

The Question of Gaius Caesar

The history surrounding the question of Gaius being by the side of Augustus when he heard the case for and against the kingship of Archelaus has caused some scholars to believe that the death of Herod must have been in 5 B.C.E. It concerns the use of the Greek words *protos/proton* in Josephus. ¹ Does it mean that Gaius was for the first time in an official role, or does it mean in first place beside Augustus? The argument has long been discussed and there are proponents for each interpretation. ²

No matter how one looks on the issue, it is a very flimsy piece of evidence on which to base chronological exactitudes. I, of course, take the position that Josephus meant that Gaius took “the first place” next to Augustus. If the other interpretation is accepted it might add weight to a 5 or 4 B.C.E. death for Herod, because “the first time” Gaius sat with Augustus in judgment was probably in one of those earlier years. Whiston in his translation of Josephus rendered the words as we accept them — and he has been followed by many others. The point is, it is very unwise to make profound chronological decisions based on the meanings of disputed words. I feel, however, that the overwhelming evidence for a 1 B.C.E. date for Herod's death, qualifies the translation “the first place” as being the proper one.

¹ Josephus, *War*, II.25; *Antiquities*, XVII. 229.

² Barnes, *Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. XIX, pp. 207–208.

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