

Were the Persian and Muslim Kingdoms Regarded as Advancing the Redemption of the Jews?

Changes in the Four Kingdoms Scheme during the Seventh Century (Part 1)

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Were the Persian and Muslim Kingdoms Regarded as Advancing the Redemption of the Jews?

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Wurden die persischen und muslimischen Königreiche als Fortschritt für die Erlösung der Juden betrachtet?

Veränderungen im Vier-Königreiche-Schema während des siebten Jahrhunderts

Abstract

The aim of this study is to present twenty-two Hebrew texts, with translations, relating to the Danielic scheme of the Four Kingdoms. In the scheme, the Fourth Kingdom is considered evil and heralds the End of Days. According to apocalyptic dialectic, there follows a short Messianic age during which evil will be vanquished and the people of Israel will be redeemed, gathering once more in their land; after this, the next world will be established by God. Since the Danielic scheme had canonical status, Jewish poets, sages, and exegetes had to adapt it to the political circumstances of their own times and update their understanding of the Fourth Kingdom. This study focuses on the first half of the seventh century, a period that witnessed the major power struggles involving the Byzantine empire, the Sassanid kingdom, and emergent Islam. These struggles played out in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, among other places. The powerless Jewish population hoped that their Byzantine oppressors would be defeated and initially welcomed their new masters, whether Sassanian (that is, Persian) or Muslim powers, who fuelled Jewish apocalyptic hopes of the approaching redemption; this is reflected in the texts presented here. The

harsh reality of Muslim rule, once established, later brought Jewish authors to express their dismay, itself becoming the Evil Kingdom. This study serves to illuminate a lesser-known chapter in Jewish attitudes towards Byzantine Christianity, Zoroastrian Persia, and the emergent Islam.

Keywords

→ Book of Daniel
→ Four Kingdoms
→ piyyutim
→ midrashim
→ apocalyptic texts

Zusammenfassung

Das Ziel dieser Studie ist es, zweiundzwanzig hebräische Texte mit Übersetzungen vorzustellen, die sich auf das Danielische Schema der vier Reiche beziehen. In diesem Schema wird das vierte Reich als böse angesehen und kündigt das Ende der Tage an. Nach der apokalyptischen Dialektik folgt ein kurzes messianisches Zeitalter, in dem das Böse besiegt wird und das Volk Israel erlöst wird und sich wieder in seinem Land versammelt; danach wird die nächste Welt von Gott errichtet. Da das Schema des Danielbuchs kanonischen Status hatte, mussten die jüdischen Dichter, Weisen und Exegeten es an die politischen Umstände ihrer eigenen Zeit anpassen und ihr Verständnis

des Vierten Reiches aktualisieren. Diese Studie konzentriert sich auf die erste Hälfte des siebten Jahrhunderts, eine Zeit, in der die großen Machtkämpfe zwischen dem byzantinischen Reich, dem Sassanidenreich und dem aufkommenden Islam stattfanden. Diese Kämpfe spielten sich unter anderem in Jerusalem und im Heiligen Land ab. Die ohnmächtige jüdische Bevölkerung hoffte, dass ihre byzantinischen Unterdrücker besiegt würden, und begrüßte zunächst ihre neuen Herren, seien es sassanidische (d. h. persische) oder muslimische Mächte, die die apokalyptischen Hoffnungen der Juden auf die nahende Erlösung nährten; dies spiegelt sich in den hier vorgestellten Texten wider. Die harte Realität der muslimischen Herrschaft, einmal etabliert, veranlasste die jüdischen Autoren später dazu, ihre Bestürzung zum Ausdruck zu bringen, die selbst zum Reich des Bösen wurde. Diese Studie beleuchtet ein weniger bekanntes Kapitel der jüdischen Haltung gegenüber dem byzantinischen Christentum, dem zoroastrischen Persien und dem aufkommenden Islam.

Schlüsselbegriffe

→ Buch Daniel
→ Vier Reiche
→ piyyutim
→ midrashim
→ apokalyptische Texte

Sumario

El objetivo de este estudio es presentar veintidós textos hebreos con traducciones que hacen referencia al esquema danielista de los cuatro imperios. En este esquema, el cuarto reino se considera malvado y anuncia el fin de los tiempos. Según la dialéctica apocalíptica, a esto le sigue una breve era mesiánica en la que el mal es derrotado y el pueblo de Israel es redimido y reunido de nuevo en su tierra; después de lo cual Dios establecerá el próximo mundo. Dado que el esquema del Libro de Daniel tenía carácter canónico, los poetas, sabios y exégetas judíos tuvieron que adaptarlo a las circunstancias políticas de su época y actualizar su comprensión del Cuarto Imperio. Este estudio se centra en la primera mitad del siglo VII, una época en la que tuvieron lugar las grandes luchas de poder entre el Imperio bizantino, el Imperio sasánida y el emergente Islam. Estas luchas se desarrollaron en Jerusalén y Tierra Santa, entre otros lugares. La impotente población judía esperaba que sus opresores bizantinos fueran derrotados y, en un principio, acogieron con satisfacción a sus nuevos amos, ya fueran sasánidas (es decir, persas) o musulmanes, lo que alimentó las esperanzas apocalípticas de los judíos de una redención inminente; esto se refleja en los textos que aquí se presentan. La dura realidad del dominio musulmán, una vez establecido y que se convirtió en el imperio del mal, llevó más tarde a los autores judíos a expresar su consternación. Este estudio arroja luz sobre un capítulo menos conocido de las actitudes judías hacia el cristianismo bizantino, la Persia zoroástrica y el Islam emergente.

Palabras clave

→ Libro de Daniel
→ Cuatro Imperios
→ piyyutim
→ midrashim
→ textos apocalípticos

Introduction

The major power struggle in the Middle East in the seventh century CE was between the Byzantine and Sassanid empires. In its nature, this was a political and military struggle; religious symbols, such as the icon of Mary that implied her protection of the Byzantine ruler and his empire, were also mobilized. At first, emergent Islam was not considered to be in competition, either as a political power or as a religion; it was deemed rather to be a heretical aberration within Christianity. In the apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius (composed c.692 CE), this aberration was imbued with an eschatological dimension, posing a threat to the Christian world order that would be saved by an emperor of Byzantine-Ethiopian descent. The Christian legend of the monk Sergius/Bahira serves as a good example how Eastern Christians became more familiar with the new religion and how they were introduced to the monotheism of Islam through this Christian eremite; Mohammed's role as a prophet however was denied equally by Christians and Jews. The eschatological scheme of the Four Kingdoms did not initially feature in Christian-Muslim polemics: it was introduced rather by Coptic apologists and Jewish rabbis and poets. Each used the scheme to channel their fears and hopes: the Copts and Syrian Jacobites hoped for a victory over the enigmatic invaders from the Arab peninsula, framing it in terms of an imperial eschatological scheme that regarded Rome (Byzantium) as the last kingdom; Jews and Armenians hoped to rid themselves of their Byzantine oppressor; and Jews channelled their hopes for redemption through the Four Kingdoms scheme.

At the end of his *Darius the Mede and the Four Empires in the Book of Daniel*, Harold Henry Rowley illustrates the variety of interpretations of the Four Kingdoms scheme throughout history in tabular form. According to his table, only one source, the Jewish polymath Abraham Ibn Ezra

* A digital version of the article can be found at: <https://www.ctsi.uni-bonn.de/zmr/aktuelle-ausgaben/zmr-109-2025-1-2>.

1 I was motivated to investigate the subject of this paper through attending the lectures given by Dr Nestor Kavvada at the Catholic Faculty of the University of Bonn entitled 'In the Crossfire: Emergent Islam and the Byzantine-Persian War'. This study would not have been possible without the assistance of Prof. Wout van Bakkum, who kindly shared with me

insights rooted in his expertise on *piyyutim*. I am also grateful for the inspiration I found when reading Prof. Josef Yahalom's views on how to consider *piyyutim* as historical sources. Thanks go to Dr. Joseph Spooner for editing and polishing my rusty English and to my daughter Elinor as well. The paper is dedicated to my wife Rivka who passed away while writing this study. Any remaining shortcomings are my own.

- ² (1092-1167), regarded the final Fourth Kingdom as Islamic.² This paper presents earlier Jewish texts in which hopes of redemption are ignited in response to the victories of the Sassanid empire and emergent Islam over the Byzantine empire. According to these texts, Sassanians and Muslims were regarded, successively, as constituting the Fourth Kingdom before the End of Days. This may come as a surprise, because common wisdom among Jews and Christians alike attributed canonical status to the scheme of the Four Kingdoms (or empires),³ and their consensus was encapsulated in the idea that Rome (i.e., Byzantium, identified by the Jews firstly as Se'ir and later as Edom), for good and for bad, was the final, Fourth Kingdom.

