiden, 1976), pp. 103–150. I see no persuasive evidence that the Christian conception comes from earlier Jewish sources (other than Daniel itself).

56. For brief summaries, see M. Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 299–301, and N. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, 2d ed. (New York, 1970), pp. 31–34. Cf. also I. Levi, "L'Apocalypse de Zorobabel et le roi de Perses Siroès," *Revue des Études Juives* 71 (1920): 59–61.

The name Armilus, however, is neither biblical nor talmudic nor Christian, and its origin and meaning cry out for explanation. Ideally, such an explanation should be more than an etymology; it should tell us something more about the ideas generating the concept and may help us place it in the typological framework which is the hallmark of Jewish messianism in this period. No such understanding is achieved by Hitzig's curious suggestion that the similarities between Suetonius' description of the *armillatus* Caligula and *Sefer Zerubbavel's* depiction of Armilus mean that our monster received his name from Caligula's bracelet.⁵⁷ Such a derivation concentrates on a triviality and has justly been ignored.

Another explanation, however, which has deservedly received more serious attention, suffers from a similar, though less acute problem. Several scholars have regarded Armilus as a corruption of the name of the evil Persian deity Ahriman or Anglo-Mainyus.⁵⁸ This derivation reinforces a certain sense of the exotic produced by the Armilus legend, but it evokes no specific associations with the story, nor is the similarity in the names particularly satisfying. More important, a Persian god would not have produced the resonance necessary for this figure and this name to have flourished within the Jewish messianic tradition. Ahriman strikes no familiar chord, and only in the absence of an alternative explanation should we be willing to assume that so alien a villain would find a home as a standard figure in the mainstream of Jewish messianism. But we have an alternative explanation. The problem, in fact, is that we have one too many.

The name Armilus has not inspired much recent controversy because one derivation has carried the day to the point where the question is generally considered resolved. Scholars might sometimes go through the motions of citing earlier theories, but the prevailing attitude appears to be that this problem is behind us. Armilus is Romulus.⁵⁹

57. F. Hitzig, *Das Buch Daniel* (Leipzig, 1850), p. 125.

58. K. Kohler in *Jewish Encyclopedia* 1:296–297, s.v. Ahriman; Kohut in *Arukh ha-Shalem*, loc. cit., and esp. in his *Über die Jüdische Angelologie und Daemonologie in Ihrer Abhängigkeit vom Parsismus* (Leipzig, 1866), p. 62. Kohler emphasized the *gimel* in the ארמילוט of the Targumim (see n. 51 above).

59. See, e.g., E. Schürer, *Geschichte der Jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi* (Leipzig, 1907), II, pp. 621–622; Klausner in *Ha-Ra'ayon ha-Meshihi*, p. 232, and in *Enziklopedyah Ivrit*, 5:954–957; Levi, "Apocalypse de Zorobabel," p. 59; M. Guttman in the German *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 3:364–366; Baron, *History*, 5:145; J. Dan, *Ha-Sippur ha-Ivri bi-Mei ha-Beinayim: Iyyunim be-Toledotav* (Jerusalem, 1974), p. 42.

Now this really is an attractive identification, even more attractive than is generally realized. It is not merely that Romulus founded and hence symbolizes Rome,⁶⁰ which is the empire that Armilus will rule. The Romulus identification recalls the central theme of messianic typology, in which an early figure or event recurs at the end of days. If the final redeemer will be like the first redeemer, so will the final king of Rome be like its founder. The logic of messianic reasoning led inexorably to such a notion, and it may even be that historical events provided reinforcement to the seventh-century observer. The Western Roman Empire had, after all, already fallen, and it could hardly be coincidence that the name of its final ruler was Romulus.⁶¹

As far as linguistic similarity is concerned, we face no serious problem. Romulus and Armilus are more than close enough to sustain the identification, and Armilus' Greek name, Ermolaos, which appears in one Hebrew apocalypse as ארמילאוס and which we shall discuss in a moment, is virtually identical with a Syriac form of Romulus (ארמלאוס) that was noted long ago by Nöldeke.⁶² To clinch the argument, we even have a late-seventh-century source which makes the identification explicit. The Latin translation (though not the Greek text) of pseudo-Methodius informs us matter-of-factly that Romulus is Armaleus.⁶³

