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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 2)*

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 22 Hebrew texts with translations that refer to Daniel's scheme of the four kingdoms. This scheme sees the fourth as evil, which also heralds the end of the world. Jewish authors considered it canonical and had to update their understanding of the fourth kingdom due to political circumstances. This study covers the first half of the 7th century, which saw major power struggles between Byzantium, Persia and the emerging Islam. The powerless Jewish population in Palestine hoped for the defeat of Byzantium and initially welcomed their new rulers, who fuelled Jewish hopes for imminent redemption. After the establishment of harsh Islamic rule, Jewish authors viewed Muslim rule as an evil kingdom. This study sheds light on a lesser-known chapter in Jewish attitudes toward Eastern Christianity, Zoroastrian Persia, and Islam.

Keywords

→ Daniel
→ canonization
→ Four Kingdoms
→ Evil Kingdom

Zusammenfassung

Das Ziel dieser Studie ist es, 22 hebräische Texte mit Übersetzung vorzustellen, die sich auf das Danielische Schema der vier Königreiche beziehen. Dieses Schema sieht, das Vierte als böse vor, die auch das Weltende einläutet. Jüdische Autoren hielten es als kanonisch und mussten ihr Verständnis des vierten Reiches wegen politischen Umständen aktualisieren. Diese Studie behandelt die erste Hälfte des 7. Jahrhunderts, in der es zu großen Machtkämpfen zwischen Byzanz, Persien und dem aufstrebenden Islam kam. Die machtlose jüdische Bevölkerung in Palästina hoffte auf die Niederlage von Byzanz und begrüßte zunächst ihre neuen Herren, die die jüdischen Hoffnungen auf die bevorstehende Erlösung schürten. Nach der Etablierung der harten islamischen Herrschaft betrachteten jüdische Autoren die muslimische Herrschaft als böses Königreich. Diese Studie beleuchtet ein weniger bekanntes Kapitel der jüdischen Haltung gegenüber dem östlichen Christentum, dem zoroastrischen Persien und dem Islam.

Schlüsselbegriffe

→ Daniel
→ Heiligsprechung
→ Vier Königreiche
→ böses Königreich

Sumario

El objetivo de este estudio es presentar 22 textos hebreos con traducciones que hacen referencia al esquema de Daniel sobre los cuatro reinos. Este esquema considera que el cuarto es maligno y que también anuncia el fin del mundo. Los autores judíos lo consideraban canónico y tuvieron que actualizar su comprensión del cuarto reino debido a las circunstancias políticas. Este estudio abarca la primera mitad del siglo VII, que fue testigo de importantes luchas de poder entre Bizancio, Persia y el Islam emergente. La población judía indefensa de Palestina esperaba la derrota de Bizancio y, en un principio, acogió con satisfacción a sus nuevos gobernantes, que alimentaron las esperanzas judías de una redención inminente. Tras el establecimiento de un duro régimen islámico, los autores judíos consideraron el dominio musulmán como un reino maligno. Este estudio arroja luz sobre un capítulo poco conocido de la actitud de los judíos hacia el cristianismo oriental, la Persia zoroástrica y el islam.

Palabras clave

→ Daniel
→ canonización
→ cuatro reinos
→ reino maligno

Ishmael's Appearances in *Piyyutim* within the Scheme of the Four Kingdoms.

The *Piyyut* ›Oto hayom‹ (›That very day‹)

Himmelfarb has drawn attention to the relationship between the *Sefer Zerubbabel* and the *piyyut* ›Oto hayom‹. The vision of the son of Shealtiel (i.e., Zerubbabel) and the motif of the staff of Hefzibah cover lines 32-93, the end of the *piyyut*, but this part is not relevant to the the scheme of Four Kingdoms. Despite similarities in the narrative, a direct correlation between the *Sefer Zerubbabel* and the *piyyut* ›Oto hayom‹ cannot be confirmed. What distinguishes them, according to Himmelfarb, is not that the *Sefer Zerubbabel* does not mention Islam (leaving aside the enigmatic Qedem and Qedar), but that the *Sefer Zerubbabel* is marked by a more biblically oriented style, adopted to imitate prophetic rhetoric. In ›Oto hayom‹ however, emergent Islam is mentioned, with the king of Yoktan invading the land of Israel during the ongoing Byzantine-Sassanian war; in addition, its style is more rabbinically oriented.¹ Yahalom has collated a complete edition of ›Oto hayom‹ from six manuscripts² and argued that the *piyyut* is older than the *Sefer Zerubbabel*.³ While Reeves does not exclude this possibility and remains undecided, Stemmerger considers the *piyyut* to be more recent than the *Sefer Zerubbabel*. Hoyland took it up as an early witness for the presence of Muslim troops in Palestine, but remained sceptical about attributing the historical content of the poem to the seventh century; this scepticism was shared by Moshe Gil.⁴

