Kenneth Atkinson

THE MILITANT DAVIDIC MESSIAH AND VIOLENCE AGAINST ROME: THE INFLUENCE OF POMPEY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN MESSIANISM

In 63 BCE the army of the Roman General Pompey the Great invaded ancient Palestine, destroyed part of the Jerusalem temple, and ended the nearly eighty-year-old Hasmonean state. The Romans thereafter ruled ancient Palestine either directly or through a series of client kings. The great Jewish War against the Romans of 66–70 CE was largely an effort to restore independent Jewish rule. The Jewish historian Josephus, who served as a general in this conflict, tells us that a messianic oracle inspired many Jews to take up arms against the Romans.[1] This nearly five-year conflict ended with the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish temple. Sixty-two years later, Simeon bar Kochba – presumed by many Jews to be the messiah – led Jewish rebels in a second ill-fated revolt against Roman rule. After this failed war, the Jewish community abandoned nationalism and the active hope that a messiah would violently overthrow their oppressors.[2]

This article explores this nearly two century period of messianic-inspired violence by focusing on its beginning, namely the 63 BCE Roman conquest of Jerusalem, to show how Jews, and then Christians, merged the Old Testament notion of a messiah with the Roman General Pompey to create a royal messianic figure that may be called the militant Davidic messiah. This violent deliverer first appears in Jewish writings that postdate Pompey's 63 BCE intervention in the Middle East. These documents contain little that can be classified as religion, such as devotional practices or temple worship. Rather, they use the militant Davidic messiah as a political tool to prepare their followers for an impending war with Rome. During this battle, the messiah is expected to defeat the Romans, execute their leader, and kill all his Jewish partisans. These writings suggest that ancient Jews and Christians often did not distinguish between religion, politics, and war. Political revenge against Rome, not piety, was often foremost on their minds.

I. The Old Testament Notion of the Messiah

The Hebrew word messiah simply means "anointed" and is not used in the Old Testament in an eschatological sense.[3] Several biblical kings – both Jewish and pagan – were

---

[1] Jos. *BJ* 6.312–313. Cf. Tac. *Hist.* 5.13.
[2] See Bockmuehl and Paget 2007.
[3] Fitzmyer 2007: 8–25.

anointed, and even referred to as the "anointed one."[4] In the Bible the word messiah is used in a generic way to refer to kings, especially those descended from the monarch David. But the expectation of these rulers, whether present or future, is rather modest. Sometimes the messiah is not a king, but a priest or a prophet.[5]

Following the Babylonian removal of the last Davidic king from power in 586/587 BCE, messianism did not emerge as a major concept in Jewish literature. Many of the latest Old Testament books, such as Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Ben Sira, show little interest in eschatology, and do not mention a future king.[6] Although eschatology reemerged as a dominant theme in the second century BCE books of Daniel and 1 Enoch, there is no role in them for a messianic king. The passage in Isaiah 9, which is traditionally regarded as a messianic prediction, is actually an enthronement oracle announcing the birth of the Jewish king Hezekiah (728/7 BCE).[7] It was written against the backdrop of the conquests of ancient Palestine by the Assyrian monarch Tiglath-Pileser and therefore cannot be used to support a Jewish expectation for a messiah in the pre-Roman era. The prophet Ezekiel denounced kings who assumed divine standing (Ezek 28:2), but did not envisage a future messianic figure.[8] The late biblical prophets Zechariah and Malachi, moreover, rebuke the militarism of past Jewish kings and call for a return to a simpler era when petty rules, known as judges, emerged in times of distress to deliver the Jewish people from their oppressors.[9] None of these biblical books convey any expectation of a future messianic figure.

In 167 BCE the situation of the Jews changed dramatically when the Hellenistic Syrian king Antiochus IV Epiphanes effectively banned Judaism.[10] A Jewish priest named Mattathias and his sons formed a resistance movement to create an independent Jewish state. In the month of Kislev, 164 BCE, Mattathias's son Judas captured Jerusalem and rededicated the Jerusalem temple: an event still commemorated with the celebration of Hanukkah.[11] Yet, messianism did not emerge during this time of distress to unite the Jewish people against their Syrian oppressors.[12]

---

[4] Jewish kings: Saul (1 Sam 9:16; 10:1; 15:1, 17); David (1 Sam 16:3, 12–13; 2 Sam 2:4, 7; 3:39); Solomon (1 Kgs 1:34, 39, 45); Jehu (1 Kgs 19:16; 2 Kgs 9:3, 6, 12; 2 Chr 22:7); Joash (2 Kgs 11:12; 2 Chr 23:11); Jehoahaz (2 Kgs 23:30); Zedekiah (Lam 4:20). Generic Jewish monarchs: Ps 2:2; 18:51; 20:7; 28:8; 84:10; 89:39, 52; 132:10, 17. Cyrus, king of Persia, Isa. 45:1.

[5] Priests: Lev 4:3, 5, 16; 6:15. Prophets: 1 Chr 16:22; Ps 105:15. See further Pomykala 2010: 938–942.

[6] Collins and Collins 2008: 43–46.

[7] For this text, and a detailed examination of other messianic, and supposed messianic, passages in Scripture, see Collins and Collins 2008; Fitzmyer 2007.

[8] Although this oracle is addressed to the king of Tyre, it presumably would have applied to any Jewish king who claimed divine status. See further Collins and Collins 2008: 46. The prophet Ezekiel prefers the word "ruler" rather than "king" for the future monarch. See Joyce 1998: 323–337. In Ezekiel 37:24–25 the prophet describes the future Davidic king, but calls him the "prince" and not the "messiah."