This paper presents a selection of twenty-two Jewish texts postdating the Book of Daniel in which one can see how apocalyptic expectations responded to events and political constellations but tried to remain consistent with the Danielic pattern of Four (sometimes eight) Kingdoms. The Book of Daniel was becoming canonical soon after 164 BCE, after the uprising of the Maccabees, and it shaped the Jewish conception of history and its end. In medieval Latin Europe, the Danielic scheme of Four Kingdoms furnished Ashkenazi sages with a reason why the Jewish exile was enduring for so long. Beyond the eschatological significance afforded to the Four Kingdoms in relation to historical circumstances, the scheme became a rhetorical device in the Talmudic and Midrashic traditions of the Greco-Roman period, with the Fourth Kingdom being presented as a divine rod to discipline the sinful Jewish nation but ultimately being punished itself by God for the evil perpetrated against Jews. There are also cases in which Sassanians and Arabs were regarded as divine tools castigating the Byzantines. Similarly, with the memory of Cyrus, who at Isaiah 45:1 is called a Messiah for allowing Jews to return from their Babylonian exile in 538 BCE, in mind, both nations were seen as advancing the redemption of the Jews.

- Some of the texts here are drawn from known apocalyptic literature, which has not only received thoroughly scholarly treatment, as exemplified by the studies of John C. Collins and John C. Reeves,⁴ but has also, since the work of Paul Alexander, not been neglected as a historical source.⁵ The paper will also introduce a wealth of homilies (*midrash*, pl. *midrashim*) and liturgical poems (*piyyut*, pl. *piyyutim*), which may be less familiar to those who do not read Hebrew. The *Encyclopaedia of Jewish Book Cultures* offers the following on *piyyutim*:⁶ »Liturgical poems were preferably written for the Sabbath and festivals when central prayers were supposed to establish a link with the theme of the day. *Piyyutim* in general do not exclusively relate to formalized prayers, but they are often associated with the sequence of Pentateuchal and Prophetic readings in a fixed lectionary during a period of one year or three years. The majority of *piyyutim* for the Sabbath relates to biblical topics or addresses interpretations and explanations of biblical themes, whereas

² HAROLD HENRY ROWLEY, *Darius the Mede and the Four World Empires in the Book of Daniel*, Cardiff 1935, repr. 1959, 184. Rowley does not mention Sa'adia Ga'on's Commentary on Daniel, because in 1935 it was not yet considered the sage's work.

³ KLAUS KOCH, *Stages in the Canonization of the Book of Daniel*, in: JOHN J. COLLINS/PETER W. FLINT (eds.), *The Book of Daniel. Composition and Reception. Volume Two*, Leiden 2001, 421-446, here 442-444. See also SID Z. LEIMAN, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture. The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence*, Hamden, CT 1976, 29f.

⁴ JOHN C. COLLINS, *The Apocalyptic Imagination. An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, Grand Rapids MI³2016; JOHN C. REEVES, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic. A Postbiblical Jewish Apocalypse Reader*, Atlanta GE 2005.

⁵ PAUL J. ALEXANDER, *Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources*, in: *American Historical Review*, 73 (1968) 997-1018.

⁶ WOUT VAN BEKKUM, »*Piyyut*«, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Book Cultures*, Leiden 2021, online edition (accessed: 6.7.2024).

⁷ WOUT J. VAN BEKKUM, *Jewish Messianic Expectations in the Age of Heraclius*, in: GERRIT J. REININK/BERNARD H. STOLTE (eds.), *The Reign of Heraclius (610-641). Crisis and Confrontation*, Leuven 2002, 95-112, here 100f.

festival compositions extensively deal with the aspects of the holiday involved. Themes and motifs are often versified recounts of rabbinic-Midrashic materials but occasionally draw on other non-canonical and non-rabbinic sources or can be considered as an addition of the composer. One can distinguish different genres among *piyyutim*. The central genre is *qedushta* (pl. *qedushtaot*), a series of nine to ten individual *piyyutim* that serve to adorn the most important daily prayer, the 'Eighteen' or Amidah, during which the *qedushah* (sanctification of God) is recited. These *piyyutim* are associated thematically with the Torah reading for the relevant week or festival. Other genres are 'avoda (pl. 'avodot), which is employed on the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), and *yotsrot*, which serves to embellish the benedictions of the Shema (the Jewish creed). The timing, in which the *piyyut* is recited, is called *kerova* ('soon') or *siluq* ('at the end'). *Piyyutim* are often anonymous, but some can be attributed to better-known liturgical poets (*paytanim*) such as Yannai, El'azar berrabbi Qillir, Jochanan ben Joshua Hakohen, and Pinhas Hakohen of Kafra. *Piyyutim* often lack dates, and any dating depends on whether allusions to emergent Islam or other historical events can be detected in their verses.

It is necessary to become accustomed to the enigmatic style of *piyyutim* of the Classical age, that is, the sixth to eighth centuries CE. One explanation for the emergence of this poetry may be found in Justinian's Novel 146 (*De Hebraeis*) of 553 CE, which prohibited, among other things, the reading of the Mishna and other rabbinic literature, on the grounds that they were not of divine origin. Modern scholars have argued that this law may have been the reason for the flourishing of *piyyutim*, with their allusions, references to rabbinic literature, and own style and language.⁷ Although it remains unclear if Justinian's Novel was ever fully implemented, it does at least reflect the spirit behind the imperial effort to make the Jewish liturgy conform to Christian modes. For van Beekum, a decisive factor in the emergence of *piyyut* culture was the Greco-Byzantine hymnological environment.⁸ Shulamit Elizur however sees the roots of this enigmatic language in the trend towards linguistic elitism⁹ during the revival of Hebraism after an era in which Judeo-Aramaic had become the dominant language of communication. (After the eighth century, Oriental Jews chose Judeo-Arabic as their language of communication.) Islam emerges during the heyday of the *piyyut* genre. This chronological coincidence raises the issue of the extent to which this liturgical poetry can be read as a historical source. Scholars such as Shmuel Klein have denied that *piyyutim* can be used as a historical source;¹⁰ Joseph Yahalom, and to a lesser degree also van Beekum, however, have argued in favour of their historicity. Indeed, for Yahalom this period affords an opportunity to try to date *piyyutim*, because their authors witnessed the final clash between the Byzantium and the Sassanians, and the emergence of Islam.¹¹

⁸ WOUT J. VAN BEKKUM, Anti-Christian Polemics in Hebrew Liturgical Poetry (*Piyyut*) of the Sixth and Seventh Centuries, in: JAN DEN BOEFT/A. HILHORST (eds.), *Early Christian Poetry. A Collection of Essays*, Leiden 1993, 297-308, here 299.

⁹ SHULAMIT ELITZUR, The Enigmatic Nature of Hebrew Poetry in the Orient from Its Origins until the Twelfth Century, in: *Peamim*, 59 (1994) 14-34 (Hebrew).

¹⁰ SHULAMIT ELITZUR, Exile on Native Soil, in: *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature*, 27 (2014) 21-36, here 22f (Hebrew).

¹¹ JOSEPH YAHALOM, The Transition of Kingdoms in Eretz Israel (Palestine) as Conceived by Poets and Homilists, in: *Shalem*, 6 (1992) 1-22 (Hebrew); WOUT J. VAN BEKKUM, Four Kingdoms Will Rule: Echoes of Apocalypticism and Political Reality in Late Antiquity and Medieval Judaism, in: WOLFRAM BRANDES/FELICITAS SCHMIEDER (eds.), *Endzeiten. Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen*, Berlin-New York 2008, 101-118.

Yet it is difficult to attribute the enigmatic language of this poetry to caution arising from legal restrictions or to linguistic elitism on the part of poets. The poets in question did deploy biblical terms and rabbinic texts, albeit allusively and allegorically. The *paytanim* could even refer to Arabs and Muslims, though only by using biblical terms analogously, as Islam was of course unknown in biblical times. The most frequently used term is Ishmael (ישמעאל). Less frequent are Qedar (קדר); sons of Qedem (בני קדם); wild ass (פרא); a rider on a camel (מנהג גמלים); and, in one case also Yoktan (יקטן), the grandson of Shem and son of Eber.¹²

From the more than 1,000 manuscript fragments of *piyyutim* preserved in the Cairo Geniza, I have selected only those that are already available in print and, most importantly, relevant to scheme of the Four Kingdoms. Uncovering the backgrounds to these liturgical poems may shed light on the sentiments expressed by their authors, who were witnessing both the defeat of the Byzantines by the Sassanians and the Islamic conquest of Palestine in the seventh century. Such sentiments include disappointment in the face of the hardships suffered under Islamic rule during the eighth century, especially after the Abbasid revolution in the middle of the century. Some of these poems have never been translated into English and the author here offers translations to help the reader follow the line of argument. Occasional use has been made of existing translations, and this is noted where appropriate. The helpful Maagarim website run by the Academy of the Hebrew Language, which hopes one day to digitize every Hebrew word ever written,¹³ allows free access to texts that would otherwise be difficult to consult and compare. Owing to technical constraints, the Hebrew text in this study sometimes appears without vocalization.

Origins of the Four Kingdoms Scheme

The Four Kingdoms scheme is a linear of periodization of the end of history followed by a vision of the next world. It is found in the texts of Zoroastrianism, Second Temple Judaism, and Rabbinic Judaism, as well as in Christian and Muslim texts; it is also found in Hellenistic and Roman historiography, though without the apocalyptic emphasis. In Herodotus's *Histories* (Book I, 95 and 130), the power of the kingdom is transferred from Assyria to Media, and then to Persia. The Four Kingdoms pattern did not originate in a Jewish context, and in the original (Persian) form of the scheme, Assyria replaces Babylon, which took

¹² Yoktan is mentioned in Qillir's *piyyut* »Oto hayom« as the land from which the king arrives in the land of Israel with an army to stay
ומארץ יקטן יצא מלך ומתנחלי יתחזקו בארץ.
See YEHUDA EVEN-SHMOUEL, *Midreshet Ge'ulah*, Jerusalem 1954, 153–160, here 158 lines 10f.