In ›Oto hayom‹, lines 1-17 are devoted to a description of the apocalyptic war; according to Yahalom, this passage may have been composed between the first appearance of Arab troops in Palestine in 634 and before their conquest of Jerusalem in 638. The poet wrote it to be recited on the Ninth of Av, the day of mourning, on which the praying community in the synagogue not only mourns but hopes for the redemption of the Jewish nation.⁵

›That very day‹⁶

1. That very day, when Messiah son of David may come to the oppressed people,
2. those signs will be visible all over the world,
3. earth and heaven will wither,
4. the residents of the land will be silenced,
5. the king of the West and the king of the East will grind each other,
6. and the armies of the king of the West will be strengthened.⁷
7. From the land of Yoktan⁸ a king will depart, and his troops will seize the land.
8. The entire world's residents will be maimed,
9. clouds will empty ashes on earth,
10. wind on earth will be generated,
11. Gog and Magog will beat each other,
12. anxiety will be in the heart of Goyim.
13. Israel will be purified from all its sins,
14. they will not be removed from the prayer house anymore.⁹
15. Blessings and consolations will be theirs(?),
16. in the Book of Life they will be inscribed.
17. The kings from the land of Edom will be finished.

אותו היום, שורות

1. אותו היום אשר יבוא משיח בן דוד אל עם אשר נדחק
2. תיראנה האותות האלה בעולם ויופקו
3. ארקה ודוק ימקו
4. ויושבי הארץ ישתוקו
5. ומלך מערב עם מלך מזרח זה לזה ידיקו
6. ומלך מערב (חיי)לוחיו ב(ארץ יתחזקו)
7. ומארץ יקטן יצא מלך ומחנותיו (בארץ) יחוזקו
8. ויושבי תיבל כולם ידוקדקו
9. ושחקים על חלד עפר יריקו
10. ורוחות בארץ יופקו
11. וגוג ומגוג איש את אחיו ידפקו
12. ואימה בלב הגוים ידליקו
13. וישראל מכל פשעיהם יתנקו
14. ומבית התפילה עוד לא יורחקו
15. ברכות ונחמות להם יורקו(?)
16. ו(בס)פר החיים יוחקו
17. (ומלכים מארץ) אדום יתמו

Most historians consider that the *piyyut* 'Time to rebuke' reflects events between 614 and 629; 'That very day' seems to be consistent with historical events around the struggle between the three big powers in Palestine between 634 and 638. The king of the West is Heracles; the king of the East is the Sassanian ruler; and the king from the Arabian Peninsula (Yoktan) is the leader of the invading Arab troops. The eschatological hope that Jews will no longer be barred from their temple goes hand in hand with the hope that the kings of the West (> Edom > Heracles) will vanish. This narrative does not necessarily mean that the *piyyut* was composed during the events in question.

The Second Recension of the *Midrash Lamentations (Eikha) Rabbah*

In the Salomon Buber edition of the anonymous *Midrash Lamentations (Eikha) Rabbah*, which is based mainly on a manuscript J.I.4 in the Bibliotheca Casanatense in Rome, the number of kingdoms is doubled to eight. In chronological order these are: Babylonia and Chaldea; Media and Persia; Greece and Macedonia; and Edom and Se'ir (i.e., the Western and Eastern Roman empire).¹⁰ In addition, the author wove the eight kingdoms into a web that makes it difficult to interpret the qualities of each kingdom, which alternate between harsh and moderate. What concerns us here is the fact that this second recension of the *midrash* has Edom and Ishmael (אֶדוֹם וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל) as the last pair. This change could be attributed to the emergence of Islam, which is why the founder of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Leopold Zunz (1794-1886), dated this recension to the seventh century (the first recension is dated to around the fifth century). The second recension of *Midrash Lamentations Rabbah* is found in the Codex Hebraica 229 in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich, which is dated 1295.¹¹ The earliest printed version appeared in Pesaro in 1519 and was often adopted in later reprints with other *Megillot*,¹² including the famous Wilna edition of 1887. Zunz's suggestion was much opposed by rabbinic scholars, who claimed that Ishmael is mentioned often in the Jerusalem Talmud and Palestinian *midrashim* long before the appearance of Islam. Despite their claim, one should bear in mind that none of these sources mentions Ishmael in the context of the Four Kingdoms. Zunz was right: the pair Edom and Seir precedes the pair Edom and Ishmael.

* A digital version of the article can be found at: <https://www.ctsi.uni-bonn.de/zmr/aktuelle-ausgaben/zmr-109-2025-3-4>.