[9] Fitzmyer 2007: 51–55.

[10] The following five sources, with some contradictions, describe this period: 1 Macc 1; 2 Macc 3–7; Dan 7–12; Jos. *BJ* 1.31–35; *idem*, *AJ* 12.237–264. See Gruen 1996: 238–264.

[11] 1 Macc 4:36–59; 2 Macc 10:1–8; Jos. *AJ* 12.316–325; *Megillat Ta'anit* 25 Kislev; b. Šabbat 21b.

[12] The ideological foundation for the expansionist policy of the Hasmoneans, most notably their penchant for expelling foreigners, was based on biblical tradition. See Dąbrowa 2010a: 7–14. Yet, despite their appeal to Scripture, the Hasmoneans did not draw upon the Davidic messiah tradition to espouse violence against foreigners in those lands they were convinced belonged to the nation of Israel.

Judas's family eventually won their independence from the Syrians, created a Jewish state, and became its high priests and political leaders. They are known both as the Maccabees and the Hasmoneans.[13] In 105/4 BCE they assumed the kingship in defiance of the biblical law that separate individuals must hold these offices, and that only David's descendants could rule as monarchs.[14] The Hasmoneans ruled as kings for nearly forty-one years. All faced numerous civil wars to remove them from power. Yet, the Jews never looked to a messiah to deliver them from these indigenous Jewish rulers, whom many regarded as oppressors. Then everything changed in 63 BCE when Pompey appeared in Palestine.[15]

Pompey's arrival coincided with the waning days of the Hasmonean state. When his *quaestor* M. Aemilius Scaurus arrived in Palestine to investigate the region's political stability, the two sons of the former Hasmonean ruler Salome Alexandra, Hyrcanus (II) and Aristobulus (II), were fighting a civil war for the throne.[16] Aristobulus, the younger of the two, had removed his elder sibling from power before Scaurus arrived. The Romans initially backed Aristobulus, but imprisoned him when he appeared to be fomenting a revolt against them. His brother Hyrcanus joined Pompey's legions and helped the Romans besiege the partisans of Aristobulus in Jerusalem. During the siege, part of the temple was destroyed and Pompey defiled the sanctuary when he entered its innermost room, the holy of holies, where only the high priest was permitted to visit once each year on the Day of Atonement.[17] The Hasmonean age was over. Direct Roman rule had begun.

II. The Militant Davidic Messiah in the *Psalms of Solomon*

The *Psalms of Solomon* is a collection of eighteen pseudonymous Jewish poems that contain an eyewitness account of Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem and its aftermath. Composed in Hebrew, the collection survives only in Greek translation. The Greek edition was later translated into Syriac. At some unknown point in time, the Syriac translation was attached to a Christian Syriac Hymnbook known as the *Odes of Solomon* and apparently used in the liturgy of the Syriac Church.[18] The *Psalms of Solomon* contains the most detailed depiction of the Davidic messiah prior to the New Testament, which makes it among the most important texts for understanding the historical development of Davidic messianism.[19]

---

[13] 2 Macc 8:1; Jos. *AJ* 12.263. See further Dąbrowa 2010b: 13–41.

[14] 2 Sam 7:11–16. For the Hasmonean dynasty, see Dąbrowa 2010b: 13–102. For the chronology of the Hasmonean period from John Hyrcanus onward, see the adjustments necessitated by the papyrological evidence in Cohen 1989: 119.

[15] For Pompey's relationship with the Jews, and his death, see Bellemore 1999: 94–118; Gelzer 1959: 115–116, 286–295; Greenhalgh 1981: 137–146.

[16] Jos. *BJ* 1.127–130; *AJ* 14.29–33.

[17] Jos. *AJ* 14.72; *BJ* 1.152. Cf. Cicero, *Orations: Pro Flacco*, 28.670.

[18] Atkinson 2001: 406–409. These poems are also listed in numerous Christian catalogues from the fourth to the sixteenth centuries CE. This history of transmission is cited to show that the militant Davidic messiah of the *Psalms of Solomon* was not merely used by Jews, but apparently by Christians in worship.

[19] Atkinson 2004b: 129–179. For an English translation and a discussion of the Greek text, see Atkinson 2007a; 763–776. Quotations are from this translation.

The *Psalms of Solomon* uses poetry to recount the Roman general Pompey's 63 BCE siege of Jerusalem. It also incorporates mythological motifs, largely drawn from Jewish Scripture, to demonize Pompey. The composition uses the image of the dragon – an ancient figure that symbolizes chaos and opposition to God – to represent Pompey.[20] The *Psalms of Solomon* rebukes Pompey for his hubris:

> He did not consider that he was a human, nor did he consider the hereafter. He said, "I will be lord of earth and sea," and he did not recognize that God is great, mighty in his great strength (*PsSol* 2:28–29).

The author also describes God's punishment of Pompey:

> And I did not wait long until God showed me his insolence, pierced, on the mountains of Egypt, more than the least despised on land and sea; His body, carried about on the waves in great insolence, and there was no one to bury, for he had rejected him in dishonor (*PsSol* 2:26–27).