¹³ <https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMMain.aspx> (accessed: 6.6.2023).

¹⁴ See MICHAEL SEGAL, *The Four Kingdoms and Other Chronological Conceptions in the Book of Daniel*, in: ANDREW B. PERRIN/LOREN T. STUCKENBRUCK (eds.), *Four Kingdom Motifs before and beyond the Book of Daniel*, Leiden 2021, 13–38, here 14, where he lists the following studies: JOSEPH W. SWAIN, *The Theory of the Four Monarchies: Opposition History under the Roman Empire*, in: *Classical Review*, 35 (1940) 1–21; DAVID FLUSSER, *The Four Empires in the Fourth Sybil and in the Book of Daniel*, in: *Israel Oriental Studies*, 2 (1972)

148–175; LOUIS F. HARTMAN/ALEXANDER A. DI LELLA, *The Book of Daniel. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Garden City, NY 1978, 30–33; DORON MENDELIS, *The Five Empires: A Note on a Propagandistic Topos*, in: *American Journal of Philology*, 102 (1981) 330–337; JOHN J. COLLINS, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel (Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible)*, Minneapolis, MN 1993, 166–170; and COLLINS, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 107–142. While Flusser and Collins propose that the Four Kingdoms' scheme was introduced into the Book of Daniel through Persian/Zoroastrian influence, Niskanen,

over from Media. The pattern's origin has been the subject of intensive research over the last decades.¹⁴ The Jews shared their eschatological scheme, which matched their reality in Palestine under Hellenistic and Roman rule, with other nations. In 1940, John Swain already recognised that the concept of the Four Kingdoms was an important vehicle for expressing political opposition to Hellenistic rule in the ancient Near East.¹⁵ Paul Kosmin has recently argued that the scheme is a reaction to the introduction of a new Seleucid calendar that was designed to run indefinitely and was no longer related to individual rulers. The literary result was apocalyptic texts that intermingled clandestine political protest and apocalyptic prophecies predicting the end of Seleucid rule.¹⁶ The scheme was not limited to four specific kingdoms but was subject to change according to historical circumstances. At 8:20-21, Daniel names three out of the Four Kingdoms: Media, Persia, and Greece; the last one, which he hinted at, could be interpreted as the Seleucid empire. Omitting to name the last kingdom explicitly may have been a measure undertaken by the author to protect himself; at the same time, it created a margin of ambiguity and flexibility for the name of the last kingdom to be changed. In the Mishna period, the sages (*tannaim*) often did even not spell out what was meant by the Fourth Kingdom (מלכות רביעית), as everyone knew that Rome was meant.¹⁷

The Danielic Scheme and its Reverberations in Jewish Texts before Islam

As Daniel's vision, written in Aramaic, is a key text for any further deliberation on his scheme of the Four Kingdoms (Daniel 2:32-44), it is useful to present it in full here with a parallel English translation. Later texts often quote or allude to this vision. It describes a statue of five parts, the first four different metals and the last iron and clay.¹⁸

Daniel 2:32-33

32. The head of that statue was of fine gold;
its chest and arms were made of silver;
its belly and thighs, of bronze;
33. its legs were of iron
and its feet part iron and part clay.

דניאל ב'. לב-מד
לב הוא צלמא, ראשה די-דחב טב,
חדוהי ודךעוהי, די קסה;
מעוהי ונרקה, די נחש.
לג שקוהי, די פרנל;
רגלוהי--מנהון (מנהון) די פרנל, ומנהון (ומנהון) די קסה.

relying on Arnaldo Momigliano's study *Daniel and the Greek Theory*, pleaded for the influence of Herodotus; see PAUL V. NISKANEN, *The Human and Divine in History. Herodotus and the Book of Daniel*, London-New York 2004, 27-29. MARIE OELLIG has recently published her Ph.D. devoted to the antique concept of the succession of the four empires: *Die Sukzession von Weltreichen. Zu den antiken Wurzeln einer geschichtsmächtigen Idee*, Stuttgart 2023. Apart from Daniel however, she neglects Jewish apocalyptic sources, because she concentrates on ancient Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman texts.

¹⁵ SWAIN, *Theory of the Four Monarchies*.

¹⁶ PAUL J. KOSMIN, *Time and Its Adversaries in the Seleucid Empire*, Cambridge, MA 2018.

¹⁷ FLUSSER, *Four Empires*, 157f.

¹⁸ The biblical quotations in English are taken from the JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh, Philadelphia PA 2003.

At 2:36-44, Daniel explained this scheme to the Babylonian king as follows.

36. Such was the dream; and we will now tell the king its meaning.	לֹא דָנָה חֲלֵמָא, וּפְשָׁרָה נְאֻמֵּר קֳדָם-מֶלֶכָא.
37. You, O king – king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given kingdom, power, might, and glory;	לֹא אַנְתָּה (אַנְתָּה) מֶלֶכָא, מֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵיָא: דִּי אֱלֹהֵי שְׁמַיָא, מְלִכְוִיתָא חֲסִנָא וְחִסְפָא וְיִקְרָא וְיִהְיֵ-לֵךְ,
38. into whose hands He has given men, wild beasts, and the fowls of the heaven whenever they may dwell, and to whom He has given dominion over them all – you are the head of gold.	לֵחַ וּבְכָל-דִּי דַאֲרִין (דְּוִרִין) בְּנִי-אִנְשָׁא חֵינֵת בְּרָא וְעוֹף-שְׁמַיָא, וְיִהְיֵ בִידָהּ, וְנִשְׁלָטָהּ, בְּכָלֵהוּ; אַנְתָּה- (אַנְתָּה-) הוּא, רִאשָׁה דִּי זָהָבָא.
39. But another kingdom will arise after yours, inferior to yours; then yet a third kingdom, of bronze, which will rule over the whole earth.	לֵט וּבְתַרְךָ, תְּקוּם מְלִכּוֹ אַחֲרֵי--אַרְעָא (אַרְעָא) מִנֵּךְ; וּמְלִכּוֹ תְּלִיתִיא (תְּלִיתִיָא) אַחֲרֵי דִּי נְחָשָׂא, דִּי תִשְׁלַט בְּכָל-אַרְעָא.
40. But the fourth kingdom will be as strong as iron; just as iron crushes and shatters everything and like iron that smashes – so will it crush and smash all these.	מִזְּמִלְכּוֹ, רְבִיעִיָּה (רְבִיעִיָּה), תְּקוּם תְּקִיפָה, כְּפָרְזָלָא; כָּל-כָּבֵל, דִּי פְרֻזְלָא מְסַדֵּק וְחָשַׁל כָּלָא, וּכְפָרְזָלָא דִּי-מִרְעַע כָּל-אַלּוֹ, מַדָּק וְתַרְעַ.
41. You saw the feet and the toes, part potters' clay and part iron; that means it will be a divided kingdom; it will only have some stability of iron, because you saw iron mixed with common clay.	מֵא וְדִי-חֲזוֹנָהּ רַגְלֵיאָא וְאַצְבָּעֵתָא, מִנְהוּן (מִנְהוּן) חֲסָף דִּי-סָתֵר וּמִנְהוּן (וּמִנְהוּן) פְּרֻזְלָא--מְלִכּוֹ פְּלִיגָהּ תְּקוּהָ, וּמִן-נִצְבָּתָא דִּי-פְרֻזְלָא לְהוֹא-בָהּ; כָּל-כָּבֵל דִּי חֲזוֹנָהּ, פְּרֻזְלָא מְעָרַב בְּחֲסָף טִינָא.
42. And the toes were part of iron, and part of clay, that [means] the kingdom will be in part strong, and in part brittle.	מִבּ וְאַצְבָּעֵת רַגְלֵיאָא, מִנְהוּן (מִנְהוּן) פְּרֻזְלָא וּמִנְהוּן (וּמִנְהוּן) חֲסָף--מִן-קֶצֶת מְלִכְוִיתָא תְּקוּהָ תְּקִיפָה, וּמִנְהָ תְּקוּהָ תְּבִירָה.
43. You saw the iron mixed with common clay, which means: they shall mix with the offspring of men, but shall not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay.	מִגֵּ דִי (וְדִי) חֲזוֹנָהּ, פְּרֻזְלָא מְעָרַב בְּחֲסָף טִינָא--מִתְעָרְבִין לְהוּן בּוֹרַע אִנְשָׁא, וְלֹא-לְהוּן דְּבָקִין דָּנָה עִם-דָּנָה; הֵא-כְדִי פְרֻזְלָא, לֹא מִתְעָרַב עִם-חֲסָפָא.
44. And in the times of those kings, the God of heaven will establish a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, a kingdom that shall not be transferred to other people. It will crush and wipe out all these kingdoms but shall itself last forever.	מִדּ וּבְיוֹמֵיהוֹן דִּי מְלִכֵיָא אֲנּוּן, וְקוּם אֱלֹהֵי שְׁמַיָא מְלִכּוֹ דִּי לְעֻלְמִין לֹא תִתְּסַבֵּל, וּמְלִכְוִיתָא, לְעַם אַחֲרֵךְ לֹא תִשְׁתְּבַק; מַדָּק וְתַסִּיף כָּל-אַלּוֹן מְלִכְוִיתָא, וְהֵיא תְּקוּם לְעֻלְמִיָא.