1 MARTHA HIMMELFARB, *Jewish Messiahs in a Christian Empire. A History of the Book of Zerubbabel*, Cambridge, MA 2017, 52.

2 JOSEPH YAHALOM published the Hebrew text of 'Oto hayom' in *On the Validity of Literary Works as Historical Sources*, in: *Cathedra*, 11 (April 1979) 125-133, here 130-133.

3 *Ibid.*, 128.

4 JOHN C. REEVES, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic. A Postbiblical Jewish Apocalypse Reader*, Atlanta, GE, 2005, 48f; GÜNTER STEMBERGER, *Jerusalem in the Early Seventh Century*, in: ISRAEL LEE LEVINE (ed.), *Jerusalem. Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, New York 1999, 270; ROBERT G. HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, Princeton, NJ 2001, 319f; and MOSHE GIL, *A History of Palestine 634-1099*, Cambridge 1992, 63 n. 65.

5 YAHALOM, *On the Validity of Literary Works*, 130-133.

6 English translation by the author. Yahalom's edition of the text has not yet been translated; HOYLAND (*Seeing Islam*) offers only a few verses.

7 This may refer to the victory of Heraclius over the Sassanians and his conquest of Jerusalem in 629/30.

8 In the Arab tradition, Yoktan bears the name 'Kathan'; he was the patriarch of all the tribes of southern Arabia before they united with the Ishmaelite tribes of northern Arabia. See *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 7, New York 1906, 225.

Second recension of the *Midrash Lamentations Rabbah*, 1:42¹³

(גרסה שנייה).

He [the Almighty] brought them upon me in pairs:
Babylon and the Chaldeans, Media and Persia,

הביא אותן עלי מקבילות
בבל ונכשדים, מדי ופרס

Greece and Macedonia, Edom and Ishmael.

יוון ומקדון, אדום וישמעאל,

He brought them upon me, alternating:

עשאן עלי סריגות,

Babylon was harsh, Media was moderate;

בבל קשה ומדי מתונה

Greece was harsh, Edom was moderate;

יוון קשה ואדום מתונה

the Chaldeans were harsh, Persia was moderate;

כשדים קשה ופרס מתונה

Macedonia was harsh, and Ishmael was moderate.

מקדון קשה וישמעאל מתונה

Likewise, ›some of the kingdom will be strong, and some of it will be brittle‹ [Dan. 2:42].

וכן (דניאל ב, מב): מן קצת מלכותא תהנה
מקיפה ומנה תהנה תבירה,

The pattern of doubling the number of kingdoms to eight found followers in second half of the eighth century, in the Palestinian poet Pinhas Hakohen of Kafra,¹⁴ and later in the Babylonian sage R. Sa'adia Ga'on (also known as Rasag, 892-942).¹⁵ Once the Danielic scheme became open to changes, it could be updated and react to further political constellations and upheavals.

The *Piyyut* ›Kedushata for shabbat shim'u‹ by Jochanan ben Joshua Hakohen

Yahalom assumed that the liturgical poet Jochanan ben Joshua Hakohen lived in the second half of the seventh century and most probably experienced the emergence of Islam. In mentioning two entities as the Fourth Kingdom, it is unlikely that Hakohen remained with the previous understanding of them as the Western and Eastern Roman empires: he meant the kingdom of Edom and Ishmael (אדום וישמעאל), which were common synonyms for the Byzantine empire and Islam. One might point out that Edom and Ishmael are mentioned together in Psalms 83:7 (›the clans of Edom and the Ishmaelites‹); as such they constitute a generic trope in the list of the biblical enemies of Israel and could be seen as a ready-made rhetorical device independent of the emergence of Islam. But Hakohen left clearer evidence of his intentions when he prayed for Islam to overthrow the Byzantine Eastern Roman rule. In his liturgical poem ›Kedushata for shabbat shim'u‹ (קדושתא לשבת שמעו) he asks the Almighty to accomplish the following.¹⁶

⁹ This could refer to Jewish hopes that Muslims would allow Jews (to continue?) to perform their cult on the Temple Esplanade.

¹⁰ SALOMON BUBER, *Midrasch Echa Rabbati*. Sammlung agadischer Auslegungen der Klagelieder, Wilna 1899, 77. A note at the end of the manuscript records that it was purchased in 1378.

¹¹ GÜNTHER STEMMEBERGER, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch*, München 1920, 317.

¹² The Five Scrolls are the Song of Songs, the Book of Ruth, the Book of Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and the Book of Esther. These five short bibli-

cal books are grouped together in Jewish tradition in the third part of the Tanakh, the Ktuvim.

