

# *Persian influence on Daniel and Jewish Apocalyptic*

## *Literature*

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### **Sources used (besides Jewish or Christian texts)**

- \* *Dēnkard*
- \* *Bundahišn*
- \* Persian apocalyptic texts (especially the *Zand i Wahman Yasn* and the *Arda Wiraz Namag*)
- \* Persian apocalyptic material in inscriptions (i.e. the 3 ones from the priest Kirdir, Fourth Century CE; KNRm, KSM are the most important and virtually identical)
- \* Lactantius' texts referring to the *Oracle of Hystaspes*, especially the *Divine Institutions*

## **Main problems posed regarding the issue of Persian influence on Daniel and Jewish apocalyptic literature**

- \* 1. From a Jewish point of view, some Danielic themes look very weird - i.e. world empires - but see Tobit 14:4; 15 -, end of times (Dan 10:5-13), resurrection of the dead (Dan 12:2)
- \* 2. From a Persian point of view, these themes look commonplace (*Denkard*, ZWY, GrBd, KNRm, KSM<sup>1</sup>, AWN)
- \* 3. The main problem: Danielic mss. are plentiful and early, Persian mss. are few and of late dating
- \* 4. Main trends: Persian themes can be considered old, notwithstanding dating of mss., due to parallels with a non-state unified, pastoral vs. warriors cultural landscape very much like Homeric poetry (i.e. common PIE background)
- \* 5. Alternatively, the three main themes mentioned in “1” above were a Jewish conception transplanted to Persia; this looks unlikely for several reasons and the main argument of those who support this line of thought is the Pahlavic redaction of the texts *as we have them* (cf. Duchesne-Guillemin, Gignoux)
- \* 6. If the stance in “4” is correct, as the majority of scholars assume, how did Persian thought influence the Jewish concepts of visionary induction, resurrection, paradise, and dualism?

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<sup>1</sup> Kirdir's rock inscription at Naqs-i-Rustam (KNRm); Kirdir's rock inscription at Sar Mashad (KSM).

### **Main thesis defended in this presentation**

- \* Why is it so difficult to accept this influence, when Persian apocalyptic material, although consisting mostly of late compilations, looks so much like the older, Avestic material? (cf. Bousset, Boyce "On the antiquity")
- \* The Iranian idea of the perfection of the world does not have a parallel in Jewish sources - especially pre-Exilic ones
- \* The concept of a sequence of ages characterized either by metals (Greek, Iranian) or by colours (Hindu tradition) is inherited from a common PIE\* background (possibly) or from shared terminology and myths among IE peoples
- \* 1QS 3.13-4.26 is very likely to reflect Persian influence, perhaps Zoroastrianism or Zurvanism
- \* Jewish concepts of resurrection, paradise, and dualism appear clearly only in post-Exilic times (for that matter, the Garden of Eden is a "lost" Paradise that has very little to do with the one after Dan 12:2)

## **1. From a Jewish point of view, some Danielic themes look very weird**

- \* World empires: with the exception of Tobit, this does not appear in other Jewish sources before the Second Century CE
- \* It appears, however, in many non-Semitic sources: quoting Bardesanes in his voyage to India, Porphyrius. *De abstinentia* 4.17 and *Peri Stygos* 1.56 ff. (= Stobaeus. *Eclogae* 1.3, 56). *Rg Veda* 10.10
- \* Resurrection of the dead linked to eternal life and Final Judgment: nothing comparable can be found in the OT notions of *sheol* and Deuteronomic pattern in history, the 2 closer counterparts
- \* In contrast, see the Akkadian text *about the Kay Kaus* - which does even include some Danielic-like features (most of all the beasts) - cf. Heinrich Lewy. "The Babylonian background of the Kay Klaus legend" in: *Archiv orientální* 17, 1949. Pp.28-109 - also in book form). This legend was registered by Firdausi on the Tenth Century

## **2. From a Persian point of view, these themes look commonplace (*Dēnkard*, ZWY, GrBd)**

- \* GrBd 34 looks very much like the promises of Dn 12:2
- \* ZWY 1 and 3 resemble very much the Danielic ages of the world cum monarchies scheme (indeed, it seems older, since the monarchies scheme here is much less developed and includes mythical ages in ZWY)
- \**Dēnkard* 3.192-201; 275-361; 6.

### **3. The main problem: Danielic mss. are plentiful and early, Persian mss. are few and of late dating**

- \* Dating of earliest extant Dan mss.: 2 → 1Q, 5 → 4Q, 1 → 6Q (from DSS canonical texts, none complete but with substantial parts; from 125 BCE - 50 CE<sup>2</sup>; the earliest known fragment of the Hebrew Bible is from Numbers, Fifth Century BCE); some scholars suggest multiple authorship for Daniel, with some material belonging to the Third Century BCE, and a Second Century BCE editor and redactor (around 164 BCE, i.e. the Maccabean Revolt)
- \* Dating of earliest extant Persian texts talking about Danielic themes related to death, judgment etc. *in written form*: AWN, Ninth Century the earliest; ZWY Tenth Century the earliest (ms. K43 colophon from the *Denkard* dates it to 1020 CE); Kirdir's inscription, around 300 CE
- \* A poor argument: dating a text according to its content *may* have to do with its dating as an artefact. More often than not this is useless - nobody would date, say, Josephus to the Ninth Century CE (earliest mss.); the same goes to almost every kind of classical text
- \* One idea against the current that it was iron-trade (technology coming West to East) that brought along the ages of the world to Judaea and *then* to Persia is that the Iron Age is always terrible (who would anybody want to buy a product with such connotations?)
- \* The earliest Greek report on Zoroaster is by Xanthus of Lydia (early Fifth Century BCE). He states that the prophet laid down the rules against defiling fire "a long time ago" (FrGH 765F32, from his *MAFIKA* quoted in Diogenes Laertius 1)

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. 4QFlorilegium (4Q174), reference (Dan 12:10) to "Daniel *the Prophet*" in a book vs. its placing among the *Ketuvim* in the *Tanakh*. Martin Abegg et al., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*, pp.482-483.