19 M. L. WEST, *Hesiod. Works and Days*, Oxford 1978, 30-33. See also KYLIE CRABBE, *The Generation of Iron and the Final Stumbling Block: The Present Time in Hesiod's Works and Days 106-201 and Barnabas 4*, in: PERRIN/STUCKENBRUCK (eds.), *Four Kingdom Motifs*, 142-166.

20 CARLO G. CERETI (ed. and trans.), *The Zand ī Wahman Yasn. A Zoroastrian Apocalypse*, Rome 1995, 149.

21 Without entering the ongoing debate concerning the dating of this Zoroastrian apocalyptic text – which appears to be multi-layered, with its composition extending in date from Zoroaster's own time throughout the post-Islamic period – Cereti did find passages that reflect the Seleucid reality in Mesopotamia. See *ibid.*, 200; and KOSMIN, *Time and Its Adversaries*, 177-181.

22 COLLINS, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 182. For a recent critical view, see NADAV SHARON, «Four Kingdoms» in the Dead Sea Scrolls? A Reconsideration, in: *Dead Sea Discoveries*, 27 (2020) 202-233.

23 VERED NOAM, «Will this One Never Be Brought Down?»: Jewish Hopes for the Downfall of the Roman Empire, in: JONATHAN PRICE/KATELL BERTHELOT (eds.), *The Future of Rome. Roman, Greek, Jewish and Christian Visions*, Cambridge 2020, 169-188, here 171-176.

24 JAMES H. CHARLESWORTH (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Volume 1: Apocalyptic Literature & Testaments*, Peabody, MA 2020, 382.

The use of metals in the statue as an analogy for kingdoms or eras may have had a predecessor in Hesiod's *Work and Days* (vv. 106-201).¹⁹ In the fragments of the Zoroastrian book of *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*,²⁰ the same analogy is found with tree branches made out of four metals (gold, silver, steel, and mixed iron); three more metals (copper, brass, and lead) were added at a later date;²¹ it is worth noting that trees also appear in the Aramaic Qumran fragment called 4Q552-3 *Four Kingdoms*.²²

The Danielic scheme endured for a lengthy period, because it could be adapted in line with historical events and circumstances. One example of this is the emergence of Rome in the ancient Near East after the conquests of Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus in 63 BCE. It was very probably this that caused a shift in the biblical nomenclature in Qumran texts from Kittim to Edom, from the Hellenistic Seleucid arch-enemy to the Roman Republic (Romans were also disliked in the eastern provinces).²³ After the Roman destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE) and the defeat of the Bar Kokhba revolt (135 CE), sages in the Mishnah refrained from apocalyptic speculation about the end of Roman rule. The days after the Four Kingdoms lost their messianic urgency.

After the destruction of the Second Temple and the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE, a Greek Jewish text channelled messianic hopes into the traditional Hellenistic medium of oracles. The fourth book of the Sibylline Oracles, which was re-edited by a Jewish hand, includes an extensive passage on the Four Kingdoms that does not adhere to the Danielic tradition. It starts with Assyria (not Babylon) as the First Kingdom;²⁴ the sequence then passes through the Assyrians, Medes, Persians, and Macedonians, who constitute an important addition as the Fifth Kingdom. Rome is mentioned separately, but not as the Fifth Kingdom owing to the canonical limitation to adhere to four Kingdoms. At the End of Days, divine wrath will destroy the world by fire, but those who repent will be resurrected or saved.²⁵ This motif reappears in later Hebrew apocalypses, such as the *Sefer Eliyahu* and the *Perek Eliyahu*. According to David Flusser, the model for the fourth book of the Sibylline Oracles reflects a political constellation prior to the Roman conquests in Asia Minor in 191 BCE.²⁶ It is older than the Danielic scheme, although Daniel was able to draw on older Mesopotamian examples. This book of the Oracles encapsulates the development of the scheme from Four to Five Kingdoms. It contains what was later to become the imperial Byzantine eschatological ideology, which repudiated the validity of the Danielic scheme of Four Kingdoms. The Byzantine-Roman empire already considered itself the divine eternal kingdom established by a king whose aura

²⁵ ERICH S. GRUEN, *The Sibylline Oracles and Resistance to Rome*, in: PRICE/BERTHELOT (eds.), *The Future of Rome*, 189-205, here 192. An English translation of the Greek text may be found in CHARLESWORTH (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 384-389.

²⁶ FLUSSER, *Four Empires*, 155.

was both divine and messianic at the same time. Stephen J. Shoemaker has noted that Byzantine authors rarely comment on the Book of Revelation, which received little attention from
 27 Byzantine theologians, most likely because the last, Evil Kingdom in it was Rome.²⁷ Alexei M. Sivertsev has recently called Cosmas Indicopleustes as his witness for the repudiation of the Danielic scheme and its being superseded by the Roman claim to be the eternal messianic
 28 kingdom (ushered in by the Augustan age and the birth of Jesus Christ).²⁸ Sivertsev's efforts to prove the validity of the concept of ›counter history‹ by means of Jewish eschatological texts and liturgical poems of the first third of the seventh century, though these form part of a cultural continuum termed the ›Byzantine Commonwealth‹, did not take into account the
 29 resilience of Danielic tradition, which enjoyed canonical status among the Jews.²⁹

In the Talmudic period (third-sixth centuries), the Four Kingdoms scheme gained trac-
 30 tion, as is evident in the vast homiletic literature.³⁰ The *Midrash Leviticus (Vayikra) Rabbah*, which, with its placenames and its deliberations on agricultural habits, reflects the realities
 31 of contemporary Palestine,³¹ has a passage dealing with the question of when Roman rule would come to an end. This question is embedded in an exegesis about Jacob's dream in
 32 Genesis 28:12, using the trope of the Four Kingdoms.³²

Leviticus (Vayikra) Rabbah

מדרש ויקרא רבה

R. Nachman opened [his homily with the verse Jer. 30:10]: ›therefore fear not, O Jacob my servant, says the Lord ...‹; for it is written [Gen. 28:11]: ›And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth [...]. R. Samuel b. Nachman said: These [were not angels] but rather the princes of the nations. He showed him the prince of **Babylon** ascend seventy rungs, and the prince of **Media** ascend fifty-two rungs, and the prince of **Greece** ascend a hundred and eighty rungs, and the prince of **Edom** ascend and ascend, and [Jacob] knew not how many rungs. Jacob became frightened and asked, will this one ever be brought down. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Jacob, even you see him rise to the skies, I will bring him down. As it is said [Obadiah 1:4]:
 33 ›Though you make your nest as high as the eagle,³³ and though you set it among the stars, I will bring you down from there – declares the Lord.‹

רבי נחמן פתח (ירמיה ל, י): ואִתָּהּ אֵל תִּירָא עֲבָדֵי יַעֲקֹב, מִדְּבַר בְּיָעֻלְבּ, דְּכַתִּיב (בראשית כח, יב): וַיַּחְלֵם וַהֲגָה סֵלֶם מִצָּב אֲרֻצָּה, אָמַר רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחְמָן אֱלֹו שְׁרֵי אֲמוֹת הָעוֹלָם, דְּאָמַר רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחְמָן מִלְּמַד שֶׁהָרָאָה הַקֹּדֶשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְיַעֲקֹב אָבִינוּ שָׁרָה שֶׁל בָּבֶל וְנֹו חֲמִשִּׁים וּשְׁנַיִם, וְשֶׁל דִּנְעוּלָה שְׁבַעִים עֲנוּקִים, וְשֶׁל מְעוּלָה וְלֹא יוֹדַע כְּמָה, בְּאוֹתָהּ מֵאָה וּשְׁמוֹנִים וְשֶׁל אֲדוֹם שְׁעָה נִתְגַּרַּר יַעֲקֹב אָבִינוּ, אָמַר אֶפְסָר שְׂאִין לָנָה רִידָה, אָמַר לוֹ הַקֹּדֶשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: ואִתָּהּ אֵל תִּירָא עֲבָדֵי יַעֲקֹב, אֶפְלוּ הוּא עוֹלָה וְיוֹשֵׁב אֶצְלֵי מִשָּׁם אֲנִי מוֹרִידוֹ, הֲנָא הוּא דְּכַתִּיב (עובדיה א, ד): אִם תִּגְבִּיהַּ כְּנֶשֶׁר וְאִם בֵּין פְּוֹכְבִּים שִׁים קִנָּף מִשָּׁם אֹרִידֶךָ, נֹאוֹם ה'.

27 STEPHEN J. SHOEMAKER, The Afterlife of the Apocalypse of John in Byzantium, in: DEREK KRUEGER/ ROBERT S. NELSON (eds.), The New Testament in Byzantium, Washington DC 2016, 301–318. Shoemaker's view is not shared by Andras Kraft in his ›Byzantine Apocalyptic Literature‹, in COLIN MCALLISTER (ed.), The Cambridge Companion to Apocalyptic Literature, Cambridge 2020, 172–189.
 28 ALEXEI M. SIVERTSEV, Judaism and Imperial Ideology in Late Antiquity, New York, NY 2011, 11f.