¹³ The text is found in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. Hebr 229, fol. 49b, and is reproduced at https://www.sefaria.org/Eikhah_Rabbah.1.42?lang=bi&with=About&lang2=en (accessed: 1.8.2023).

¹⁴ MENAHEM ZULAY, *Eine Hanukka Kerova von Pinhas Hakohen*, in: *Mitteilungen des Forschungsinstituts für Hebräische Dichtung* 1, Berlin 1933, 150-174.

¹⁵ YERUHAM FISCHL (ed.), *Sa'adia Ga'on. Sefer ha-emunot ve-ha-de'ot. Ma'amar Hashmini Ge'ula Aharoni* [Eighth Essay on final Redemption], Leipzig 1859, 152-157 (Hebrew translation by Ibn Tibbon).

¹⁶ JOSEPH YAHALOM, *The Transition of Kingdoms in Eretz Israel (Palestine) as Conceived by Poets and Homilists*, in: *Shalem*, 6 (1992) 1-22 (Hebrew), 6. Translation taken from 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, 110.

Jochanan Hakohen. »Kedushata for shabbat shim'u«

Dispossess the mountain of Seir¹⁷ and Edom,
 speak to Assur – he must make haste and hurry,
 to plough down a godless nation by your mighty sceptre,
 to tread them down by the kingdom of the wild ass.¹⁸

קדושתא לשבת שמעו

הר שעיר ואדום שים ירישה
 דבר לאשור ימהר ויחשה
 גוי חנף במטה עוזך לחרושה
 במלכות פרא לדושה

The verse »Speak to Assur [Assyria]« serves to highlight how difficult it is to interpret this enigmatic text. What is meant by Assur? Could it be the Sassanids, who are not mentioned by name in the context of the Four Kingdoms? The *paytanim* sometimes chose biblical terms with dual meanings. The term Persians would not have been available to denote Sassanians, as it was already in use for the kingdom that occupied the second or third position in the scheme. One biblical term however was available, as it had left the Four Kingdoms centuries previously: the Assyrians or Assur (אשור/אשורים). At this period, in the Babylonian Talmud and in *piyyutim*, the term usually signified ancient Babylonia, but Ezra Fleischer has argued that in the context of the Four Kingdoms, it could, very rarely, signify the Sassanid kingdom. He compares this *piyyut* with the earlier *piyyut* »Time to rebuke« (by another poet), in which Assur could be identified with the Sassanid empire. The latter *piyyut* was composed before the Arab invasion of Palestine in 634 CE,¹⁹ and Hakohen most probably composed his »Kedushata« in the transition period between 633 CE and the final Muslim conquest in 638 CE. Yahalom attributes allegorical meaning to Assur by referring to Isaiah 10:5, according to which Assur is a rod of divine wrath sent against a godless nation (גוי חנף).²⁰ According to van Bakkum, however, Assur here denotes the Arab conquerors and not Sassanians; his interpretation is based on an allegorical interpretation of Hosea 8:9 (»They have gone up to Assyria like a wild ass wandering alone«); this precedes the verse referring to the kingdom of the wild ass, which is clearly the kingdom of Ishmael.²¹ It seems to me that van Bakkum's interpretation of Hakohen's poem is more persuasive.

The motif of the wild ass in association with Ishmael appears in eschatological texts of the seventh century, first in Jewish and later in Syrian-Christian sources. Both could be relying on a common source, namely Genesis 16:12. *Paytanim* regarded the wild ass as a symbol with biblical authority of the ferocity of the Arab forces fighting the Byzantine army. The Syrian apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius considered the destruction of the civilized world by the wild ass an unavoidable stage before the beast is defeated by Gedeon and sent to Yatrib (i.e., Medina) in the desert; the location for the final victory of a king of Greek descent was thus set. The Apocalypse (chapter 11.3) includes a sequence of kingdoms constructed as follows: »For just as they [Greeks and Romans; M.L.] themselves slew the lords of the Hebrews and of the Persians, so they also will fall at the mouth of the sword by hand of the seed of Ishmael, who has been called a wild ass,²² because in wrath and anger they will be sent over the face of the whole world against the men.«²³ This is definitely not the Danielic scheme, but with this sequence of Hebrews, Persians, and Greek and Romans, with Ishmael as the evil Fourth Kingdom, the world will be ultimately saved by a Greek/Ethiopian king. This is a distant echo of imperial Byzantine eschatological ideology.

¹⁷ Har Seir is a synonym for Edom; see Genesis 36:7-8. Har Seir in Edom was the place where Esau allegedly resided. For Hakohen, both Seir and Edom stood for the Byzantine Christian empire.

