

The fourteenth vision of Daniel

Unknown author

DATE OF BIRTH Unknown; probably 12th century
PLACE OF BIRTH Unknown; presumably Egypt
DATE OF DEATH Unknown; probably late 12th or early
13th century
PLACE OF DEATH Unknown; presumably Egypt

BIOGRAPHY

Nothing is known of the redactor of this pseudonymous apocalyptic text beyond what can be gathered from the text itself: that the author was a Copt, probably a monk, who, sometime after the fall of the Fatimid dynasty, perhaps in the 1170s, ‘updated’ an older apocalyptic text in order to take account of recent Egyptian history.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary —

Secondary —

WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Tihorasis mmah IΔ / Al-ru'yā l-rābi'a āshara,
‘The fourteenth vision’, ‘The fourteenth vision of
Daniel’, ‘14Dan’, ‘14th Vision’

DATE Probably late 12th century, perhaps in the 1170s

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Bohairic Coptic

DESCRIPTION

The *Fourteenth vision of Daniel* is a short historical apocalypse added, in several bilingual Copto-Arabic manuscripts, to the biblical Book of Daniel, which in the Coptic miaphysite tradition usually comprises 13 chapters. Most witnesses give a Bohairic Coptic and an Arabic text in parallel columns. It has been thought that the extant Coptic text is a translation from the Arabic, but the manuscript note cited in support

of this view (Becker, 'Reich', pp. 29-34; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 289) pertains only to the first two verses of Daniel 1. Moreover, an analysis of the language of both the Bohairic and the Arabic texts strongly suggests that the former is the more original and was the direct *Vorlage* of the Arabic.

The *Fourteenth vision* is modelled after Daniel 7. It first recounts the vision of the four beasts (Dan 7:2-8), with the difference that the last beast is given 19 instead of ten horns. Next, an angel appears in order to explain the meaning of the vision. The four beasts represent the kingdoms of the Persians, the Romans, the 'Hellenes' (Byzantines), and the 'Sons of Ishmael', while the 19 horns of the fourth beast symbolize 19 Ishmaelite kings. This interpretation is followed by brief descriptions of the reigns of the 10th to the 19th kings, which take up the greater part of the work. The last king will be killed by another, called 'the Turk' (*pitourgos /al-turki*), after which, at the end of time, a last Roman emperor will free Egypt from Muslim dominion.

The work contains many but often vague historical allusions, which has given rise to scholarly debate on the identity of the kings it refers to and on its date of composition. Thus, the prophecy has been dated to shortly after the fall of the Umayyad dynasty (Becker), the early Ayyūbid period (Macler, Meinardus in 'New evidence'), and, more recently, the late 11th century (Hoyland). The present writer inclines to the theory that the present form of the *Fourteenth vision* in fact represents a reworking, probably from the late 12th or early 13th century, of a now lost mid-8th century Danielic apocalypse (Meinardus in 'Commentary', Suermann, van Lent), called *The Proto-fourteenth vision of Daniel* in *CMR* 1, pp. 309-13.

While there are certainly grounds for skepticism about attempts to date the work precisely (Hoyland, DiTomasso), evidence for the scenario just described is provided by a recently published witness to yet another recension, most likely produced during the reign of the Caliph al-Amīn (809-13) (van Lent, 'The Prophecy of the nineteen Muslim kings', *CMR* 1, pp. 411-13). A comparison between this source and the *Fourteenth vision*, backed up by historical analysis, suggests that the second is the product of a redactor who revised the early Abbasid *Proto-fourteenth vision* in order to make its prophecies (which originally dealt mainly with the Umayyads) fit better with the Fatimid dynasty. For example, it appears that the original prophecy contained descriptions of the 11th to 19th kings rather than starting with the 10th, but that a description of another king (the third) was

then added in order to conform their total to the number of Fatimid caliphs that actually ruled over, and from, Egypt. The redactor is also likely to have reversed the order of the first two descriptions, so that their contents came to reflect the reputations of the first Egyptian Fatimid, al-ʿAzīz (r. 975-96), and the second, al-Ḥākīm (r. 996-1021), respectively – the former generally judged good and the latter bad by Copts and Muslims alike. In addition, he may also have added some (but not all; *pace* Suermann) of the passages that involve the ‘Ethiopians’.