29 SIVERTSEV, Judaism and Imperial Ideology, 6f. I am not sure that one gains more insight through Sivertsev's counter-historical approach. His analysis of Jewish eschatological motifs – such as the figure of Hefzibah in the *Sefer Zerubbabel* and in the *piyyut* ›That very day‹ (ibid., 119f), or the figure of the Messiah-King in the eternal kingdom in the *piyyut* ›Time to rebuke‹ (ibid., 173–175) – does in fact reveal traces of the impact of Byzantine culture. The canonical scheme of the Four Kingdoms, however, was to my mind outside the

imaginary dialogue between the dominant culture of Byzantium and that of the Jewish periphery.

30 RIVKA RAVIV, The Talmudic Formulation of the Prophecies of the Four Kingdoms in the Book of Daniel, in: Jewish Studies Internet Journal, 5 (2006) 1–20 (Hebrew).

31 GÜNTHER STEMBERGER, Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch, Munich 2011, 323.

Neither a human nor a messiah will bring Roman rule to an end. Guaranteed annihilation of it is reserved for the Almighty, at an appropriate time unknown to humans.

Other shifts in the scheme were caused by the introduction of a divided Roman empire and the transformation of Christianity into a state religion in the fourth century CE. In the Eastern empire, a new capital, Constantinople, was founded. The poet Yannai, who lived in Palestine somewhere between the fifth and sixth centuries, composed cycles of liturgical poems that were included in weekly and high-holiday prayers. They were of an edifying nature and sometimes hinted at historical events. The historian of Hebrew poetry, Josef Yahalom, has drawn attention to the poem by Yannai that begins with a verse from Deuteronomy (24:19): ›When you reap the harvest in your field.‹³⁴

34

›When you reap the harvest in your field‹	כי תקצור קצירך בשדך
And a statue composed of five elements,	וצלם המעורב מחמשת מינים
which stands for four kingdoms that lasted long,	שהוא ארבע מלכיות אשר האריכו ימים
and they counted five,	והן חמשה נימנים
of which three come first	שלשה ראשונים
and two last.	ושנים אחרונים
All may perish ...	יכלו כולם

Yannai may have been reacting to a historical event, with the Fifth Kingdom standing for the newly founded Eastern Roman empire, the equal of its Western counterpart.

The Four Kingdoms scheme could be construed as correlating with historical changes relevant to Jewish history, such as the Roman conquest of Palestine and the division of the Roman empire into two parts. There was no need to depart from the canonical scheme, because the feet in Daniel's vision already contained two elements, iron and clay, which were open to allegorical exegesis.

The *Piyyut* ›Time to rebuke‹ – the Sassanian Conquest and the Redemption of the Jews – an Episode in Jerusalem

Before turning to emergent Islam in Jewish eschatological texts, attention might be brought to bear on an interesting episode in which a *piyyut* seems to deliver a historical narrative next to the *Sefer Zerubbabel* apocalypse.³⁵ I speak of *silluq* for Ninth of Av (סילוק לחשעה), the day of mourning commemorating the destruction of the Solomonic temple by the Babylonians in 587 BCE. The poem, the first part of which is quoted here (lines 1-33), is also known from the first extant verse ›Ha et lig'or‹ (העת לגעור) or ›Time to rebuke.‹³⁶

35

36

³² Midrash Leviticus Rabbah, 29:2. For the Hebrew text, see https://www.sefaria.org/Vayikra_Rabbah.29.2?lang=bi (accessed: 1.8.2023).

The English translation is based on NOAM, ›Will this One Never Be Brought Down?‹, 169.

³³ The eagle was also the emblem of the Roman legions.

³⁴ For the Hebrew text, see YAHALOM, The Transition of Kingdoms in Eretz Israel (Palestine), 2. English translation by the author.

³⁵ Ezra Fleischer does not include the possibility that the *piyyut* pre-

dates the Apocalypse, or at least that both rely on an earlier model. See EZRA FLEISCHER, Solving the Qirilli Riddle, in: Tarbiz, 54 (1984-1985) 385-427, here 412 (Hebrew).

³⁶ The Hebrew text relies on the reading of manuscript in Cambridge University Library, T-S Collection, Ar. 37, 99, available online at <https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/> (accessed: 1.8.2023). Fleischer published his full version of the text in ›Solving the Qirilli Riddle‹, 412-426; he assumed that it was a single, complete *piyyut* composed by Qirill.

YAHALOM disputed both assumptions in his ›The Transition of Kingdoms in Eretz Israel (Palestine)‹, publishing his version of the text on pages 6f. An almost complete translation into English is available in HILLEL I. NEWMAN, Apocalyptic Poems in Christian and Jewish Liturgy in Late Antiquity, in: BROURIA BITTON-ASHKELONY/DEREK KRUEGER (eds.), Prayer and Worship in Eastern Christianities, 5th to 11th Centuries, London-New York 2017, 239-253, here 244-246, and a partial one in VAN BEKKUM, Anti-Christian Polemics, 308.

	<i>Silluq</i> for the Ninth of Av, ›Time to rebuke‹	העת לגעור- סילוק לתשעה באב
37	The time has come to rebuke the forest animal, to madden ³⁷ her in tempest and storm.	העת לגעור חיית יער להוללנה בסופה ובסער
38	Since the grape ³⁸ has gnawed a bit off the forest hence [God] will deliver her by storm	כי גפן כרסמה מיער בכון (?) יסגירנה בסיגור כל סער
39	into the hand of the Red [adom] One and the Hairy One. ³⁹	ביד אדום ובעל שער
40	In exchange for the beloved son from youth, ⁴⁰	תמור כי עינת בן אהוב מנוער
41	she will lose her reason and may become a fool. ⁴¹	זאבד תבונתה ותהיה כבער
42	*And Assyria ⁴² shall go forth against her [Byzantium] and pitch her palatial tent [Dan. 11:45] within her borders, and destroy all her tents [Jer. 10:20], all her idols shall be ashamed, all her images be confounded, he shall terrify her by panic, to leave her to owl and raven as inheritance [Isa. 34:11], to distort her doing to blot out all her military power, he shall sink her into the heart of the seas [Ezek. 27:27], he shall lower her unto the deep, with the line of confusion, he shall obscure her, with the plummet of chaos, he shall [hit] her doubly [Isa. 34:11]*	יִאשׁוּר יבוא עליה יטע אפדנו בגבוליה ישדד כל אוהליה יבושו כל אלילה ויחפרו כל פסליה בבהלות יבחיליה יקאת וקפוד להנחיליה לעו(ו)ת מעלילה להכחיד כל חייליה יבלב ים יפיליה יעד תהום ישפיליה יבקו תהוה יאפיליה יבאבני בהוה יכפיליה (או לחילופין לפי הלל נוימן : יתפיליה) ⁴³
43	The holy people will gain a brief respite, Assyria allowing them to establish a temple of holiness, and they will build there an altar of holiness, and they will sacrifice offerings of holiness, but they will not have time to erect the mountain of holiness, for there has yet been no scion of the root of holiness.	וירגעו מעט אנשי קודש כי ירשם אשור ליסד מקדש קודש ויבנו שם מזבח קודש ויעלו בו זבחי קודש ולא יספיקו לכונן הר קודש שעדיון יצא חוטר מגזע קודש
	First my Chief Stronghold will enter. in a prayer house [lit.: lesser temple] to talk to the people, and he will be made a leader and a chief. Within three months he [will be the leader], and upon him a general will pounce, and in the prayer house he will be trampled and on the barren rock his blood will be spilt.	ותחילה יבוא מעוז לראש במקדש מעט עלימו לדרוש ויושם לקצין ולראש ומשולש חדשים (ישיג ראש) ועליו יבוא שר הראש ובמקדש מעט אותו יחרוש ועל צחיח סלע דמו יקרש

37 *leholahna* (leholalna), which derives from the infinitive להולל (*leholel*) can be translated as ›to make crazy‹ or ›to make mad‹. The poet Qillir used this verb often in his *piyyutim*.

38 Synonym for Israel in Midrashic literature. See Midrash Exodus Rabbah, 16:52.

39 Both YAHALOM (The Transition of Kingdoms in Eretz Israel (Palestine), 7) and FLEISCHER (Solving the Qirilli Riddle, 412) considered the ›Red One‹ to be an allusion to the red-haired King David (1 Sam. 16:12), who serves as a synonym for the Messiah, son of David. The ›Hairy One‹ is the prophet Elijah (2 Kgs 1:8).

40 An allusion to the sacrifice of Isaac.

41 A polemic directed at Christianity.

42 The translation within asterisks is taken from VAN BEKKUM, Anti-Christian Polemics, 308.

43 NEWMAN, Apocalyptic Poems, 245 n. 42.

44 EZRA FLEISCHER, An Early Jewish Tradition on the Date of the End of the Byzantine Rule in Eretz-Israel, in: Zion, 36 (1971-1972) 110-115 (Hebrew); FLEISCHER, Solving the Qirilli Riddle.