The only trouble with all this is that another, widely rejected derivation is at least as attractive as this one. It has been recognized for centuries that Armilus may be the Greek Eremolaos (Ἐρημόλαος), meaning "destroyer of a people"; the possibility, in fact, is almost forced upon us by the ארמילאוס of *Nistarot de-Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai*⁶⁴ and the Hermolaos or Ermolaos routinely used in *Doctrina Jacobi*. The definition of Armilus in Menahem de Lonzano's early-seventeenth-century dictionary reads as follows: "This means 'destroyer of a nation.' It is a Greek word compounded from *ereme*, meaning 'destroy,' and *laos*, meaning 'a nation'; it refers to an Edomite king who will win a major victory against his enemies and destroy them and who

60. Cf. Klausner, *Ha-Ra'ayon ha-Meshihi*, loc. cit.

61. Since Romulus Augustulus had at least one competitor for his dubious distinction, and since a seventh-century resident of the Eastern Roman Empire may not have shared the perception that the Western Empire had "fallen," we should perhaps be cautious about pressing this point too hard.

62. *Zeitschrift der Deutschen-Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 39 (1895): 343.

63. Ernst Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte und Forschungen* (Halle, 1898), p. 76. The pseudo-Methodian passage was noted by Bousset (*Antichrist Legend*, p. 105), Levi (loc. cit.), and others.

64. Even Shmuel, *Midreshei Ge'ullah*, p. 195.

will consequently be called Eremolaos.”⁶⁵ As in the case of the Romulus identification, this approach is confirmed by a very early source—in this instance by one manuscript of *Sefer Zerubbavel* itself, which tells us that Armilus means “destroyer of a nation” in Greek.⁶⁶

Despite these early references, it was not, as far as I know, until Graetz that the real significance of this derivation was noticed. Armilus, Graetz argued, is none other than a new Balaam, the archenemy who had tried to destroy the Jews, and whose name, according to the Talmud, means “destroyer of a people” (בלעם = בלע עם).⁶⁷ Eremolaos, he says, “is a felicitous Greek reproduction of the biblical archetype of enmity toward Israel.”⁶⁸ Armilus as *eremolaos* (often without reference to Balaam) has received only the most perfunctory comment by twentieth-century scholars; those who mention the derivation at all tend to reject it summarily and virtually without discussion. Klausner’s comment is among the most extensive: “And the suggestion that Armilus comes from the Greek *eremolaos* is especially far-fetched despite the fact that it is already noted in [one manuscript of *Sefer Zerubbavel*].”⁶⁹

It hardly seems necessary to say that modern conceptions of what is or is not farfetched do not serve as trustworthy guidelines for penetrating the early medieval apocalyptic imagination. We have already seen that Eremolaos, like Romulus, is associated with Armilus in an early source and that both derivations are linguistically appropriate and attractive. Typologically, Romulus provides the return of the first king of Rome; Balaam-Eremolaos

65. *Ma'arikh*, ed. A. Jellinek (Leipzig, 1853), p. 15.

66. I. Levi, *Revue des Études Juives* 68 (1914): 136 = *Midreshei Ge'ullah*, p. 387. The text of the passage is slightly corrupt, but however we emend it (see Levi’s note on p. 152), it clearly says that Armilus means חרוב עם. Levi notes other early scholars who proposed this translation, and cf. also the citation from David de Lara’s *Keter Kehunnah* in Kohut’s *Arukh ha-Shalem*, p. 292.

67. B. *Sanhedrin* 105a.

68. “Eine glückliche griechische Nachbildung des biblischen Urtypus der Feindseligkeit gegen Israel” (my translation). See *Jahrbuch für Israeliten* 5265 [1864/65], ed. J. Wertheimer and L. Kompert (Vienna, 1865), p. 19. The essay has recently been translated into English by I. Schorsch in H. Graetz, *The Structure of Jewish History and Other Essays* (New York, 1975), pp. 151–171 (notes on p. 310). Cf. also J. Levy, *Chaldäisches Wörterbuch über die Targumim und einen grossen Theil des Rabbinischen Schrifttums* (Leipzig, 1881), 1:66, s.v. Armilus.