The psalmist's poetic description bears a remarkable similarity to the classical accounts of Pompey's assassination. It is especially reminiscent of Lucan's epic poem *Pharsalia* that recounts how the Ptolemaic supporters of Caesar decapitated Pompey with a sword shortly after his arrival in Pelusium, Egypt, on September 28, 48 BCE.[21]

The *Psalms of Solomon* combines the ancient biblical prophecies of the messiah, especially Isaiah 11, with Pompey to fashion a militant messiah who is descended from king David.[22] This figure is expected to kill the Romans and restore native Jewish rule to Palestine. The *Psalms of Solomon* plead with God to send the only legitimate ruler, "the son of David" (*PsSol* 17:21), to purge Jerusalem of its Gentile and Jewish sinners (*PsSol* 17:21–46). This king will accomplish this feat because he is the "Lord's messiah" (*PsSol* 17:32) and without sin (*PsSol* 17:36). The *Psalms of Solomon* combines the righteousness of the messiah with the militancy of Pompey to depict him as a violent warrior who will:

> in wisdom of righteousness, to drive out sinners from the inheritance, to smash the arrogance of the sinner like a potter's vessel, to shatter all their substance with an iron rod, to destroy the lawless nations by the word of his mouth (17:23–24).

The author also states that the Davidic messiah will deliver his community from their enemies, expel the Romans, restore the lost tribes to Jerusalem, and rule forever as Jerusalem's king (*PsSol* 17:26–46).

The *Psalms of Solomon* is the earliest witness to the militant Davidic messiah tradition. Other Jewish texts written following Pompey's conquest likewise adopt the mili-

---

[20] For the mythological connotations surrounding the figure of the dragon, see Collins 1976. See also Isa 30:7; Jer 51:34; Amos 9:3; Ps. 74:13–14; 87:4; Job 7:12; 9:13; 26:12–13; Rev. 12–13. The Old Testament also associates the dragon with Egypt. See Ezek 29:3; 32:2. This metaphor is also used to describe the Babylonian monarch Nebuchadnezzar in Jer 51:34.

[21] Atkinson 2004b: 30–36 Pompey's death: Caesar, *Civil Wars*, 2.86; Dio Cassius, 42.5–6; Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 8.521–522, 605–608, 708–711; Plutarch, *Pompey*, 79–80 Velleius Paterculus, *Roman History*, 2.53.3.

[22] Isaiah 11:1–3 refers to the dynastic line of David as the "shoot" and "stump," upon whom God will bestow his blessings. This oracle was likely written after the line of Davidic kings had ended. See Blenkinsopp 2000: 264.

tancy of the *Psalms of Solomon* to depict the Davidic messiah as a righteous counterpart to Pompey, who comes to represent the evils of Roman rule.[23] Nearly all these writings adopt the same scriptural interpretation to portray the Davidic messiah as a warrior who will defeat Rome.[24] The appearance of this militant Davidic messiah in Jewish texts written after Pompey's 63 BCE conquest, following its absence during the Persian and early Hellenistic periods, suggest that his arrival in ancient Palestine and his termination of Hasmonean rule was the formative event in the development of Jewish messianism. A brief look at some of the other texts written in the aftermath of Roman intervention further suggest that the Davidic messiah was fashioned as a righteous counterpart to Pompey, and that this image later shaped the development of Christian messianism.

III. Pompey's Conquest in the Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls is a collection of Jewish manuscripts primarily in Hebrew and Aramaic that date from the second century BCE to the first century CE.[25] The *Nahum Pesher* is one of the few texts in this collection that contains names of identifiable persons.[26] The following passage in this text clearly alludes to Pompey's 63 BCE conquest of Jerusalem.

> [Its interpretation concerns Deme]trius, King of Greece, who sought to enter Jerusalem on the advice of the Seekers-After-Smooth-Things. [But God did not give Jerusalem] into the hand of the kings of Greece from Antiochus until the rise of the rulers of the Kittim; but afterwards [the city] will be trampled (4QpNah 3–4 I 2–3).[27]

The first line of this passage is widely recognized as a description of the occasion when, in 88 BCE, the Pharisees (=the Seekers-After-Smooth-Things) invited the Seleucid monarch Demetrius (III) Eukairos to invade Palestine to remove the Hasmonean king Alexander Jannaeus from power.[28] The ruler in whose hands God gave Jerusalem is Pompey. To ensure the reader makes these identifications, the *Nahum Pesher's* author mentions "Antiochus" to show beyond any doubt that the final line of this section recounts Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem. Because Pompey is the only conquer since Antiochus IV Epiphanes to have captured Jerusalem, occupied Palestine, and desecrated the temple, he is clearly the subject of this passage.

The authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls frequently call the Romans "Kittim," which is a name they took from Numbers 24:24, to portray them as an eschatological gentile power that is God's divine instrument of vengeance.[29] The *Nahum Pesher*, like other

---

[23] Atkinson 2004b:109–126.

[24] It is not necessary to demonstrate that these later texts used the *Psalms of Solomon* since it is probable that they drew upon common exegetical traditions regarding the Davidic messiah that were incorporated into the *Psalms of Solomon.*

[25] For the dates of all the Scrolls, see Webster 2002: 351–446.

[26] Atkinson 2007b: 125–151.

[27] I follow the translation, and understanding of the verb "trample," as proposed by Horgan 1979: 174.

[28] Jos. *BJ* 1.92; *AJ* 13.372–16. For the identifications of Demetrius III, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, and Alexander Jannaeus in this text, see further, Berrin 2004, 89–91, 100, 104–109.

[29] Later Jewish texts also use the name "Kittim" for the Romans. See Berrin 2004: 101–104.