¹⁸ »Wild ass of a man« (פרא אדם) is the description of Ishmael at Genesis 16:12: »He shall be a wild ass of a man; his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him.«

¹⁹ EZRA FLEISCHER, Solving the Qirilli Riddle, in: Tarbiz, 54 (1984-1985) 385-427, 412.

²⁰ YAHALOM, The Transition of Kingdoms in Eretz Israel (Palestine), 6.

²¹ VAN BEKKUM, Jewish Messianic Expectation, 110.

²² The Greek translation is *ὄναγρος* (onagros), whence the Latin *onager*.

How Jewish Apocalyptic Texts Welcomed the Muslim Prophet

The *Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati*, which revolves around a Jewish merchant named Jacob from Carthage who converted to Christianity, dates to about 634 CE, close to the Arab invasion of Palestine. Although considered by scholars a Christian testimony, it includes the earliest non-*piyyut* witness to what Jews in Palestine thought of the prophet Mohammed. Abraham, a relative of Jacob, reports from Palestine:²⁴ ›A prophet has appeared, coming with the Saracens, and he is preaching the arrival of the anointed one who is to come, the Messiah.‹ Abraham investigates the matter further; not only does he mention the remark of a learned person (›He is false, for prophets do not come with a sword and a war chariot‹), he adds: ›I heard from those who had met him that one will find no truth in the so-called prophet, only the shedding of human blood. In fact, he says that he has the keys of paradise, which is impossible.‹ Doubting as Abraham did the veracity of the news about the prophet, it is important to note the Jewish apocalyptic notion that a prophet would be sent to announce the long-expected Messiah; this motif reappears in other Jewish texts of the seventh and eighth century.

I will concentrate here on translations of apocalyptic texts from the so-called Shim'on bar Yochai complex, as John C. Reeves has termed it.²⁵ Scholars usually approach apocalyptic text assuming that they are finished literary works. In fact, apocalyptic texts are by nature unfinished and require constant amendments and updates so that they are not rendered obsolete by predictions that go fulfilled. Any apocalyptic text serves as a point of departure for a continuous chain of transmission, which is why one finds so many different versions of apocalyptic texts among those attributed to Rashbi. The Hebrew texts here of the *Secrets of Rashbi* and the *Prayer of Rashbi* are taken from editions by Adolph Jellinek and Yehuda Even-Shmuel, who expended much philological effort in establishing the *Urtext*. Dating these texts depends, among other things, on whether any positive reference to Arabs is detected. Such a reference could indicate an older layer of the text, if one compares it with a version containing negative attitudes, which would serve as evidence for a later text. The later changes seem to rely on actual experience and not on hopeful visions.

Updating apocalyptic texts would have been easier than deleting what seem to us to be outmoded sections, and the Rashbi complex is a kind of mixed bag of amendments made by various hands on separate occasions. In the following table one can compare what I consider to be the oldest layer of the *Secrets of Rabbi Shim'on bar Yochai*, with the oldest layer of *Prayer of Rabbi Shim'on bar Yochai*, which can be conceived as a partly extended and updated continuation of the *Secrets*.

23 BENJAMIN GARSTAD (ed. and trans.), *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius. An Alexandrian World Chronicle*, Cambridge, MA, 2012, 39. The devastation caused by the wild ass is described in detail at the end of chapter 11.17 (page 47). See also GERRIT J. REININK, *Ismael, der Wild-*

esel in der Wüste. Zur Typologie der Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodios, in: *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 75 (1982) 31-45.

24 The English translation is taken from STEPHEN J. SHOEMAKER, *A Prophet Has Appeared. The Rise of Islam through Christian and Jewish Eyes*, Oakland, CA, 2021, 39f.

25 REEVES, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic*, 76.

*The Secrets of Rashbi*²⁶נסתרות של רשב"י²⁷

These are the secrets that were revealed to Rabbi Shim'on bar Yochai while he was hiding in a cave on account of Caesar, king of Edom, who forced the conversion of the Israeli people [Shmad].³⁰ And he stood in prayer for forty days and forty nights and he began thus: ›Lord God, how long will you be wrathful‹ [Psalm 80:5] toward the prayer of your servant. Immediately the secrets and hidden things of the eschaton were revealed to him. And he began to interpret [the passage] ›Then he looked on the Kenite‹³¹ [Num. 24.21]. When he understood that the kingdom of Ishmael would come upon, he began to say, ›Is it not enough, what the wicked kingdom of Edom has done to us that [we must also endure] the kingdom of Ishmael?‹ And immediately Metatron, the foremost angel, answered him and said: ›Do not be afraid, son of man, for the Holy One, blessed be He, is bringing about the kingdom of Ishmael only for the purpose of delivering you from that wicked one [i.e., Edom]. He shall raise up over them a prophet in accordance with His will, and he will subdue the land for them; and they shall come and restore it