45 ELITZUR, Exile on Native Soil, 21-36, here 35 n. 36.

46 YAHALOM, The Transition of Kingdoms in Eretz Israel (Palestine), 6f. VAN BEKKUM (Anti-Christian Polemics, 307) seems to agree with Yahalom.

47 DAVID FRANKFURTER, Elijah in Upper Egypt. The Apocalypse of Elijah and Early Egyptian Christianity, Minneapolis, MN 1993, 216-218.

48 NEWMAN, Apocalyptic Poems, 246f.

49 HAGITH SIVAN, From Byzantine to Persian Jerusalem: Jewish Perspectives and Jewish/Christian Polemics, in: Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies, 41 (2000) 277-306. Newman's caveat is found in his introductory note to the reprint of EVEN-SHMOUEL'S Midreshet Ge'ulah, Jerusalem 2017, LIII-XCIV, here LVII.

50 The Hebrew text of the *Sefer Zerubbabel* is printed in ISRAËL LÉVI, L'Apocalypse de Zorobabel et le roi de Perse Siroès, in: Revue des études juives, 68 (1914) 129-173, here 135:

Since Muslims are neither mentioned nor hinted at, scholars have dated the poem to the pre-Islamic era. There is however ongoing dispute about the historicity of the narrative underlying the verses of this enigmatic poem. Ezra Fleischer attributes the poem to Qillir, who lived in the late sixth and early seventh centuries,⁴⁴ through the dramatic years of the Byzantine-Sassanian conflict in Palestine and in Jerusalem; for Fleischer, Assyria stands for the Sassanians.⁴⁵ This identification has been disputed by Yahalom (who also claims that the poet is anonymous); for him, Assyria does not stand for the Sassanians as a historical political entity, but is most likely a biblical allegory, ›the rod of my anger, the staff of my fury [Isa. 10:5]‹.⁴⁶ David Frankfurter has observed that by the Hellenistic era the term *assyroi* had already lost its specific meaning and therefore became devoid of its historical significance.⁴⁷ Hillel Newman denies entirely the historicity of ›Time to rebuke‹ for the seventh century, reading verses 27-33 as being modelled on Daniel 9:26-27, which describes the Antiochene crisis created by Antiochus IV Epiphanes.⁴⁸

Historians who lament the lack of textual documentation from this dramatic period are inclined to infer from the poem hints about the short period of ill-documented Sassanid rule in Jerusalem, between the 614 and 628/9.⁴⁹ Newman however issues a caveat aimed at limiting the eagerness of some historians to identify in apocalyptic and poetical texts historical allusions only in periods that are otherwise ill documented, such as the Sassanid occupation of Jerusalem. The killing of the Jewish leader in Jerusalem by a Persian general in the poem could reflect a historical event, if one identifies, as Israëli Lévi did, the ninth king in the *Sefer Zerubbabel*, the Persian Shiroy, with Kavadh II (628-629), who killed his father Khosrow II. This Kavadh, known as Siroes in Greek and Roman sources, kills the mythical messianic leader Nehemiah ben Hushiel in the *Sefer Zerubbabel*'s apocalyptic narrative (line 32).⁵⁰ Kavadh's short reign supports the suggested date of 629 CE as a *terminus a quo* for the composition of the *Sefer Zerubbabel*.⁵¹ The same argument could be applied to the dating of ›Time to rebuke‹, although Martha Himmelfarb has remarked that there is otherwise no evidence of dependence between the two. The Jews were overwhelmed by the Sassanians' success in defeating the Byzantine forces and remembered that it was the Persians who allowed the Jews to return to their homeland in 538 BCE. In the eschatological scheme of Four Kingdoms, however, Greece (Macedonia) succeeded Persia, so it can be assumed that the poet did not wish to alter the Jewish canonical scheme. Assyria, however, had already disappeared from the Jewish scheme of Four Kingdoms in the fourth

ובשנה החמישית לנחמיה
ולקבוץ קדושים יעלה שירוי
מלך פרס על נחמיה בן חושאל ועל
ישראל ויהיה צרה גדולה בישראל.

An English translation may be found in MARTHA HIMMELFARB, *Sefer Zerubbabel*, in: DAVID STERN/MARK JAY MIRSKY (eds.), *Rabbinic Fantasies. Imaginative Narratives from Classical Hebrew Literature*, Philadelphia, PA 1990, 67-90, here 74: »Then in the fifth year of Nehemiah and the gathering of the holy ones, Shiroy, king of Persia, will go up against Nehemiah son of Hushiel and Israel, and there will be great trouble for Israel.«

51 MARTHA HIMMELFARB, *Jewish Messiahs in a Christian Empire. A History of the Book of Zerubbabel*, Cambridge, MA 2017, 28, and especially

31-34, where she refutes Newman's claim for an earlier dating (to the sixth century) of the *Sefer Zerubbabel* and the poem ›Time to rebuke‹. Her strongest argument is that the unique figure of Hefzibah, the mother of the Davidic Messiah, is a response to Mary, mother of Christ, whose icon was carried into battle under Emperor Heraclius (ruled 610-641). Newman challenged the accepted date of composition of the *Sefer Zerubbabel* and pushed it back to the 560s. He distinguished between an early recension and a longer, later one with different predictions for when Messiah would arrive; the earlier recension expected his coming in 560 CE and the later one in 1058. Neither Himmelfarb nor Newman discuss the period of the Sassanid

conquest of Palestine, 614-629. According to Newman, the reference to the Sassanid king Shiroy in the *Sefer Zerubbabel*, which occurs in two out of four witnesses for the first recension, is a later insertion and so cannot serve as a dating criterion; see HILLEL I. NEWMAN, *Dating Sefer Zerubabel: Dehistoricizing and Rehistoricizing a Jewish Apocalypse of Late Antiquity*, in: ADAMANTIUS, 19 (2013) 324-336, here 329 and 331f. His challenge to dating and historicizing ›Time to rebuke‹ to the seventh century was published in his ›Apocalyptic Poems‹, 239-243 and 248, where among other points, he presumed similarities between the *piyyut* and the poem ›On the second coming‹ by the sixth-century Byzantine poet Romanus the Melodist.

- 52 or fifth century CE, as is apparent from the Ta'anit tractate in the Jerusalem Talmud.⁵² The poet may have chosen to use the term Assyria as a synonym for the contemporary Sassanid kingdom, because this would not have affected the traditional eschatological scheme.

Qedar and Qedem in the *Sefer Zerubbabel*

- The *Sefer Zerubbabel* contains an enigmatic reference to Armilus (the ultimate eschatological villain or Antichrist, most likely a personification of Heraclius) who will fight with the kings of Qedar and the sons of Qedem in Arbel valley, after which he will conquer the entire world.⁵³ Reeves avoided solving the enigma of Qedar and Qedem, remarking that they might be a generic trope based on Jeremiah 49:28: 'Arise, march against Qedar, and ravage the Qedemites.'⁵⁴ Lévi has suggested that this book should be dated between the death of Khosrow II in 629 and before the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem in 638; in this he has been followed by most scholars.⁵⁵

- The short episode of Sassanid rule (614–628/9) set a messianic wave in motion among Jews that produced not only the well-known apocalyptic text *Sefer Zerubbabel*, but also the *piyyut* attributed to Qirill 'In those days at that period' (בְּיָמֵים הָהֵם בַּעַת הַהִיא), *Bayamim ha hem ba'et hahi*). Both offer a chronological, month-by-month sequence of apocalyptic events that precede redemption, but without any reference to the scheme of Four Kingdoms.⁵⁶

- According to the poem 'Time to rebuke', the hope of re-establishing the Jewish temple did not materialize, because a Davidic messiah had not come yet. Here one might hear an echo of a rabbinic caveat not to usher in the coming of the messiah.⁵⁷ If one turns to the narrative of the *Sefer Zerubbabel* however, it could well be that even the effort to rebuild a lesser temple failed because only Nehemia ben Hushiel was involved, and not the second messiah Menahem ben Amiel, the ultimate Jewish messiah of Davidic descent. Jewish cultic

52 See the Jerusalem Talmud, Ta'anit, 2:4,3: »So in the future will your descendants be caught in sins and become entangled with kingdoms [מלכויות]: From Babylon to Media, from Media to Greece, from Greece to EDOM.« Translation after https://www.sefaria.org/Jerusalem_Talmud_Taanit.2.4?lang=bi (accessed: 20.4.2023).

53 HIMMELFARB, *Sefer Zerubbabel*, 80: »He will come with the kings of Qedar and the children of Kedem and start a war in the valley of Arbel, and the kingdom will be theirs.« VAN BEKKUM translated it differently in his *Four Kingdoms Will Rule*, 110: »Armilus will come with the kings of Qedem and start a war with the sons of Qedar in the valley of Arbael.« According to the LÉVI edition (*L'Apocalypse de Zorobabel*, 142f), the Hebrew text is as follows:

והמלך העשירי ארמילוס בן ששן היוצא
מצלמנות האבן הוא ימלך על עולם ויבוא
ויעורר מלחמה בבקעת ארבל עם מלכי
קדר ובני קדם ושלמה תהיה המלוכה, ויעלה
בכוזו ויכבוש את כל העולם כולו.