Jewish texts, combines chronology with *ex eventu* prophecy to give credibility to its prediction that the Kittim will trample Jerusalem.[30] Because the *Nahum Pesher* here, and elsewhere, alludes to Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem, the composition clearly postdates 63 BCE.

The *Nahum Pesher* also describes the "last period" of history when the rule of the Sadducees (=Manasseh) will collapse:

> The interpretation of it concerns Manasseh at the last time, whose reign over Isr[ael] will be brought down [...] his wives, his children, and his infants will go to captivity. His warriors and his honored ones [will perish] by the sword (4QpNah Frags. 3–4 4 1–4).

The *pesher* here undoubtedly refers to Pompey's capture and exile of Aristobulus, along with his family and supporters, following the 63 BCE Roman conquest of Jerusalem.[31]

The *Nahum Pesher* and the *Psalms of Solomon* both regard this event as a severe blow to the Sadducees, which suggests that many Jews disagreed with this sect's operation of the temple.[32] The author of this *pesher* expects Aristobulus's warriors to likewise experience defeat in battle. It was Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem, his exile of Aristobulus, and his termination of Hasmonean rule that convinced many Jews that they were now living in the "last age" of history.

The Qumran *pesharim* provide some indirect evidence that the famine of 65 BCE prompted Pompey to send Aemilius Scaurus to investigate Judea's political affairs: an event that led to the 63 BCE Roman conquest of Jerusalem and the end of independent Hasmonean rule. This famine is mentioned in the *Pesher on Hosea A*, the *Pesher on Isaiah B*, and twice in the *Pesher on Psalms A*. Both Josephus and the rabbis also talk about it, and state that it occurred during the civil war between Hyrcanus and Aristobulus. The numerous references to this famine suggest that it was not an ordinary food shortage, but one of unusual severity.[33] The *Pesher on Hosea A* in particular reveals that this famine it was unprecedented. The Romans likely decided to take advantage of Judea's suffering during this famine and the subsequent civil war between Salome Alexandra's sons to annex Palestine. The writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls apparently regarded this famine as an eschatological event that preceded the Roman conquest, and which marked the beginning of the "last age" of history. It was this interpretation of present events that

---

[30] For this phenomenon in other Jewish texts, such as the book of Daniel, the Apocalypse of Weeks, the Animal Apocalypse, and possibly columns 1–2 of the *War Scroll* (1QM), see Gmirkin 1998: 172–214, esp. 177–185.

[31] Dupont-Sommer notes that the military context of this *pesher* is suitable for Aristobulus, who was a warrior like his father. See Dupont-Sommer 1963: 85. For additional evidence in favor of this identification, see Berrin 2004: 268–271; Regev 1997: 286–288.

[32] For this interpretation of Manasseh as the Sadducees in the wake of Pompey's conquest, as well as code words for the Pharisees, in the Dead Sea Scrolls, see Amusin 1977: 142–146; Dupont-Sommer 1963: 65, 74; Horgan 1979: 175; Regev 1997: 286–288; Eshel 2008: 133–135.

[33] *Pesher on Hosea A* (4QpHos^a; 4Q166 ii 8–12); *Pesher on Isaiah B* (4QpIsa^b; 4Q162 ii 1–8); *Pesher on Psalms A* (4QpPs^a; 4Q171 1–10 i 25–27, 1–10 ii–iii 26–3). Jos. *AJ* 14.25–27; *PsSol* 17:18–19; m. Ta'anit 3.8; b. Ta'anit 213a; b. Manahot, 64b. For this interpretation, see further Eshel 2008: 146–147; Amusin 1977: 148–149. Flusser dates the famine in the *pesharim* to the time of Herod the Great in 25 BCE. Because the historical allusions better fit Pompey's conquest, and since there is no evidence that any *pesharim* were composed after 31 BCE, his thesis is unlikely. Flusser 1987: 7–16.

would encourage many Jews to look forward to a Davidic messiah to alleviate them of their current woes.

The *Habakkuk Pesher* provides additional information about Pompey's conquest and its aftermath. It mentions the approach and attack of a fearful warlike people, the Kittim, who came from the islands of the Sea to conqueror Judea:

> The Kittim, and they increase their wealth with all their booty like the fish of the sea. And when it says "Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his seine," the interpretation of it is that they sacrifice to their standards, and their military arms are the objects of their reverence (1QpHab 6:1–5).

This passage not only describes Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem, but it provides an early example of the worship of Roman standards as documented in later texts.[34] It was Pompey's desecration of the sanctuary that undoubtedly helped to stimulate the expectation for a righteous Davidic messiah to overthrow the Romans and purify the temple.

The *Habakkuk Pesher* provides some valuable information about the subsequent Roman occupation of Palestine. The author views the Kittim's invasion as God's judgment upon Jerusalem's priests for their sins:

> "Since you pillaged many peoples all the rest of the nations will pillage you" (Hab. 2:8a). Its interpretation concerns the last priests of Jerusalem, who will accumulate riches and loot from plundering the nations. However, in the end of days their riches and loot will be given into the hands of the army of the Kittim (1QpHab 9:4–7).