#### **4. Main trends: Persian themes can be considered old, notwithstanding dating of mss., due to parallels (i.e. common PIE\* background)**

- \* Dn 2:33 talks about iron mixed with clay - ZWY 1.3 and 3.29 both ignore what is being mixed, or else we lost this bit of the text (the ZWY as we have it looks quite inordinate in the organization of chapters)
- \* GrBd 34.10 echoes judgments in the form of ordeal by fire; the execution of Aquilius in 88 BCE by Mithridates may have been considered a form of ordeal, especially taking into account the huge numbers of Zoroastrians in Asia Minor (cf. my article "Mithridates and the Oracle of Hystaspes: some dating issues" in: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, forthcoming)
- \* ZWY 1.3 and 3.29 show a more primeval concept of state organization (the theme of the world monarchies, although a separate issue, appears mixing historical and mythical units). Compare that to Dn - although the book as a whole is a poor guide to world affairs at the time, all the monarchies involved are historical
- \* No other place in the OT speaks about rising of the dead - the story of Job, e.g., displays a God that can redeem Job for every loss except his dead loved ones

**5. Alternatively, the three main themes mentioned in “1” above were a Jewish conception transplanted to Persia; this looks unlikely for several reasons**

- \* The image of the statue is confirmed by several Indian myths - cf. *Rg Veda* 10.10 (primordial twins myth, another PIE\* feature, cf. West), *Hymn to Skambha* (= *Atharvaveda* 5.32-34); it appears out of place in Daniel, but...
- \* ... the same imagery is confirmed in the report by Bardesanes in Stobaeus 2.2. and, what is more significant, in Shamanistic drums from Central Asia (although these are not IE, but Turkic); in short, the statue *possibly represented originally a form of cosmic pillar or world tree of life*
- \* Finally, the diffusion of the theme of the "tree of life" looks so universal that it cannot be regarded as specifically Indo-European (cf. Parpola); however, its association to men, or cruciform statues of men, or hanged men (myth by Bardesanes, Odin, *Rg Veda* are the most important examples) is more common in IE-related sources

**6. If the stance in “4” is correct, as the majority of scholars assume, how did Persian thought influence the Jewish concepts of visionary induction, resurrection, paradise, and dualism?**

- \* Through contact in communities, especially in Persian Babylonia and Asia Minor
- \* The stories of Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah - although Daniel appears as a mixed compound of tales and Ezra / Nehemiah stand alone as historical figures - all show that intimate and intellectual contact between Jews and Persians was more than a possibility. The same can be said about Second Isaiah's opinion of Cyrus (Is 45:1)
- \* Throughout Near Eastern mythology, the place of rest for the dead is a most unpleasant or, at least, unsavoury one (cf. Gn 37:35; 1Sm 14:28 ff.; Job 7:9; Ps 6:4-5; 18:5-7; 86:13; 139:8; Pr 30:12; Jn 2:2; Ecl 17:27-28); by comparison...
- \* ... the references both to Hell as a place of dread and to Paradise as the one of reward are common in Persian sources, as seen, and...
- \* ... there is no notion of a final conflagration in other OT sources than Daniel

## Conclusion

- \* There is not, and probably never will be, *hard* evidence for the anteriority of Persian eschatology vs. Jewish one
- \* “Eschatology” is not to be confused with “apocalyptic”, but...
- \* ... it is in the earliest complete “historical” apocalypse, Daniel, that we find traces so different from anything previously seen in OT texts that this, plus the Persian setting of the story of the hero (Daniel himself) point to the actual acquiring of new theological lore from the Persians
- \* Although the texts (i.e. mss.) are fairly recent, the world depicted in Persian sources looks much more like the one previous to Hesiod, i.e. the world of Homeric poetry - this would be reason enough to argue for its anteriority to the *Works and Days*; the same reasoning goes to Vedic material
- \* On the other hand, since scarce evidence from Persian sources regarding “final” eschatological solutions are plentiful and plentiful Jewish sources on the same matter in the early Second Temple Period are scarce, it is reasonable to suppose that if there were more Persian sources the disproportion would be even greater
- \* Dating of Persian material based on language alone is not enough, in my opinion, to contradict the thesis that they depict a much older and pastoral world; indeed, it would be surprising to find such a well-made fabrication in the Sassanid Era given the knowledge that the Persians (or, for that matter, even the Greeks) could have about the changes in civilization from the second millennium to the Third Century CE
- \* Finally, analysis from 1QS, which can be dated with certainty, pushes very much forward Persian - Jewish influence rather than the other way round, or any other options
- \* The issue at stake seems rather to be able to *prove* how this influence could have been possible - and in this respect inferences from the content of Persian sources alone do not suffice

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