CHAPTER 7

The Theme of Jesus’ Kingship in Negotiation with Jewish Hopes and the Roman Empire

1 Thesis

In Mos. 1:290 and Praem. 95, Philo appropriates Num 24:7 LXX in contexts in which he envisages an eschatological conquest of the nations under the leadership of a ‘Man’ (ἄνθρωπος). While the ‘Man’ in Mos. 1:289–291 is perceived as a future king who is to rule over many nations and whose kingship will be exalted, he is mainly seen as a commander in chief in Praem. 95, who, if needed, will appear in the eschatological war, and bring the Hebrew people to prevail over its enemies. In the context of a Mosaic typology, this ‘Man’ appears to be a ‘new Moses’, who will bring the universal charge of the Jewish nation to a full and complete realization, far beyond what Moses was able to realize in his time.¹ Thus, Moses’ and the Hebrew army’s victories during the exodus were seen as past events of history that anticipated the Hebrew people’s future conquest of many nations.

In this chapter, I shall argue that such ‘eschatological’ hopes provide a cultural context for Pilate’s declaration of Jesus as the ‘Man’ in John 19:5. In the context of John’s gospel, this serves as an ironic reversal of the mocking of a pseudo-Emperor, conveying the message that Jesus is the true king and ‘Emperor’ over against Caesar.

In the first place, I shall give a brief survey of research of previous proposals on the meaning of Pilate’s declaration of Jesus as ὁ ἄνθρωπος (John 19:5) in John 19:5. Then, I shall examine the ‘eschatological’ appropriation of Num 24:7 in the LXX and in Philo. Against this referential background, I shall argue that John portrays Jesus as a rival king and ‘world Emperor’ over against the Roman Emperor, as one who transforms and transcends the expected way in which such a ‘messianic’ figure would come to power. Finally, I shall draw my observations together in some conclusions.

¹ On a Mosaic typology and the terminology of a ‘new Moses’ in early Judaism and Christianity, cf. Allison 1993, 273. When the terminology of a ‘new Moses’ is here applied to Philo’s understanding of the ‘Man’ in these texts, the idea is that the ‘Man’ is more than Moses.
In one of the most dramatic moments in the gospel, Pilate brings out Jesus, crowned and empurpued like a king, and declares to the people: “Behold the man!” (ἰδοὺ ὁ ἄνθρωπος), John 19:5. Most scholars understand the phrase ὁ ἄνθρωπος in John 19:5 as emphasizing Jesus as a wretched mock-king, apt to excite ridicule and pity.\(^2\)

An alternative approach has been to understand Pilate’s acclamation theologically, in the sense that the reader recognizes that it covers a deeper meaning which goes beyond a mere statement of ridicule. In this regard, scholars in the last fifty years have presented various proposals pertaining the background of the phrase ὁ ἄνθρωπος.

One approach takes ἄνθρωπος as an abbreviation for the title ‘Son of Man’.\(^3\) R. Schnackenburg objected that the title of the ‘Son of Man’ did not fit the interest of John in the context of the trial before Pilate. Thus, according to Schnackenburg, ἄνθρωπος in 19:5 referred back to the fact that Jesus is already called ‘man’ by Pilate in John 18:29: “What charge do you bring against this man (τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τούτου)?” By calling Jesus ‘man’ rather than king according to the charge implied in 18:29, Pilate rejects the charge.\(^4\) Unfortunately, Schnackenburg did not take sufficiently into consideration the literary context of 19:14, in which Pilate explicitly entitles Jesus as king. Moreover, his objection to the ‘Son of Man’ theme associated with the ‘Man’ in John 19:4 neglects too easily what F. Moloney affirmed, viz. that John often applies one Christological title to modify and take further other titles in the course of the gospel. In the trial narrative, it is not implausible that the ‘Man’ might be seen as an expansion of the theme of Jesus’ kingship in association with the ‘Son of Man’ as well as with other royal designations previously employed in the gospel.

Another position takes the noun ὁ ἄνθρωπος as referring to the figure of Adam, made in the image of God. Scholars such as A. Richardson understand the phrase in John 19:5 to denote Christ as a new Adam, who as the first human being, is seen as the king of the whole world:

In Christ, the Son of Man, God’s intention in the creation is fulfilled. He is the new Adam, the Messianic King. Thus, we have in Pilate’s words a strik-

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\(^3\) So e.g. Bultman 1950; Moloney 1978.