The prophecy of Daniel to Athanasius

Unknown author

DATE OF BIRTH Unknown; probably mid-11th century
PLACE OF BIRTH Unknown; presumably Egypt
DATE OF DEATH Unknown; late 11th to early 12th century
PLACE OF DEATH Unknown; presumably Egypt

BIOGRAPHY

Nothing is known of the author of this pseudonymous apocalyptic text beyond what can be gathered from the text itself: that the author was a Christian, probably a monk, active in the late 11th and early 12th centuries, perhaps in the area called 'the island of Niqiyūs' (*jazīra Banī Naṣr*), in the western Nile Delta.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary —

Secondary —

WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Khabar Dāniyāl al-nabī, lammā aẓharahū li-abīnā Athanāsiyūs baṭriyark al-Iskandariyya, 'The message of Daniel the prophet, when he revealed it to our father Athanasius, patriarch of Alexandria' (in MS Sinai, Monastery of St Catherine – Ar. 495); *Maymar li-l-qiddīs Athanāsiūs al-baṭriyark, wa-mimmā aʿlamahū bihi Dāniyāl al-nabī fī l-manām*, 'The homily of St Athanasius the patriarch and what the prophet Daniel let him know in a dream' (in MS Paris, BNF – Ar. 153); 'The prophecy of Daniel to Athanasius', 'The second (Arabic) apocalypse of Athanasius', 'PA ar. II', 'ApocAth II'

DATE 1095-1101
ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Arabic

DESCRIPTION
This historical apocalypse is only partially edited and is still little known among scholars. The extant manuscripts give evidence of two different recensions: a long one, consisting of a miracle story followed by an apocalyptic prophecy, and a short one, which only has the second part. Clearly, the latter depends on the former, since it briefly summarizes the miracle story in its extended title. Otherwise, no significant differences occur.

The miracle story has as its protagonist Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373), and it contains a fictitious account of the famous conspiracy that accused him of having murdered one Arsenius, bishop of Hypsele (see the selection of sources in Martinez, *Eastern Christian apocalyptic*, pp. 557-58). In this particular version (which speaks of an unnamed deacon rather than a bishop and changes many other details of the incident), Athanasius manages to get himself exonerated because the alleged murder victim is transported on a cloud, alive and well, from Alexandria to the imperial court at Constantinople where Athanasius stands trial! The emperor, seeing the deacon, is convinced that the accusations against Bishop Athanasius are false.

The story may be interpreted as a long narrative introduction to the prophetic part of the apocalypse, which consists of a series of revelations made by the prophet Daniel to Athanasius, when the latter was in hiding from his enemies and contemplating the future state of the Church. These revelations may be divided into three parts.

The first part consists of prophecies *ex eventu* about a succession of Eastern Roman emperors and the beginning of Arab rule over Egypt. The emperors whose reigns are briefly described are not listed by name, but they are quite easily identifiable. Modelled after Daniel 7, the part begins with a series of ten rulers, from Constantius II (d. 361) to Theodosius II (d. 450), followed by an eleventh, Marcian ('the smaller horn', r. 450-57); then a jump is made to Heraclius (r. 610-41). After some allusions to Cyrus al-Muqawqis ('a dissenting man') and his rule in Egypt (631-42), the text describes the arrival of the Arabs, sent by God in response to 'the clamoring of the saints'. While the new rulers, characterized as 'wearing mourning garments' and being 'burnt of the flesh' (var. 'circumcised of the flesh') love 'gold, silver, women, horses, and pleasures of the body', they also 'inform themselves about the faith of the people of the country, and they do not forbid them their

worship'. Earlier on, in the prophecy on Emperor Marcian, an allusion is made to Muḥammad, for the reason that both their names would add up to 666 (the number of the beast, cf. Rev. 13:18); Muḥammad is also characterized as a lawgiver (*ṣāḥib sharīʿatihim*).

The second part of the revelations opens with the prediction that 19 kings shall come forth from the Arabs, which is followed by a long prophecy on the 18th of them. This king is doubtless the Fatimid Caliph al-Mustanṣir (r. 1036-94), and the text alludes to some of the most important events of his later reign, starting with the revolt of Nāṣir al-Dawla ibn Ḥamdān and his Lawāta Berber allies, and the Great Crisis of 1065-72. Particularly detailed attention is given to the Armenian vizier Badr al-Jamālī (the 'great commander', *amīr kabīr*, r. 1074-94), whose 'thoughts are the thoughts of kings; yet he will have a king who has authority over him'. After allusions to his and al-Mustanṣir's deaths in 1094, to his son al-Afḍal Shāhanshāh, vizier himself until his death in 1121, and to the struggle for power between al-Mustanṣir's sons Nizār and Mustaʿlī, the prophecies *ex eventu* conclude with a brief general description of Muslim rule.