The "Rulers of the Kittim," whose successive officials continue to ruin the land at the behest of the "council of [their] guilty house," likely refers to the Roman governors placed in Palestine-Syria following Pompey's 63 BCE conquest of Jerusalem.[35] The mention of the Romans "plundering" Judea supports this interpretation.[36] Although Josephus writes that the Romans did not pillage the sanctuary during their siege of Jerusalem in 63 BCE, Pompey polluted the temple when he went inside the Holy of Holies.[37] However, in 55 BCE, Crassus, Syria's proconsul, actually plundered the temple treasury that Pompey had left behind to fund his ill-fated Parthian expedition.[38] The reference to this event in the *Habakkuk Pesher* shows that its author closely watched the Roman officials, and viewed their crimes, and Palestine's continued Roman occupation, as God's punishment upon the Jews for their sins. With no hope of removing the Romans, the Jewish community began to focus their attention on the Davidic messiah to expel all gentiles from their land through force the same way Pompey had removed the Hasmoneans from power.

---

[34] See Atkinson 1959: 246–255.

[35] 1QpHab 4:5, 10–11. See Eshel 2008: 174. Atkinson (1959: 240–244) believes the author refers to the Roman Senate of the late Republican period.

[36] Atkinson (1959: 244–246) believes that column 6, line 6, of this pesher, which mentions both tribute and food, can only refer to the aftermath of Pompey's conquest when the Jews were forced to pay money to Rome, and provide aide to Scaurus for his Nabatean campaign.

[37] Jos. *AJ* 14.72; *BJ* 1.152. Cicero (*Orations: Pro Flacco*, 28.670) states that Pompey did not lay his hands on any item in the Jerusalem Temple.

[38] Jos. *AJ* 14.105–109. See further Charlesworth 2002: 110–112.

Pompey's assassination quickly became an *exemplum* for classical writers who wanted to use his story as an illustration of the vagaries of fate.[39] It is, therefore, erroneous to take the ancient accounts of his demise literally because each classical author embellished certain details of Pompey's murder to buttress his particular political or theological agenda. The authors of *Psalm of Solomon* 2 and 4Q386 likewise use Pompey's death as an *exemplum* to warn others that God controls world events.[40] The authors of these texts focus on Pompey's death because they recognized that his conquest of Jerusalem represented a new age of history. It was, therefore, important to show that God had punished Pompey for his crimes to convince people that the Davidic messiah would likewise chastise Israel's Roman oppressors.

IV. The Militant Davidic Messiah in the Dead Sea Scrolls

The Davidic messiah appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls only in those texts whose paleographical dates place them after Pompey's 63 BCE conquest.[41] These documents all appear to allude to Pompey and his destruction of Jerusalem. Like the *Psalms of Solomon*, the authors of these Dead Sea Scrolls preferred code names for their enemies, often drawn from the Jewish Scripture. Without exception, all the Davidic messiahs in the Dead Sea Scrolls are violent, and expected to overthrow Roman rule. The writers of these texts appear to fashion their depiction of the militant Davidic messiah as a righteous counterpart to Pompey.

One Dead Sea Scroll, a commentary on the biblical book of Isaiah known as the *Isaiah Pesher A* (4Q161), uses the biblical text of Isaiah 11:1–5 to describe a militant Davidic messiah who will oppose the Romans.[42] It calls the Romans the Kittim, which is a common code name for them in the Scrolls.[43] In this text, as in the *Psalms of Solomon*, the writer changes the messianic prophecy in Isaiah 11 to intensify the militant nature of the Davidic messiah by transforming the "word of his mouth" into an iron rod (=sword). The *pesher* describes the advance of this enemy, whose forces pass through Ptolemais (=Akko/Acre) on their way to Jerusalem.[44] The *pesher* also describes how, during the "battle of the Kittim," the Jews will defeat the foreign general (column 4, lines 6–13) of this invading force.

---

[39] Bell 1994: 824–836. As Bell notes in this study, the major modern biographers of Pompey fail to recognize the diversity in the accounts of his death, and mistakenly believe that there was a consensus in antiquity as to the exact manner and place of his assassination.

[40] For Roman parallels to the psalmist's use of poetry to interpret a military event, see Cloud 1993: 113–138.

[41] The manuscripts of these texts all date between 37 BCE to 70 CE. See Atkinson 2004b: 151–154.

[42] Texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls cited from the edition of García Martínez and Tigchelaar, 1997–1998.

[43] The "Kittim" in the Qumran Pesharim are the Romans. This is clearly indicated by allusions found in the Dead Sea Scrolls 1QpHab 6:1–8, where the Romans sacrifice to their standards, and 4QpNah. See Charlesworth 2002: 109–112. The Romans are also associated with the Kittim in 4Q285; 4Q491; Tg. Onq. and Tg. Ps-J. Num 24:24; Dan. 11:30 (LXX).

[44] 4Q161 2–6 ii 27. See further Horgan 1979: 81.

Joseph Amusin and Hanan Eshel propose that this *pesher* describes the events of 103–101 BCE, when Ptolemy Lathyrus campaigned against Alexander Jannaeus.[45] Given the late date and content of the extant copy of this document, it is doubtful that it describes events of this time. Perhaps the greatest obstacle to dating the text to Alexander Jannaeus's reign is that Ptolemy Lathyrus never attacked Jerusalem. He also did not follow the route described in the *pesher*, and his arrival was never associated with deliverance or messianism by the Jews.