with grandeur. Great enmity will exist between them and the children of Esau.‹ Rabbi Shim'on answered him and said: ›How will they be our salvation?‹ He said to him, ›Did not the prophet Isaiah say: ›When he sees riders, horsemen in pairs etc.‹ [Isa. 21.7]. Why did he put the chariot of an ass before the chariot of the camel, when he should have said, ›a chariot of a camel and [then] a chariot of an ass? That is because when the one who rides on the camel goes forth [to war] he has a kingdom in his hand. He said chariot of an ass [Zech 9.9] because he rides on an ass. Therefore they [the Ishmaelites] will be a redemption to Israel like the redemption of the one who rides on an ass.‹³²

אלו הן הנסתרות שנגלו לר' שמעון בן יוחי- כשהיה חבוי במערה מפני קיסר מלך אדום שהיו גוזרים שמד על ישראל ועמד בתפלה ארבעים יום וארבעים לילה והתחיל כך: ה' אלהים עד מתי עשנת בתפלת עבדך? מיד נגלו אליו סתומות הקץ והסתומות והתחיל דורש 'וירא את הקני' (במדבר כד', כא). כיון שראה מלכות ישמעאל שהיה בא התחיל לומר לא דיינו מה שעשה לנו מלכות אדום הרשעה אלא אף מלכות ישמעאל? מיד נגלה אליו מטטרון שר הפנים ואמר לו: אל תירא בן אדם. שאין הבורא ברוך הוא מביא מלכות ישמעאל אלא כדי להושיעכם מזאת הרשעה. והא מביא מלכות ישמעאל והוא מעמיד עליהם נביא ויכבוש להם כרצונו את הארץ ובארץ ישראל הם יתחזקו בגדולה ואימה גדולה תהיה בניניהם ובין בני עשו. ענה לו רבי שמעון ואמר ומניין שהם ישועה לנו? אמר לו ולא כך ישעיהו הנביא אמר וראה רכב צמד פרשים וגו'. מפני מה הוא מקדים רכב חמור רכב גמל? לא היה צריך לומר רכב גמל רכב חמור, אלא כיון שהוא יוצא רוכב על גמל צמחה מלכות בידו. הוא אמר רכב חמור כיון שהוא רוכב על חמור. מיכאן שהם תשועה לישראל כתשועת רוכב על חמור.

26 The translation here is based on those of SHOEMAKER (A Prophet Has Appeared, 139) and HOYLAND (Seeing Islam, 312f).

27 ADOLPH JELLINEK (ed.), Bet ha-Midrash. Sammlung kleiner Midraschim und vermischter Abhandlungen, vol. 3, Leipzig 1855, 78-82, here 78.

28 https://www.sefaria.org/Otzar_Midrashim%2C_Midrashim_of_Rabbi_Shimon_bar_Yochai%2C_

Prayer_of_Rabbi_Shimon_Bar_Yochai. 5?lang=bi (accessed 31.7.23).

29 JELLINEK (ed.), Bet Ha-Midrash, vol. 4, 117-126, here 119.

30 *Shmad* (שמד) can be translated as ›physical annihilation‹ or ›forced conversion‹; considering Heraclius's oppression of the Jews, the latter applies in this case.

31 Kenites are here synonymous with the Byzantine empire under Heraclius (610-41 CE), the historical

context for the *Secrets of Rashbi*. Most scholars deem the historical context of the full text of the *Secrets* to be the Umayyad period in the seventh century and/or the upheavals associated with the rise of Abbasid dynasty in the eighth century; to my mind however, this passage precedes the establishment of Umayyad rule (i.e. before 638 CE).

32 Zechariah 9:9 states that the king (David) will come ›humble,

*The Prayer of Rashbi*²⁸תפילה של רשב"י²⁹

And the kingdom of the Kenites³³ [i.e. Byzantines] will come at that time to Jerusalem and conquer and they killed in it more than three ten thousands [i.e., 30.000] people.³⁴ **Because of the pressure that oppresses Israel, the Holy One, blessed be He, sends Ishmaelites among them and make war with them to save Israel from them, and a foolish man stands and speaks falsely about God,**³⁵ and he conquers the land, and there will be enmity between them and between the sons of Esau. I answered Metatron and said to him, Lord, and are the sons of Ishmael salvation for Israel? He said to me: did not the prophet Isaiah say: »and he saw a chariot, a pair of horsemen, a rider on an ass and a rider on a camel [Isa. 21:7]?« A chariot – this is the kingdom of Media and Persia; a pair – this is the kingdom of Greece; horsemen – this is the kingdom of Edom; a rider

on an ass – this is the Messiah, who is said to be »humble and riding on an ass« [Zech. 9:9]. A rider on a camel – this is the kingdom of Ishmael, in whose days the kingdom of the Messiah will arise, that is why [the phrase] a rider on an ass preceded a rider on a camel, and the camel's rider will rejoice at the coming of the Messiah.