The eschatological third part of the revelations consists largely of a version of the legend of the last Roman emperor. After 'the Children of Hagar' have destroyed themselves at the Euphrates, the king of the Romans (*al-rūm*), called 'lion cub' and 'Constantine', and, on one occasion, identified as 'the king of the Franks (*al-ifranj*)', meets with the king of Ethiopia (initially accompanied by the king of the Nubians) in Miṣr, where a divine ordeal is to determine who stands for the True Faith. The miaphysite faith triumphs, and the two kings travel to Jerusalem where the Roman emperor is crowned with the 'crown from heaven'. The tenth Roman king after him will return the crown to God, after which his successor will conspire with the Antichrist. The work ends with a quite original version of the Antichrist legend and a description of the Last Judgment.

Since the *Prophecy of Daniel* speaks of 19 kings and is clearly referring to the Caliph al-Mustanṣir when describing the rule of the 18th king, one would expect that the text was composed during the reign of al-Mustanṣir's son and successor al-Mustaʿlī (r. 1094-1101), and indeed, such a date finds confirmation in other details from the prophecies *ex eventu*. The last historical allusion that can be identified with any certainty is the one pointing to the revolt, and subsequent defeat, of al-Mustanṣir's other son Nizār in 1095. In addition, in the brief passage alluding to al-Afḍal ibn Badr, it is said that this vizier will rule two years and some days (*sanatayn wa-ayyām*), which,

if taken literally and counting from his father's death in April 1094, brings us towards the middle to second part of 1096. The text may thus have served to explain the turbulent events of the later 11th century, to predict their outcome, and to provide hope to Copts under Muslim rule.

A few details in the text could be used in support of a later date, but the present author is inclined to interpret them as 'genuine' prophecies or as later additions. The most remarkable point at issue is a brief passage that tells how the king of the Franks will go to Constantinople and conquer the city before travelling to Jerusalem and meeting with the king of the Ethiopians. This could well be a reference to the fall of Constantinople in 1204; on the other hand, apart from the possibility that the passage was added later – which applies in any event to the designation 'king of the Franks', which occurs just once, in place of 'king of the Romans' – the notion reported here is well-known from a number of Greek and Syriac apocalyptic texts that antedate the Crusaders' sack of Constantinople, and therefore the passage may not have anything to do with that event.

Support for the date proposed is also found in the mention of 'the island known as Nikiyūs' as the only place in Egypt where the king of Ethiopia still finds life after the destruction of the peoples at the Euphrates. This area stretching eastward from the Rosetta branch of the Nile may still have had some cultural importance at the end of the 11th century: the Syrian priest and recluse Samuel bar Cyriacus – copyist and one-time candidate for the position of Coptic patriarch – lived there in that period, in a small town called Azarī, which slightly later also became an abode for Patriarch Macarius III (r. 1102-25). Afterwards, however, it seems to have gone into rapid decline (on 'the island of Niqiyūs' and Samuel, see Coquin and Martin, 'Azarī'). The particular attention the text gives to this place could indicate that the work was actually composed there, especially if the presence of an important Syrian monk might explain the great influence of Syrian and Greek apocalyptic traditions on the *Prophecy*. At the same time, more evidence is needed to substantiate any such theories on its place of composition and authorship.

The *Prophecy of Daniel* is a composite work, and it is likely that the author borrowed entire sections of text from older sources. This is quite possible, for instance, for the miracle story and the prophecies concerning the Eastern Roman emperors, although so far we do not have texts that match them. The apocalypse contains many motifs that occur in other Coptic apocalyptic texts. Examples include

the motif of the 19 Muslim kings (*Proto-fourteenth vision of Daniel*, *Fourteenth vision of Daniel* [q.v.]) and the episode on the kings of the Romans and the Ethiopians and their dispute over the true Orthodox faith (*Letter of Pisentius* [q.v.]). In addition, the text was influenced, either directly or indirectly (or both), by the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* and the *Edessene Apocalypse* (see Martinez, 'King of Rūm'), particularly in the eschatological part, while it also has affinity with medieval Greek Danielic prophecies and Syriac apocalyptic texts such as the *Baḥīrā* apocalypse and the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Ezra* – in its use of the lion cub motif, for example. It has even been claimed that the text 'represents the definitive introduction in Egypt of a foreign style in apocalyptic, much closer to Syriac models and conceptions than to the older Egyptian apocalyptic tradition' (Martinez, 'King of Rūm', p. 257). At the same time, the *Prophecy of Daniel to Athanasius* appears closest to the *Copto-Arabic Sibylline prophecy* (q.v) and the *Apocalypse of Peter* (q.v), which may be roughly contemporary and relate to same historical events.