69. *Enziklopedyah Ivrit*, 5:955. All reference to the *eremolaos* derivation was dropped from the abridged English translation of Klausner’s article in the recent *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. (Why is an article on a Jewish theme that appears in a general encyclopedia abridged when it is transferred to a Jewish encyclopedia?) Cf. also the brief references to this explanation in Schürer and Guttmann, loc. cit. (see n. 59 above).

provides the return of the archenemy of the first redeemer.⁷⁰ In light of the frequent stress on the similarities between the first and last redeemers, the Balaam derivation may well be the more attractive in this respect. Finally, there are even some concrete resemblances between Balaam and Armilus. The physical asymmetry of the monstrous king of Edom reflects the talmudic description of a Balaam who was blind in one eye and lame in one foot,⁷¹ while Armilus' construction of seven altars in *Sefer Zerubbavel* is a transparent reminiscence of the seven altars built by Balak at Balaam's behest.⁷²

These considerations force a reassessment of the regnant Romulus derivation, not because of any deficiency in that explanation, but because of the persuasiveness of an alternative. Like Buridan's ass, we are apparently condemned to eternal indecision in the face of two equally attractive options.

In fact, however, a single observation dissolves the problem and presents us with a richer and more fully persuasive picture of the mysterious figure of Armilus. Balaam *is* Romulus!

There is nothing esoteric or inordinately complex in this identification. To the seventh-century Jew steeped in midrashic lore, Balaam was Romulus not by some stretch of the exegetical imagination but as a simple matter of fact. Romulus, of course, was the first king of Rome, and the identification of Rome and Edom was the most basic commonplace. But the Bible informs us that the first king of Edom was Bela the son of Beor (Gen. 36:32; I Chron. 1:43), and some Jews made the almost inevitable identification of this king with Balaam the son of Beor.⁷³ Hence, even without a linguistic correspondence, the Jewish apocalypticist knew that Balaam is the person whom the Gentiles call Romulus or Armaleus; the identification was confirmed beyond all question when he noticed that Armaleus (= Eremolaos) is a direct translation of Balaam's name. The name—and to some degree the figure—of Armilus was generated by an exceptionally powerful typological impetus: the first king of Edom, who was also the archenemy of the first redeemer, will return at the end of days as both the final king of Rome and the archenemy of the final redeemer.⁷⁴

70. On the frequent midrashic contrast between Balaam and Moses, see the references in Ginzberg, *Legends*, 6:125, n. 727.

71. B. *Sanhedrin* 105a and *Sotah* 10a; for Armilus, cf. n. 50 above.

72. Num. 23:29–30. Cf. Even Shmuel's note in *Midreshei Ge'ullah*, p. 82.

73. See the Targum to I Chron. 1:43 and the reference in Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5:323, n. 324.

74. In this context, I think that the argument that Romulus was the founder of the city of Rome, not all of Edom, and that Bela ben Beor's city was Dinhavah (Gen. and I Chron., loc.

Thus far, we are on fairly firm ground, and I am tempted to end the argument at this point; nevertheless, understanding the messianic imagination virtually requires us to take the risk of more venturesome speculations. In an isolated footnote in the general introduction to *Midreshei Ge'ullah*, Even Shmuel made the following suggestion:

Apparently, people tended to call Rome "Aram" because of Laban the Aramaean, the deceiver (*rammai*), who "sought to destroy everything," and because of the verse, "My father was a wandering Aramaean" (Deut. 26:5), which the midrash took as "An Aramaean [Laban] sought to destroy my father [Jacob]." In the time of the Palestinian Amoraim this name was grafted on to (Remus and) Romulus . . . , and thus the name Armilus was born.⁷⁵

Although I know of no evidence that Rome was called Aram, the Laban connection may be worth pursuing for reasons unmentioned by Even Shmuel. Laban the Aramaean, the *eremolaos* who attempted to destroy the patriarch whose very name was Israel, is another alias of Balaam. The full text of the same Targum that identifies Balaam as the first king of Edom reads as follows: "And these are the kings who ruled in the land of Edom before any king ruled over the children of Israel: the evil Balaam son of Beor, that is, Laban the Aramaean, who united with the sons of Esau to do harm to Jacob and his sons and who sought to destroy them."⁷⁶