54 REEVES, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic*, 65.

55 LÉVI, *L'Apocalypse de Zorobabel*, 158.

56 The Hebrew text of the *piyyut* may be found in EVEN-SHMUEL, *Midreshey Ge'ulah*, 113–116.

57 NEWMAN (*Apocalyptic Poems*, 246) denies rabbinic traces in the poem and in the *Sefer Zerubbabel*.

58 The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos, translation with notes by R. W. Thomson, historical commentary by James Howard-Johnston, Liverpool 1999, chapter 43, 102f: »I shall also speak about the plots of the rebellious Jews, who after gaining help from the Hagarenes for a brief while, decided to rebuild the temple of Solomon. Finding the spot called Holy of Holies, they rebuilt construction with base and as a place for their prayers. But the Ishmaelites, being envious of them, expelled them from that place and called the same house of prayer their own. Then the former built in another spot, right at the base of the temple, another place for their prayer.« The rare use of

Hagarenes alongside Ishmaelites in the same passage is a puzzle. Who are the Hagarenes? Is this a textual corruption, or do the Hagarenes serve as a substitute for the Sassanians or Persians? The passage admittedly becomes more comprehensible if the term Hagarenes functions as a substitute for a yet unidentified grouping that is not of Arab origin. 59 This did not prevent the right-wing Israeli daily newspaper 'Israel Hayom', on 20.3.2023, from devoting a lengthy article to this poem and the possibility that it reflected an actual historical episode in which a Jewish sanctuary was rebuilt on the Temple Esplanade.

practice is hinted at by the Armenian chronist Pseudo-Sebeos, who reports on the Muslim decision to remove a Jewish prayer house built on the Temple Esplanade; as a substitute, they build a Jewish prayer house at the base of the Esplanade.⁵⁸ Newman denies the historicity of the narrative of both the *Sefer Zerubbabel* and the *piyyut* 'Time to rebuke', but did not take Pseudo-Sebeos into consideration; be that as it may, no archaeological remains of Jewish activity have been traced at the Temple Esplanade from that period.⁵⁹

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The *Sefer Eliyahu* – the Sassanian Empire as the Fourth Kingdom

The *Sefer Eliyahu*, which must be distinguished from *Seder Eliyahu*, is a Jewish apocalypse from late antiquity that remains in the shadow of the much better-known contemporary *Sefer Zerubbabel* apocalypse. Compared with the latter, it has fewer witnesses, indicating that it did not have such a wide impact, and studies devoted to it are also comparatively fewer in number.⁶⁰ Newman has recently set out new textual insights, which it is helpful to set out here, since his article in Hebrew might not be accessible to some readers.⁶¹ Research into the *Sefer Eliyahu* is based on a dependable text edition prepared by Moses Buttenwieser, who relied on a manuscript dated by Steinschneider to the fifteenth century.⁶² This edition superseded the text published by Adolph Jellinek, who claims to have relied on a corrupted version printed in 1743 in Thessaloniki;⁶³ this version is lost, and Newman assumes that Jellinek probably used the version printed in Istanbul c.1711–1720, a copy of which is stored in Jerusalem. This is not the earliest printed version of the *Sefer Eliyahu* however: the National Library in Jerusalem also holds a version without a cover that is assumed to have been printed in Ferrara in the years 1554–1555. The text of this early printed version is like that of the Munich manuscript on which Buttenwieser based his edition.

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60 See MOSES BUTTENWIESER, *Die hebräische Elias Apokalypse*, Leipzig 1897; REEVES, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic*, 29–39, for a whole chapter and English translation; and SAMUEL KRAUSS, *Der römisch-persische Krieg in der jüdischen Elia Apokalypse*, in: *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 14 (1902) 359–372. More than a decade ago, the South African theologian MARIUS NEL published *The Post-Rabbinic Apocalypse Sefer Elijah and the Hebrew Bible*, in: *Acta Patristica et Byzantina*, 21 (2010) 270–286. In 2011, HIMMELFARB published her articles *Sefer Eliyahu: Jewish Eschatology and Christian Jerusalem*, in: K. G. HOLM/H. LAPIN (eds.), *Shaping the Middle East. Jews, Christians and Muslims in an Age of Transition 400–800 C.E.*, Bethesda, MD 2011, 223–238, and MARTHA HIMMELFARB, *Revelation and Rabinization in Sefer Zerubbabel and Sefer Eliyahu*, in: PHILPPA TOWNSEND/ MOULIE VIDAS (eds.), *Revelation, Literature, and Community in Late Antiquity*, Tübingen 2011, 217–236. HILLEL I. NEWMAN recently pub-

lished his article *The Hebrew Book of Elijah and Commodian's Carmen de duobus populis*, in: BROURIA BITTON-ASHKELONY/MARTIN GOODMAN (eds.), *Essays on Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity in Honour of Oded Irshai*, Turnhout 2023, 253–270.

61 NEWMAN, introductory note to the reprint of EVEN-SHMUEL'S *Midreshey Ge'ulah*, LXXIV–LXXXI (Hebrew).

62 Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. Hebr. 222. See BUTTENWIESER, *Die hebräische Elias Apokalypse*, 8f.

63 ADOLPH JELLINEK (ed.), *Betha-Midrasch. Sammlung kleiner Midraschim und vermischter Abhandlungen*, vol. 3, Leipzig 1855, 65–68.

A few apocalyptic messages have been ascribed traditionally to the biblical prophet Elijah. The pseudepigraphical *Sefer Eliyahu* is an apocalypse with a detailed description of the last war of Gog and Magog before the End of Days; the return of the tribes of Israel; and how divine justice will be finally meted out to the rightful and to the sinners. I do not want to dwell here on details relating to earlier layers of the text, suffice to say that it would not be wrong to date them somewhere between the third and the fifth centuries CE.⁶⁴ For current purposes, it is relevant however that the opening the text (here in bold) already pays tribute to the Danielic scheme of Four Kingdoms and to the idea that the End of Days will be revealed during the reign of the fourth king. This scheme is not found in the *Sefer Zerubbabel*. The opening passage continues with what seems to be a later insertion of a pseudo-Talmudic discourse concerning the name the last king would have; this in fact is a diminution of the divine revelation.⁶⁵ Five sages proposed different names of the last king, none of them clearly identified, although most of them sound as if they are of Persian origin and belong to the distant past.

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67*Sefer Eliyahu*⁶⁶

Cod. Hebr. 222

ספר אליהו⁶⁷ - לפי נוסח כ"י מינכן.

And he lay down and fell asleep beneath a broom-shrub. Then lo, this angel touched him and said, 'Get up, eat!' (1 Kgs 19:5). Michael, 'the great prince' of Israel, revealed this mystery to the prophet Elijah at Mount Carmel; (namely), **the eschaton and what was scheduled to transpire at the End of Days at the end of the Four Kingdoms (and) the things which would take place during the reign of the fourth ruler.**

A wind from the Lord lifted me [i.e., Elijah] up and transported me to the southern part of the world, and I saw there a high place burning with fire where no creature was able to enter. Then the wind lifted me up and transported me to the eastern part of the world, and I saw stars battling one another incessantly. Again, the wind lifted me up and transported me to the western part of the world, and I saw souls undergoing a painful judgment, each one in accordance with its deeds.

Then Michael said to me, 'The appointed time for the End of Days will occur during the reign of a king who will be named Hrmlt. There are some that say that Trmyl' will be his name. R. Simai says Hksht will be his name. R. Eleazar says Artaxerxes will be his name. R. Judah b. Betira says Cyrus will be his name. R. Shim'on bar Yochai says Hksra [Khosrow] will be his name. The halakhah in this case follows R. Shim'on who said 'Hksra' [Khosrow, the last king of Persia] will be his name [...].

וישכב וישן תחת רותם אחד והנה זה מלאך נוגע בו ויאמר לו קום אכול. רזא גלא ליה מיכאל שרא רבא דישראל לאליהו הנביא בטורא דכרמל, קץ וזמן שעתיד להיות באחרית הימים בסוף ארבע מלכויות בימיו של מלך רביעי העתיד להיות. נשאתני רוח ה' והוליכני לדרום העולם וראיתי שם מקום גבוה בויער באש ואין כל בריה יכולה ליכנס שמה. שוב נשאתני והוליכני למזרח העולם וראיתי שם כוכבים נלחמים זה עם זה ואינם נחים. שוב נשאתני רוח והוליכני למערב העולם וראיתי שם נפשות בצער גדול כל אחד לפי מעשיו.

ואז אמר לי מיכאל קץ העתיד להיות באחרית הימים בימיו של מלך העתיד להיות הרמלת שמו, ויש אומרים תרמילא שמו. ר' סימאי אומר הכשרת שמו. ר' אלעזר אומר הרתחשסתא שמו. ר' יהודה בן בתירא אומר כורש שמו. ר' שמעון בן יוחאי אומר הכסרא שמו, והלכה כרבי שמעון דאמר הכסרא (שמו של מלך אחרון שבפרס...)