From its section on the destruction of the Muslims onwards, the contents of the text are very similar to the eschatological part of an Arabic *Testament of our Lord* (ed. Ziadé, 'Testament'). It has been suggested that the former was copied from the latter (Troupeau, Suermann), but this is unlikely as the *Testament* is most certainly the more recent, dating from the 14th century. Therefore, it is rather the other way around, or the two texts both borrowed their eschatological part from a common *Vorlage*.

SIGNIFICANCE

The *Prophecy of Daniel to Athanasius* provides evidence of a desire for order and of a heightened interest in history among Copts in response to the tumultuous events of the late 11th century. It is written against the background of a progressive acculturation of Copts into the dominant Muslim culture, which may have caused the need for an assertion, or re-assertion, of positions.

Thanks to its reflection on the meaning and outcome of history, the *Prophecy* gives an interesting insight into the world view of Egyptian Christians of the period: one in which, for example, the Muslim Arabs had liberated the Egyptian miaphysites from oppression, treated them well (at least initially), and, overall, are less intrinsically evil than they are portrayed in other Coptic and Copto-Arabic apocalypses. This world view also includes a strong longing for Christian unity, if only

out of necessity – and thus, while the miaphysite faith will ultimately triumph, the champions of the Christian faith in this text include not only Athanasius, but also several past Eastern Roman kings, future kings of the Romans, the Franks, the Ethiopians, the Nubians, and seemingly even the vizier Badr al-Jamālī, a Muslim Armenian. The *Prophecy of Athanasius*, then, may prove significant in any future debate on the development of Coptic identity in the Middle Ages.

The ecumenical spirit perceived in this text is also reflected in its wide variety of sources: it seems to represent the perfect blend of Coptic with Greek and Syrian apocalyptic traditions.

The prophecies *ex eventu* are rather explicit and unstereotypical compared with those commonly found in historical apocalypses – especially when referring to the more recent history of al-Mustanṣir's reign – thus enhancing the historical value of the text. The text is an early example, in this regard, of a new trend in the Copts' apocalyptic tradition, witnessed also in the *Prophecies and exhortations of Shenute* and the above-mentioned *Testament of our Lord*, both from the Mamlūk period.

MANUSCRIPTS

Long recension:

- MS Sinai, Monastery of St Catherine – Ar. 448, fols 212r-219r (c. 13th century)
- MS Vat – Ar. 158, fols 99v-111v (1356)
- MS Cairo, Franciscan Center of Christian Oriental Studies, Muski – 150, fols 148r-151v, 158r-159v (18th century)
- MS Monastery of St Anthony – Hist. 186, fols 11v-19v (19th century)
- MS Monastery of St Macarius – Hag. 32 (Zanetti 398), fols 20v-37v (19th century)

Short recension:

- MS Paris, BNF – Ar. 153, fols 461v-469v (17th century)
- MS Monastery of St Macarius – Hag. 44 (Zanetti 410), fols 170v-178r (1735)
- MS Monastery of St Macarius – Comm. 23 (Zanetti 318), 2nd MS of the two bound together, fols 16r-22v (19th century)

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Rifʿat Fatḥī Rūmān, *Khabar Dānīyāl al-nabī al-mansūb li-l-qiddīs Athanāsiyūs. Muqaddima wa-taḥqīq*, Cairo, 1995 (BTh thesis, Evangelical Theological Seminary), pp. 5-13 (critical edition)

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H. Möhring, *Der Weltkaiser der Endzeit. Entstehung, Wandel und Wirkung einer tausendjährigen Weissagung*, Stuttgart, 2000, p. 186

Monferrer Sala, 'Literatura apocalíptica cristiana en árabe', pp. 239-46

Rifʿat Fatḥī Rūmān, *Khabar Dānīyāl*

G. Troupeau, 'De quelques apocalypses conservées dans les manuscrits arabes de Paris', *Pd'O* 18 (1993) 75-87, pp. 77-79

R.-G. Coquin and M. Martin, art. 'Azarī', in *CE*

F.J. Martinez, 'The king of Rūm and the king of Ethiopia in medieval apocalyptic texts from Egypt', in W. Godlewski (ed.), *Acts of the third international congress of Coptic studies, Warsaw 1984*, Warsaw, 1990, 247-59, pp. 251-52, 255-57

F.J. Martinez, *Eastern Christian apocalyptic in the early Muslim period. Pseudo-Methodius and Pseudo-Athanasius*, Washington DC, 1985 (Diss. Catholic University of America), pp. 557-58

Graf, *GCAL* i, p. 277

J. Ziadé, 'Un testament de N.-S. concernant les invasions des Mongols', *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 21 (1918-19) 261-73, 433-44

Jos van Lent