One of the possible dates of composition of the recension is the late 11th century, in which case one would want to identify ‘the Turk’ with the Seljuks who threatened Egypt in that period (Hoyland). It is perhaps more likely, however, that it was produced after the fall of the Fatimid dynasty. The name Pitourgōs may well refer to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī (d. 1193) or to the Ayyūbids in general (cf., e.g., the Coptic inscription in U. Bouriant, ‘Petite inscription historique en dialecte thébain’, *Receuil de travaux relatifs à la philologie et à l’archéologie égyptiennes* 7 (1886) 218). Instead, ‘the battle in Shmoun [Arabic *Ashmūn*]’ between Pitourgōs and the 19th king could be taken as a reference to the battle in 1167 at al-Bābayn, near al-Ashmūnayn in Middle Egypt, between the combined Frankish-Egyptian forces of the Fatimid vizier Shāwar and the Syrian army of the Kurdish general Shīrkūh – even if only in a ‘recycled’ way: the passage perhaps already formed part of the *Proto-fourteenth vision*, where it may have alluded to the battle in 750 at nearby Būṣīr in which the last Umayyad caliph, Marwān II, was killed by an Abbasid force. If the Danielic prophecy of ten rulers cited by the biographer of Patriarchs Mark III (1166-89) and John VI (1189-1216), and applied by him to the Fatimids, refers to this particular recension, we have a *terminus ante quem* of 1207, which is when the biographer completed his work (see Meinardus, ‘New evidence’, pp. 282-85, with a translation of the relevant passage). However, since its focal point seems to be the fall of the Fatimid dynasty and the rise of the Ayyūbids, the recension was probably produced decades earlier. Some passages on the ‘Ethiopians’, which may well have been added as part of the early Ayyūbid redaction, suggest a date during or shortly after the Nubian campaign of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s brother Tūrānshāh in 1172-73.

The second part of the 12th century seems late for a text written in Coptic, but much less so if the extant *Fourteenth vision* is indeed a reworking of an earlier Coptic original (*pace* Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*,

p. 290). In addition, if it was written to form part of the biblical Book of Daniel from the start, this too may have influenced the language choice; however, it is difficult to determine whether this was indeed the case or whether the prophecy once existed independently.

Little is known about the Coptic redactor, and the argument that he and the above-mentioned anonymous biographer of Mark III and John VI are one and the same person (Meinardus, 'New evidence', p. 283) lacks real basis. In any event, his aim was probably to explain the course of history and to provide hope to Christians under Muslim rule; certainly, the decision to use a centuries-old prophecy was motivated by the parallels he saw between its contents and Fatimid and early Ayyūbid history – notably the fact that starting with the Imam Ismā'il, and following the traditional genealogy, the Fatimids indeed counted 19 'rulers' (five hidden imams, then four caliphs from Ifrīqiya, then ten from Egypt). It has been proposed that the text also served to entertain as much as to edify (van Lent, 'Nineteen Muslim kings', p. 671).

SIGNIFICANCE

The prophecy provides a unique example of a medieval apocryphal text included in Egyptian Christian biblical manuscripts, and is an important source for the reconstruction of the early Abbasid *Proto-fourteenth vision of Daniel*. While the *Fourteenth vision of Daniel* does not contain any detailed description of Christian-Muslim relations, it provides evidence for a heightened interest in the meaning and outcome of history among Egyptian Christians in the period after the fall of the Fatimid dynasty. In addition, the fact that it is probably a redaction of a much older piece of popular Coptic literature suggests that such texts continued to be studied and to enjoy a certain prestige at least into the 12th and 13th centuries. At the same time, it may have been among the last examples of the use of Coptic as a literary language.

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