CHAPTER 2

The Anonymous *Liber erarum*

1 Structure and Contents

Aside from Reinher’s *Compositus emendatus*, the earliest fully-fledged manual on the Jewish calendar to be extant in Latin is a short anonymous treatise that begins with the words *Prima erarum est a creatione mundi* ... (“The first era is from the creation of the world”). It is perhaps simply on account of this incipit, which is followed by an introductory portion mentioning several eras associated with Jewish chronology, that the treatise received the title *Liber erarum* from the fourteenth-century copyist of MS C (for manuscript sigla see p. 87 below). Together with the earliest manuscript, here designated as R, which originated in northern Italy in the early thirteenth century, and the fifteenth-century cognate copy V, this manuscript preserves what appears to be the most complete and authentic version of the text. All three mentioned copies (out of seven in total) parse the main text into four parts of unequal length. While the first and lengthiest part carries no specific heading, parts two and four are each preceded by the laconic term *Capitulum*. Only the heading of part three informs us about the subject of the chapter in question, which deals with the method of extracting conjunctions (*Capitulum in magisteriio extrahendi coniunctiones*). All this naturally leaves wide open the question how the text may have been structured in its original version.

As just mentioned, the first part or ‘chapter’ begins with an introductory portion that specifies the most important eras used in rabbinic chronology. Pride of place among these is taken by the commonly used Jewish ‘era of the world’, starting in 3761/60 BCE, which is here said to be ‘like a root’ (*sicut radix*). This choice of words is in line with the fact that the Hebrew word for ‘epoch’ is *iqqar* (יְקֵר), which can also mean ‘stump’ or ‘root’. As we shall see below (p. 84),

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1 MS C, fol. 100r: “Incipit liber erarum et si alibi plane satis vis videre de dictis eris, habeas librum Campani qui incipit ‘annus solaris etc.’ et ibi pulcra et magna poteris notare.” The reference matches the tenth chapter in Campanus of Novara’s *Computus maior*, which starts “Est autem annus solaris” and closes with a discussion of the epochs of eras used by different nations. See the printed edition of the *Computus maior* in *Sphera mundi*, fol. 164r. This chapter was copied separately into MS Florence, BNC, Conv. Soppr. J.X.40 [s. XV], fols. 28v–46v. See Axel Anton Björnbo, *Die mathematischen S. Morchohandschriften in Florenz*, 2nd ed. (Pisa: Domus Galilaeana, 1976), 69–71.
the Liber erarum probably goes back to a Hebrew original, written by a Jewish author. The text’s Jewish origin would explain why the author never bothers to spell out the chronological relation between the Jewish world era and the Christian era according to Dionysius Exiguus, which begins 3760 years and ca. three months later. This omission is everything but trivial, for without a precise understanding of the starting year of the Jewish calendar, it is impossible to calculate the current date of the molad based on the tables contained in the present treatise, let alone convert Jewish into Julian dates. Christian readers intent on giving the present text a practical application would not have been able to do so without additional information from outside sources. In the case of MSS D and P, this information was in fact provided in adjacent texts in the same codex, but it remains remarkable that the Liber erarum was copied as often as it was, given this obvious limitation.

The other eras mentioned in the introduction are that of the Flood (starting in Annus mundi or AM 1656 = 2016/5 BCE), the era of the Exodus (AM 2448 = 1314/3 BCE), the era of the destruction of the First Temple (AM 3338 = 424/3 BCE), the ‘era of Alexander the Great’, which is actually the Seleucid era (AM 3449 = 313/2 BCE), and the era of the destruction of the Second Temple (AM 3828 = 67/68 CE). These dates, very common in Jewish tradition, are ultimately derived from the Seder Olam, the principal work of early rabbinic chronography, which in its present form goes back to the second century of the common era. The only slight deviation is the date for the beginning of the ‘era of Alexander the Great’, which is here further specified as “the one they use to sign their charters” (qua scribunt chartas suas) in acknowledgment of the fact that the Seleucid era is also known as minyan shetarot (minster atlas) or ‘era of contracts’. Jewish sources normally start this ‘era of contracts’ in year 3450 from Creation (= 312/1 BCE), whereas the present text assigns it to AM 3449. This may indicate that the author of the Liber erarum was here influenced by a source that used a world era based on the molad vayad (see p. 75 below), which counted one year less since Creation.

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2 In MS D, the text is embedded in Robert of Leicester’s treatise on the Hebrew compotus (see Chapter Three below), while in MS P, it is immediately followed by material that originally belonged to Reinher of Paderborn’s Compotus emendatus (see Appendix II, p. 612 below).
5 As Sacha Stern informs me, this may have been a source from the East, e.g. Babylonia, where