ומלכות הקני יבאו בעת ההיא לירושלים וכובשין אותה והורגין בה יותר משלשת רבוא, ומפני הלחץ שלוחצין את ישראל הקב"ה שולח בם ישמעאלים ועושים עמהם מלחמה כדי להושיע את ישראל מידם, ועומד איש שוטה ובעל הרוח והוא מדבר על הקב"ה כזבים, מכבש את הארץ, ויהיה ביניהם ובין בני עשו איבה. השבתי למטטרון ואמרתי לו, אדוני וכי בני ישמעאל ישועה לישראל? א"ל ולא כך אמר ישעיה הנביא וראה רכב צמד פרשים רכב חמור רכב גמל (ישעיה כ"א ז'), רכב – זו מלכות מדי ופרס, צמד – זו מלכות יון, פרשים – זו מלכות אדום, רכב חמור – זה משיח שנאמר עני ורוכב על חמור (זכריה ט ט'), רכב גמל – זו מלכות ישמעאל שבימיו תצמח מלכות משיח, לכך הקדים רכב חמור על רכב גמל, וישמח רכב גמל בביאת משיח.

riding on an ass«. This is the traditional view of how the Messiah will arrive.

33 Most scholars follow Jellinek (Bet Ha-Midrash, vol. 4, viii-ix) and identify the Kenites in the *Prayer* as the Crusaders; see REEVES, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic*, 89. Bernard Lewis identified the apocalyptic »trigger« for the writing of the *Prayer* as the campaign of the Byzantine Emperor Tzimiskes, who invaded Syria

and Palestine in the years 974-976; see BERNARD LEWIS, *An Apocalyptic Vision of Islamic History*, in: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 13 (1949-1951) 308-338. Gil regarded the Kenites as Ishmaelites, although he conceded that confusion among the texts' sources was responsible for their mistaken identification as Byzantines; see GIL, *A History of Palestine*, 62f, esp. n. 68.

34 The passage »And the kingdom [...] people.« is most probably a later addition dating from the time of the First Crusade.

35 This negative passage in bold is an addition from the mid-eighth century, expressing the author's disappointment in Muslim rule, in contrast to the eschatological hopes reflected in the *Secrets of Rashbi*.

In the *Secrets*, emergent Islam appears as an instrument of redemption for Israel, and the kingdom of Ishmael's only role, according to the divine plan, was to rescue Israel from Byzantine oppression. The issue of the Islamic conquest of Palestine and the recovery of Palestine's past glory are not disputed here by the Jewish author. This reflects a certain pragmatism, acknowledging the real equation of power on the ground. Constanza Cordoni explains this inconsistency in the question of purifying the land of Israel of non-Jews before redemption as a result of the different layers and hands in the text of the *Secrets*.³⁶ If one compares the lack of dispute concerning possession of the land here with the Jewish-Muslim controversy about ownership on the Temple Mount found in the *midrash Pirke Mashiah*, it seems that the latter reflects a phase in which Arab rule was already established in Jerusalem.³⁷ The dispute in the *midrash* ends unfavourably for the Jews, who have to flee to the desert of Moab. The result in both texts is nevertheless the same: Muslims retain possession of Jerusalem before the ultimate apocalyptic combat. The *Prayer*, however, in a later amendment ridicules the role of the prophet by attributing negative characteristics to him: ›a foolish man stands and speaks falsely about God‹. This bolsters what the *Doctrina Jacobi* reports about how Jews regarded the emergent prophet.

The exegesis on Isaiah 21:6-7 that appears in the *Prayer of Rashbi* consists of an allegorical interpretation in which a Four Kingdoms scheme appears to be extended to include a Fifth Kingdom, that of the Messiah. The exegetical model has the following sequence: a chariot – the kingdom of Media and Persia; a pair – the kingdom of Greece; horsemen – the kingdom of Edom; a rider on an ass – this is the Messiah; a rider on a camel – this is the kingdom of Ishmael, which appears while the kingdom of the Messiah will arise. Reeves has suggested that the use of Isaiah 21:6-7, a passage that was neglected by Jewish exegetes in the pre-Islamic period, is a Jewish response to Islamic exegesis that legitimized the appearance of the prophet through biblical authority.³⁸ Here, Mohammed only emerges as a divine tool to help the Jews to find relief from Edom.