We may have arrived, then, at a threefold interpretation of Armilus in which Romulus, Balaam (= Eremolaos), and Laban (the Arami) are identified with one another. Each is described as the first king of Edom, and the apocalypses may even have understood Laban's epithet "the Arami" as a term bearing the dual meaning of "Aramaean" and "destroyer."⁷⁷ The

cit.) would be a quibble. There is an overwhelming likelihood that in the apocalyptic mentality, where Rome and Edom had merged into synonyms, Romulus would have been perceived as the first king—and symbol—of all of Edom. On the fluid midrashic tradition about the founding of the city, which ranged from the time of Esau's grandson Zepho to the time of Solomon, see Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5:372, n. 425, and 6:280, n. 11.

75. *Midreshei Ge'ullah*, introd., p. 51, n. 67. The midrash cited is best known for its appearance in the Passover Haggadah.

76. Targum to I Chron. 1:43. On the variety of relationships between Laban and Balaam posited in rabbinic literature, see Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5:303, n. 229, and 6:123, n. 722. See also the references in R. LeDéaut and J. Robert, *Targum des Chroniques*, vol. 1 (Rome, 1971), p. 42, n. 22.

77. Midrashic literature is not devoid of Greek puns. Is it beyond the realm of possibility

typological richness of the figure is further enhanced. History will have come full circle. The first king of Edom, who was the archenemy of both the father of the children of Israel and the first redeemer, will return at the end of days to rule over Edom once again. Once again he will seek to destroy Israel, but he will go down instead to a decisive and this time permanent defeat at the hands of the final redeemer.⁷⁸

* * *

As the Middle Ages wore on, the significance of typology began to wane; though this mode of messianic speculation would never be entirely displaced,⁷⁹ other factors gradually removed it from center stage. Amos Funkenstein's perceptive study of the marginal role of typology in medieval Jewish exegesis is not directly concerned with messianism;⁸⁰ nevertheless, some of the factors that he proposes to account for the exegetical phenomenon have application to our concerns as well. What is perhaps most relevant is the suggestion that Jews shied away from typology because they had come to see it as a classically Christian approach.⁸¹ Such reservations would have exerted special force in the context of messianic theory, and even Jews living in the orbit of Islam would not have escaped their impact.⁸²

that the famous and problematic midrashic interpretation of ארמי אויב אבי is based in part on an understanding of ארמי as both "Aramaean" and "destroyer"?

78. Let me finally propose two suggestions that may be improbable but should nevertheless be noted. (a) Balaam was the son of Beor. The root *b'r* refers to an animal, and associations with the story of the she-wolf that suckled Romulus could have arisen despite the fact that *b'r* usually means a beast of burden. (b) I. Levi in "Apocalypse de Zorobabel" thought that Armilus' birth from a statue was a parody of the alleged virgin birth of Jesus. (Note especially the Christianized Armilus in Even Shmuel, *Midreshei Ge'ullah*, p. 320.) Though I am skeptical, someone attracted by this theory might want to suggest a connection with the possible talmudic association between Balaam and Jesus.

79. If Gerson Cohen's reading of Abraham ibn Daud's *Sefer ha-Kabbalah* is correct (see his edition [Philadelphia, 1967], esp. pp. 189–222), then it is a case of typological messianism in its most striking form. For another illustration of what remains a significant approach, see Yehudah Liebes, "Yonah ben Amitai ke-Mashiah ben Yosef," *Mehkarim be-Kabbalah Muggashim li-Yesha'yah Tishby* (= *Mehkerei Yerushalayim be-Mahashevet Yisrael* 3, pts. 1–2 [1983–84]), pp. 269–311, and cf. n. 85 below.

80. "Parshanuto ha-Tippogit shel ha-Ramban," *Zion* 45 (1980): 35–59.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

82. The effect on such Jews would, of course, have been more limited, and it may be worth noting that the contrast between the relative messianic activism of Sephardim and the quietism of Ashkenazim in the Middle Ages is in significant measure a contrast between Jews living under Islam and those living under Christianity. In a classroom discussion of Gerson Cohen's "Messianic Postures of Ashkenazim and Sephardim," in *Studies of the Leo Baeck Institute*, ed.