The unidentified author of the *Sefer Eliyahu* vehemently rejects all five of the sages' proposals for the name the last king: HRMLT (הרמלת, Armilus?), TRMILA (תרמילא), HKSRT (הכשרת), Artaxerxes (הרתחשסתא), and Cyrus. The sixth sage is the popular Rabbi Shim'on bar Yochai, also known by his acronym Rashbi, by whose quasi-Halachic authority in what I call 'special apocalyptic assignments' it was decided that the last king's name will be Kisra. (Reeves notes that this is the Arabic form of Khosrow.) With this name one might point to the Sassanid kings Khosrow I (531-579) and Khosrow II (590-628); scholars tend to opt for the latter, because he is the one who defeated the Byzantines when he conquered Jerusalem in 614. The *Sefer Eliyahu* also narrates that 'on the twentieth day of Nisan, a king shall come up from the sea [meaning the West], ravaging and horrifying the world. He shall encroach upon 'the holy beautiful mountain' [Dan 11:45, meaning the Temple Mount] and burn it.'⁶⁸ Khosrow II was murdered in 628 by his son Khavadh, alias Shiroy, which points to a pre-628 date for the composition of this later insertion.⁶⁹ If this assumption is correct, the Sassanid empire is the last and Fourth Kingdom in the *Sefer Eliyahu*. The dialectical change of the worst catastrophe, as described in the *Sefer Eliyahu*, into the Era of the Coming of Messiah, whose name is Jinon, does not allow anything positive to be attributed to Sassanid rule as the Fourth Kingdom from the author's perspective; this contrasts with the hopes attributed to it in 'Time to rebuke'. The only positive aspect eschatologically is that the redemption of the Jews should be expected soon. (In Jewish eschatology, the dialectic of redemption is called חבלי משיח, which means 'pre-Messianic sufferings'.) With the *Sefer Eliyahu* in mind, we may have an eschatological context for the following quotation, attributed to Rabbi Shim'on bar Yochai, in the *Midrash Lamentations Rabbah* (1:41): »If you see a Persian horse tied in the land of Israel, look out for the footsteps of the Messiah.«⁷⁰ This might indicate that a recension of the *Lamentations Rabbah* was prepared near the date to the Sassanid occupation of Jerusalem in 614 CE.

The impetus for the statement attributed to Rashbi is the endeavour to explain the quotation of *Lamentations* 1:13 through the pun between פרש רשת לרגלי (he spread a net beneath my feet) and *Midrash Lamentations Rabbah* 1:41, סוס פרסי קשור (Persian horse tied) by proposing that the literary translation of the punning word should have been

64 BUTTENWIESER (Die hebräische Elias Apokalypse, 80f) had already remarked that the *Sefer Eliyahu* shared motifs with the *Divinae institutiones* by the early Christian apologetic author Lactantius (c.250-325). More recently, in his introductory note to the reprint of EVEN-SHMUEL's *Midreshey Ge'ulah* (LXXIX-LXXX), Newman drew our attention to apocalyptic motifs common to the *Car-men de duobus populis* by Commodian (about 250 CE) and the *Sefer Eliyahu*; this does not prove direct dependency, but that the texts had their genesis in similar intellectual climates at the turn of the fourth century. Himmelfarb delivered a lengthy paper in which she weighs the pros and cons for conceiving the Descent of the Heavenly Jerusalem in the *Sefer Eliyahu* as a polemical response to the Descent of Heavenly Jerusalem in the *Book of Revelations*. After conceding the modest popularity that the

Sefer Eliyahu enjoyed among Byzantine theologians, she nevertheless frames it as a Jewish rejoinder arising from oral contact with Christians and the impact of Oecumenius's Commentary on *Revelations*, which would be dated somewhere in the sixth century. Himmelfarb does not raise any doubt that the *Sefer Eliyahu* was composed at the beginning of the seventh century. See HIMMELFARB, *Sefer Eliyahu*, 235f and 238.

65 HIMMELFARB (*Sefer Eliyahu*, 229) deems the passage to be in 'imitation of Rabbinic style' and to have been composed in the seventh century.

66 English text in REEVES, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic*, 31-39, here 32f. Reeves notes that Kisra is the Arabic form of Khosrow.

67 BUTTENWIESER, *Die hebräische Elias Apokalypse*, 15f.

68 Translation based on REEVES, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic*, 34f.

69 EVEN-SHMUEL (*Midreshey Ge'ulah*, 39) suggested the year 627.

70 תני רבי שמעון בן יוחאי אם ראית סוס פרסי קשור בארץ ישראל, צפה לרגליו של משיח.

https://www.sefaria.org/Eikhah_Rabbah.1.41?lang=bi&with=About&lang2=en (accessed: 20.9.2023). In his Dissertation, Lutz Greisiger associated this prediction with Jewish messianism after the Sassanid conquest of Jerusalem in 614. See LUTZ GREISIGER, *Messias – Endkaiser – Antichrist. Politische Apokalypitk unter Juden und Christen des Nahen Ostens am Vorabend der arabischen Eroberung*, Wiesbaden 2014, 53.

›rider‹ or ›knight‹ (פרש spread > פרס rider > פרס Persia). Lastly, by quoting Micah 5:4, the *midrash* makes an ironic association with the peace the Lord would bring after the attack by Assyria, which there appears to be synonymous with Babylonia, the power that destroyed the first temple in 587 BCE and caused suffering to the people of Israel. This is what the book of Lamentations is about. It may serve as another indirect proof that Sassanid Persia of the sixth and seventh centuries has been associated with biblical Assyria, which at that time had disappeared from the Jewish scheme of the Four Kingdoms.

The *Perek Eliyahu*: Ishmael's rule as the Fourth Kingdom

- ⁷¹ In his anthology *Midreshey Ge'ulah*,⁷¹ Even-Shmuel included a text called the *Perek Eliyahu*, supposedly taken from a Yemenite manuscript belonging to the collection of Rabbi Fishman-Maimon. The manuscript is lost, which means that for the time being the only witness for the text is Even-Shmuel's anthology. The text differs in several places from the *Sefer Eliyahu*, but the frame is the same: the Archangel Michael reveals to Elijah how the End of the Days will unfold at the end of the Fourth Kingdom. The discourse about the name of the last king is similar too, and the physical description of the evil last king who sets the events of the apocalypse in motion is the same.⁷² The *Perek Eliyahu* is however later than the amendment that named Khosrow (in its Arabic form Kisra or Kisri) as the last king, since it mentions the period of Arab rule. In the *Perek Eliyahu*, Ishmaelites are mentioned three times: the ›Sons of Ishmael‹, the ›king of Ishmael‹, and the ›Ishmaelites‹. Text in bold is unique to the *Perek*.⁷³

<i>Perek Eliyahu</i>	פרק אליהו
28-30. That very day three atrocities may occur in the world and the sun, and all constellations will be focused on one spot at the end of the Fourth Kingdom. And all nations will gather without peace – said God – to the sons of Ishmael and to the sinners of Israel who plunder one another and rob one another's houses.	28-30: אותו היום עתיד לזוע שלש זועות בעולם, וחמה וכל המזלות מתקבצים למקום אחד בסוף מלכות רביעית. וכל האמות יבהלו שמה ואין שלום – אמר יי – לבני ישמעאל ולחוטאי ישראל העושים ובוזים זה את זה וחוטאים איש בית רעהו,
49-50. On the ninth [of Nissan] the king of Ishmael went out and kept the entire world without food and he approached the holy mountain to burn it, and this is the horn that Daniel [8:9] saw.	49-50: בתשעה (בניסן) יצא מלך ישמעאל וישאיר את כל העולם בלי מזון ויבא אל הר צבי קדש לשרפו, וזהו קרן שראה דניאל (ח' ט').
53-54. On the twenty- eighth of Elul, Messiah went out of the mountains of the world , Yinon is his name, to conduct war with the Ishmaelites . At the same hour, Gabriel went out with him to annihilate the enemy.	53-54: בעשרים ושמונה באלול יצא משיח מהררי עולם, ינון שמו, ויעשה מלחמה עם הישמעאליים. באותה שעה יצא גבריאל עמו וישחית את האויב.

⁷¹ EVEN-SHMUEL, *Midreshey Ge'ulah*, 49-54.

⁷² Motifs such as thin legs or thighs are also common to the description of the ›Lawless One‹ and to the ›Son of Perdition‹ in the Coptic *Elijah Apocalypse* (c.260-295 CE) and the Syriac *Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ*

(687-688 CE). See my study Mordechay Lewy, How to recognise an apocalyptic figure-In search of thin legged protagonists, <https://www.academia.edu/75663871> (accessed: 22.9.2023).

⁷³ English translation by the author.

Even-Shmuel remarks that the text refers to Edom, asserting that the scribe was forced to hide the original reference to Edom because of censorial constraints somewhere in Europe. The Yemenite manuscript was apparently written, however, in an unspecified Near Eastern country. Even-Shmuel did not remain faithful to the original text and moved passages of the *Perek Eliyahu* to make it consistent with the *Sefer Eliyahu*, producing what he considered a historical description of the Sassanian war with Byzantium in seventh-century Palestine. One issue remains clear: the *Perek Eliyahu* considered the kingdom of Ishmael the final, Fourth Kingdom.

A less noted similarity between the *Sefer Zerubbabel*, *Sefer Eliyahu*, and *Perek Eliyahu* apocalypses is that all remarks about Sassanian rulers (Shiroi and Kisra) are likely to be later insertions. Scribes must have felt a need to amend earlier previous texts and give them an updated look, but we are not able to determine their exact reasons for doing so. It might be suggested that such changes arose from the messianic enthusiasm that followed in the wake of the Byzantines' losing their grip on Jerusalem in 614. ♦