Amusin and Eshel are certainly correct to view the "valley of Akko" as a reference to the port of Ptolemais. However, the *pesher* describes a threat to Jerusalem, which was not attacked during Lathyrus's invasion.[46] If the reference to the "valley of Akko" is to be understood literally, it likely refers to the Romans, who approached the Middle East from the West.[47]

Perhaps the greatest reason to associate this text with Pompey, and not Lathyrus, is its reference to the messiah ("Branch of David"), who is the agent of salvation. It is unlikely that the author of the *pesher* would have associated Alexander Jannaeus with the messiah, or a deliverer, because he thwarted Lathyrus's advance. It is equally doubtful that the writer would have considered this conflict the beginning of an eschatological war. Cleopatra II and her son Ptolemy Alexander actually saved Judea from Lathyrus: Alexander Jannaeus was forced to beg her to spare his kingdom. It is improbable that the *pesher* would have been written to commemorate such a shameful event in Judean history.[48] The *Isaiah Pesher* more accurately reflects the Roman period. The author used the biblical prophecy of Isaiah to describe Pompey's appearance in Palestine and his future defeat.[49] After Pompey arrives in Jerusalem, the Davidic messiah will appear, defeat the Romans, and assume the throne.

Several other Dead Sea Scrolls likely allude to Pompey. In one, 4Q285, the author describes the messiah's execution of the Roman leader with a sword. This fragment belongs to a version of the lengthy composition know as the *War Scroll*, which recounts a future battle between the Davidic messiah and the Romans. Its content is reminiscent of Greco-Roman military manuals, especially those written by Asclepiodotus, Aelian, and Arrian.[50] The *War Scroll* describes the movement of troops, the composition of military units, and the carnage of a final battle that will result in the overthrow of Rome. The version of the *War Scroll* represented by 4Q285 not only describes the defeat of the Roman commander, but his final judgment and execution, perhaps his beheading, with a sword by the Davidic messiah.[51]

---

[45] Amusin 1977: 123–134; *idem*, 1974: 381–392; Eshel 2008: 96–100.

[46] For this interpretation, see Horgan 1979: 81.

[47] Armies passing through the regions of Akko/Acre and Megiddo also appear in later Jewish apocalypses as a sign of the coming of the messiah. See, for example, the medieval Jewish apocalypses "On That Day" and "The Prayer of Rabbi Simon Ben Yohay." For text, see Jellinek 1938: 4.117–126; Ginzberg 1928: 310–312. The region is likewise associated with the messiah and eschatological battle in Rev 16:16.

[48] Jos. *BJ* 1.86; *AJ* 13.324–355. See also the Egyptian evidence of this conflict, which presents a different sequence of events than Josephus's account of the war against Lathyrus, in Van't Dack et al. 1989.

[49] For partial support of this dating, see the evidence Alexander 2003: 17–31; Schultz 2009: 159–169.

[50] Duhaime 1988: 133–151.

[51] The *War Scroll* exists in several versions. 4Q285, which overlaps with 11Q14, identifies the Kittim of this text, which in the original version referred to the Seleucids, with the Romans. This updating was possible

The *War Scroll* was one of the most popular texts for the Dead Sea Scroll community, and one of the few they continued to copy during the first century CE up to the time the Romans destroyed their settlement of Qumran during the Great Jewish Revolt against Rome in 66 CE. Its militancy, and its description of the Davidic messiah, is identical to other depictions of this figure that appear after Pompey's invasion, all of which portray this redeemer as a righteous counterpart to this Roman invader. Its apparent description of the beheading of the enemy leader is reminiscent of the death of the dragon in the *Psalms of Solomon.* Because Pompey was beheaded in Egypt, it is probable that the mention of a beheading of the enemy general in 4Q285 is an allusion to Pompey's assassination.[52] The expectation that future Roman rulers would likewise succumb to the same fate appears in other contemporary Jewish texts that also espouse violence towards Roman rule.

The Aramaic document known as the "Son of God" text (4Q246) incorporates passages from the book of Isaiah to fashion the Davidic messiah after the Romans.[53] 4Q246 clearly portrays this Son of God as a warrior, who will cast down his enemies before assuming the throne (column 2.8–9) for an eternal kingdom (column 2.9). The militant nature of this latter phrase is particularly clear, for 4Q252 also states that Davidic dominion will be achieved following the annihilation of the messiah's enemies. Moreover, 4Q246 contains several parallels with Isaiah 10:20–11:16: a biblical passage that is interpreted in a messianic sense in at least three other Dead Sea Scrolls (1QSb, 4Q161, 4Q285).[54] These, and other contemporary Dead Sea Scrolls, portray the Davidic messiah as a violent warrior, whose actions mimic Pompey: He will take up arms, lead troops in battle, and execute the Roman leader.[55]

V. The Militant Davidic Messiah in the New Testament

The appearance of anti-Roman rhetoric within these Jewish documents suggest that common exegetical traditions were in circulation by the end of the first century BCE to undermine the political authority of the current Roman rulers and their subordinates. All the Jewish texts that describe this figure portray him as a violent warrior who will kill the Romans. There is little interest in religious law, matters of faith, or pacifism – revenge

---

because the original composition left the identification of the Kittim ambiguous. See further Duhaime 2004: 64–102; Eshel 2008: 163–179.

[52] The Dead Sea Scrolls 4Q386 also describes Pompey's death in Egypt and refers to him as the "son of Belial." The author of this text, moreover, places Pompey's death in Memphis rather than Pelusium in order to match biblical prophecy. See Eshel 2008: 151–161. This shows that Jewish writers of this time often used geographical references taken from Scripture, regardless of their historical accuracy, to describe current events.

[53] Although this text does not explicitly state that the messiah is Davidic, its depictions of the ideal ruler uses the same messianic titles and biblical allusions that are consistently combined in various ways throughout the Dead Sea Scrolls to refer to a Davidic messiah. The images in the messianic Dead Sea Scrolls were so common that texts from this period need not explicitly mention that the messiah was Davidic. See further Collins 2002: 49–73, 108–109.