Nevertheless, the typological heritage was extraordinarily strong in the realm of messianism, and additional explanations need to be mobilized to explain its relative decline. The first of these is the virtual elimination of a messianic enterprise for which typology was especially suited. The medieval mind was too constrained by the authority of the now plentiful ancient texts to create new messianic personalities, and as a result, figures of the past could no longer give birth to tragic heroes and diabolical monsters at the end of days. It was primarily in the area of calculations where typology could still hold sway, but here too its dominance was challenged, this time by several new sources of information whose significance in the rabbinic period was minor or nil.

The most important of these was the Book of Daniel. We have already seen that in the earliest period Daniel's 1335 days were understood as days and that this understanding precluded their use as a clue to the time of the Messiah's advent.⁸³ As centuries passed, it became possible to understand these days as years without inordinately delaying the messianic age. Once this happened, the Bible suddenly contained a messianic calculation which, for all of its obscurity, bordered on the absolutely explicit, and the primary task of the calculator was the relatively simple one of determining the terminus from which the count begins. In addition to the date latent in Daniel, the growing, almost promiscuous use of numerical equivalence in some medieval and early modern Jewish circles turned Scripture into a treasure trove of eschatological information through a process which appeared more promising than the relatively subtle approach of typological speculation. Finally, the talmudic material itself provided a more concrete basis for calculations than the rabbis themselves had possessed, and this consideration too made their successors less reliant on the uncertain techniques of typology.

These approaches, of course, were not mutually exclusive. Daniel's 1335 years had to be coordinated with its "time, times, and half a time" (Dan. 7:25; 12:7); since these times were perceived as eras of the past whose duration points to the length of the exile, they were understood, at least in a limited sense, typologically. Abravanel extended the 1335 years to 1435 by adding the numerical value of the word "days." And in a *tour de force* which

Max Kreutzberger (New York, 1967), pp. 117–156, my former student Avraham Pinsker made the interesting suggestion that Jews in the Christian world, who constantly saw themselves as rejecting the claims of a false Messiah, may have been instinctively more cautious about any involvement with messianic pretenders.

83. See n. 41 above.

strikes me as the most stunning messianic calculation in history, sixteenth-century Jews combined Daniel's number, *gematria*, and a typological rabbinic calculation to produce a messianic date of 5335 A.M. (= 1575 C.E.). The rabbis had said that after the year 4000, the messianic age should have begun, but our sins have delayed its arrival. Thus, when Daniel was told to wait 1335 years, the count must have commenced at the point where anticipation began to make sense, i.e., after the year 4000.⁸⁴ This calculation could have stood on its own, and no doubt would have. But then someone noticed the incredible: the number 1335 is embedded in the last two verses of Daniel, which read, "Happy is he who waits and comes to one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days. And now go your way until the end; you shall rest, and shall stand up to your lot at the end of days." The numerical equivalence of both verses in their entirety is precisely 5335! We can only marvel at the resistance of those who remained skeptical; at the same time, we can also marvel at the creative orchestration of diverse modes of messianic calculation, an orchestration in which typology lingers, but in a decidedly secondary role.⁸⁵

Whatever position messianic typology was ultimately to assume, its significance in early Jewish messianism was even greater than has hitherto been recognized. The much-debated Messiah son of Joseph was probably produced after all by typological speculation, typology is the most plausible source of every single rabbinic calculation in the post-Bar Kokhba period, and the intriguing monster Armilus is a typological figure of extraordinary resonance, richness, and complexity.

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84. See David Tamar, "Ha-Zippiyyah be-Italyah li-Shenat ha-Ge'ullah Shin-Lamed-He," *Sefunot* 2 (1958): 65–68.

85. In the Sabbatian heresy, of course, typology was mobilized once again for the same reasons that it was mobilized in Christianity: the unorthodox career of a messianic personality had to be prefigured by biblical heroes whose own careers would be subjected to subtle, innovative scrutiny.