[54] See Evans 1992: 107–111.

[55] Atkinson 2004b: 151–179.

is foremost on the minds of their authors. The appearance of this image in texts that post-date the 63 BCE Roman conquest of Pompey suggest that his arrival in Palestine resulted in the emergence of a widespread expectation that the Davidic messiah would use violence to overthrow the Romans.

The militant Davidic messiah described in these texts may appear to oppose the New Testament's portrayal of Jesus as a peaceful Davidic messiah. However, the author of the New Testament book of Revelation adopted this depiction of Jesus to portray him as a militant Davidic messiah whose robe will be dipped in blood when he comes to strike down his enemies with the sword (Rev. 19:11–12). To intensify his militant nature, the author of this New Testament book, like the writers of the *Psalms of Solomon* and the Dead Sea Scrolls, changed Isaiah 11's verbal weapon, the "word of the mouth," into a literal rod of iron that he will use to defeat the Romans.[56] This New Testament book is so similar to the Dead Sea Scroll *War Scroll* that one scholar has even referred to it as a "Christian War Scroll."[57] This shows that Christians found this image as powerful as the Jews and likewise continued to apply it to their Roman oppressors. The incorporation of the *Psalms of Solomon* into the *Odes of Solomon*, moreover, suggests that some Christians regularly recited poems about the militant Davidic messiah in worship for centuries after Pompey's death.

Despite their differences, the texts described in this study share images of violence that were directed toward Roman rule. Militant Davidic messianism emerges only after Pompey's conquest. This messiah is reminiscent of Pompey since he also uses violence to achieve his aims, namely the Jewish domination of ancient Palestine. At first used by the Jewish community, the early Christians adopted this violent image to depict Jesus as a righteous military opponent of Roman rule. While many regard the early Christian community as pacifistic, their use of the image of a warrior messiah suggests that they too looked forward to great bloodshed and the annihilation of the Romans.[58] This expectation remained viable until the failure of the Second Jewish Revolt under Bar Kochba, after which the Jewish community abandoned its hope for a militant Davidic messiah in favor of cooperation with ruling authorities and an emphasis on pacifism and the oral law.[59]

VI. Conclusion

Pompey's conquest represents a pivotal moment in Jewish and Christian history. His campaign in Palestine apparently reignited a belief that had been absent during the post-biblical period until the late Hellenistic period, namely the expectation for a Davidic messiah. Not even the Maccabean revolt resulted in a hope for this figure when its use

---

[56] See further Atkinson 2004a; Betz 1996.

[57] Bauckham 1993: 210–237. Although the Apocalypse dates to the reign of Domitian, the author focuses on Nero since he was the first emperor to persecute Christians. See further Friesen 2001.

[58] Jewish literature commonly entails a hope for the future of the nation that is often temporal, military, and political in nature. See Sanders 1992: 298.

[59] These changes, most of which can be traced to the Pharisees, paved the way for the eventual emergence of rabbinic Judaism with its focus on the Oral and Written Torahs. See Cohen 1984: 27–55.

could have rallied many Jews to fight their Syrian overlords, or expel pagans from their lands.[60] Rather, it was the disappointment of many Jews with the violent reigns of the Hasmoneans that led them, following Pompey's removal of independent Jewish rule, to revive the ancient biblical tradition of a Davidic dynasty and the messiah to oppose the Romans and usher in the Kingdom of God. The violent nature of this expected deliverer tells us much about this time when many Jews lost their lives and their freedom.

Without Pompey's intervention in Jewish affairs, it is uncertain whether Jews or Christians would have looked to a Davidic messiah in the first centuries BCE–first century CE to deliver them from their Roman oppressors. If not for Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem, Judaism would have developed differently. Christianity, moreover, may never have emerged from Judaism as a distinctive religion at all. In light of the texts examined in this study, Pompey's intervention in the Middle East should be considered one of history's most important events, and a pivotal moment in the development of Judaism and Christianity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alexander, P.S. (2003): The Evil Empire: The Qumran Eschatological War Cycle and the Origins of Jewish Opposition to Rome, in: S.M. Paul et al. (eds.), *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov*, Leiden: 17–31.

Amusin, J.D. (1977): The Reflection of Historical Events of the First Century B. C. in Qumran Commentaries (4Q161; 4Q169; 4Q166), *Hebrew Union College Annual* 48: 123–152.

Amusin, J.D. (1974): À propos de l'interpretation de 4Q161 (fragments 5–6 et 8), *Revue de Qumran* 8: 381–392.

Atkinson, K. (2001): *An Intertextual Study of the Psalms of Solomon*, Lewiston, NY.

Atkinson, K. (2004a): Anti-Roman Polemics in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature: Their Later Use in John's Apocalypse, *Qumran Chronicle* 12: 109–126.

Atkinson, K. (2004b): *I Cried to the Lord: A Study of the Psalms of Solomon's Historical Background and Social Setting*, Leiden.

Atkinson, K. (2007a): Psalms of Salomon, in: A. Pietersma and B.G. Wright (eds.), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, Oxford: 273–276.

Atkinson, K. (2007b): Representations of History in 4Q331 (4QpapHistorical Text C), 4Q332 (4QHistorical Text D), 4Q333 (4QHistorical Text E), and 4Q468e (4QHistorical Text F): An Annalistic Calendar Documenting Portentous Events?, *Dead Sea Discoveries* 14: 125–151.

Atkinson, K.M.T. (1959): The Historical Setting of the Habakkuk Commentary, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 4: 246–255.

Bauckham, R. (1993): *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation*, Edinburgh.

Bell, Jr., A.A. (1994): Fact and *Exemplum* in Accounts of the Deaths of Pompey and Caesar, *Latomus* 53: 824–836.

Bellmore, J. (1999): Josephus, Pompey, and the Jews, *Historia* 48: 94–118.

Berrin, S.L. (2004): *Pesher Nahum Scroll From Qumran: An Exegetical Study of 4Q169*, Leiden.

Betz, O. (1996): The Messianic Idea in the 4Q Fragments: Its Relevance for the Christology of the New Testament, in: J. Kapera (ed.), *Mogilany 1993. Papers on the Dead Sea Scrolls Offered in Memory of Hans Burgmann*, Kraków: 61–75.

Blenkinsopp, J. (2000): *Isaiah 1–39*, New York.

---

[60] See further Collins 1995: 148.

Bockmuehl, M.N.A. and J.C. Paget (eds.) (2007): *Redemption and Resistance: The Messianic Hopes of Jews and Christians in Antiquity*, London–New York.

Charlesworth, J.H. (2002): *The Pesharim and Qumran History: Chaos or Consensus?*, Grand Rapids.

Cloud, D. (1993): Roman Poetry and Anti-Militarism, in: J. Rich and G. Shipley (eds.), *War and Society in the Roman World*, New York: 113–138.

Cohen, G.M. (1989): The Beginning of the Reign of Jannaeus, in: Van't Dack 1989: 118–121.

Cohen, S.J.D. (1984): The Significance of Yavneh: Pharisees, Rabbis, and the End of Jewish Sectarianism, *Hebrew Union College Annual* 55: 27–55.

Collins, A.Y. (1976): *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, Missoula, MT.

Collins, J.J. (1995): 'He Shall Not Judge By What His Eyes See': Messianic Authority in the Dead Sea Scrolls, *Dead Sea Discoveries*: 145–164.

Collins, J.J. (2002): *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature*, New York–London–Toronto–Sydney–Auckland.

Collins, A.Y. and J.J. Collins (2008): *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature*, Grand Rapids, MI–Cambridge, UK.

Dąbrowa, E. (2010a): The Hasmoneans and the Religious Homogeneity of Their State, *Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia* 8: 7–14.

Dąbrowa, E. (2010b): *The Hasmoneans and their State: A Study in History, Ideology, and the Institutions*, Kraków.

Duhaime, J. (2006): *The War Texts: 1QM and Related Manuscripts*, London.

Dupont-Sommer, A. (1963): Le Commentaire de Nahum Découvert près de la Mer Morte (4QpNah): Traduction et Notes, *Semitica* 13: 55–88.

Eshel, H. (2008): *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Hasmonean State*, Grand Rapids, MI–Cambridge, UK–Jerusalem.

Evans, C.A. (1992): *Jesus and His Contemporaries*, Leiden.

Fitzmyer, J.A. (2007): *The One Who Is To Come*, Grand Rapids, MI–Cambridge, UK.

Flusser, D. (1987): Qumran and the Famine during the Reign of Herod, *Israel Museum Journal* 6: 7–16.

Friesen, S.J. (2001): *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins*, Oxford.

García Martínez, F. and E.J.C. Tigchelaar (eds.) (1997–1998): *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, 2 vols., Leiden.

Gelzer, M. (1959): *Pompeius*, Munich.

Ginzberg, L. (1928): *Genizah Studies in Memory of Doctor Solomon Schechter*, New York.

Greenhalgh, P. (1981): *Pompey: The Roman Alexander*, Columbia, MO.

Gmirkin, R. (1998): Historical Allusions in the War Scroll, *Dead Sea Discoveries* 5: 172–214.

Gruen, E. (1996): Hellenism and Persecution: Antiochus IV and the Jews, in: P. Green (ed.), *Hellenistic Society and Culture*, Berkeley, CA: 238–264.

Horgan, M.P. (1979): *Pesharim: Qumran Interpretation of Biblical Books*, Washington, DC.

Jellinek, A. (1938): *Bet ha-Midrasch*, Leipzig.

Joyce, P.M. (1998): King and Messiah in Ezekiel, in: J. Day (ed.), *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, Sheffield: 323–337.

Pomykala, K.E. (2010): Messianism, in: J.J. Collins and D.C. Harlow (eds.), *Dictionary of Early Judaism*, Grand Rapids, MI–Cambridge, UK: 938–943.

Regev, E. (1997): How Did the Temple Mount Fall to Pompey?, *Journal of Jewish Studies* 48: 276–289.

Sanders, E.P. (1992): *Judaism: Practice & Belief 63 BCE–66CE*, Grand Rapids.

Schultz, B. (2009): *Conquering the World: The War Scroll (1QM) Reconsidered*, Leiden.

Van't Dack et al. (1989) = E. Van't Dack, W. Clarysse, G. Cohen, J. Quaegebeur, J.K. Winnicki, *The Judaean-Syrian-Egyptian Conflict of 103–101 B.C.: A Multilingual Dossier Concerning a 'War of Sceptres', (Collectanea hellenistica – 1)*, Brussels.

Webster, G. (2002): Chronological Index of the Texts from the Judaean Desert, in: E. Tov (ed.), *The Texts from the Judaean Desert Indices and An Introduction to the Discoveries in the Judaean Desert Series*, Oxford: 351–446.