In Jewish eschatology, the Fourth Kingdom is considered evil. There is not a clear distinction in apocalyptic texts between the last (non-Messianic) king and the ultimate destroyer of the world³⁹ before the divine order establishes the next world. In the *Sefer Zerubbabel* and *Sefer Eliyahu*, the same protagonist played both roles.

After the defeat of the Byzantine empire by the Sassanids and later the Muslims, the Jewish scheme of the Four Kingdoms had to adapt to a new political reality. One can detect this need to update the scheme in the poem ascribed to Qillir, ›Time to rebuke‹, in which Jewish hopes are most probably pinned on the Sassanians, who conquered Jerusalem in 614 CE. The updating and the need to make Muslim power the last kingdom before redemption required recourse to new biblical allegorical rhetoric to pave a new exegetical path. In the *Secrets of Rashbi*, the verses from Numbers 24:12 and Isaiah 21:7 became instrumental for explaining the divinely assigned twofold role of the Arabs. In the dialectic pattern of an

³⁶ CONSTANZA CORDONI, Of Siblings, Kingdoms and the Days of the Messiah: Jewish Literary Responses to the New Order in the Land of Israel in the First Muslim Period, in: Josephine van den Bent/Flor van den Eijnde/Johan Weststeijn (eds.), *Late Antique Responses to the Arab Conquests*, Leiden 2022, 212-244, here 236.

³⁷ For a translation of *Pirke Mashiah*, see REEVES, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic*, 150-169; the dispute appears on 157f. The dispute is printed in Hebrew in YEHUDA EVEN-SHMUEL, *Midreshey Ge'ulah*, Jerusalem 2017, 336. The Hebrew terms describing the Muslims in the dispute are מלך הערביים (king of the Arabs) and בני קדר (sons of Qedar).

³⁸ JOHN C. REEVES, The Muslim Appropriation of a Biblical Text. The Messianic Dimensions of Isaiah 21: 6-7, in: KENNETH G. HOLM/HAYIM LAPIN (eds.), *Shaping the Middle East: Jews, Christians and Muslims in an Age of Transition 400-800 C.E.*, Bethesda, MD, 2011, 211-222, here 215-220.

evil Fourth Kingdom preparing the way for a better world, it does not make any difference theologically which power assumes the role of the Fourth Kingdom. Jewish eschatology however was pragmatic enough to adapt to new political constellations and changed the Fourth Kingdom accordingly, even if it inspired new hopes on political ground. This is a case in which the vision of Jewish redemption was dissociated from the regaining of the Promised Land. It speaks for the political realism of Palestinian Jews, who desperately wanted to rid themselves of oppressive Byzantine rule and therefore refrained from any dispute with the new ruler of Palestine.

Disillusion with Arab Rule

According to its incipit, the poem known as ›Ish yeminkha‹ is a *silluq*, recited at the end of one of the first three blessings of the Amidah prayer. It refers to Mordechai from the Book of Esther, who was a son of the tribe Benjamin.⁴⁰ It was published by Yahalom and dates to shortly after the middle of the eighth century (752 CE), that is, shortly after the transition from Umayyad to Abbasid rule. In lines 36–37, the anonymous poet is obviously inspired by the verses of Hosea 9:6–7, which enabled Yahalom to complete the poem's lines as follows.⁴¹

Silluq ›Ish yeminkha‹

34. Their iron shanks [of the statue] are the entire
Edomites,
35. their iron feet are sons of Qedar the foxes.
36. When Mahmad [lit. precious or greedy] comes,
nettles will inherit their silver and thorns [will be] in
[their] tents,
37. comes the spiritual man, a mad prophet, who
guides camels.

איש ימנך- סילוק
שקיה די פרזל הם אדומים המכוללים,
ורגליה די פרזל הם בני קידר השועלים.
בבוא מחמד לכו (ספם) קימוס ורישם חוח באוהלים
ב (א איש ה) רוח נב (א) משוגע מנהג (בג) מלים

Hosea 9:6–7

6. For suppose they escape the destruction – Egypt
will round them up, Memphis will bury them. And
their precious treasures of silver? Nettles will inherit
them; thorns will be in their tents.
7. The days of punishment have come, the days of
retribution are here, and Israel knows it. [Yet they
cry,] 'The prophet is a fool, the man of the spirit has
gone crazy!' Because your iniquity is so great, the
hostility [against you] is great.

הושע ט', ו- ז
ו קי"הגה קלכו משד מצרים תקבצם מר תקבצם מחמד לכספם
קמוש ירשם חוח באוהלים:

ז באו ו ימי הפקדה באו ימי השלם ידעו ישראל אניל
הנביא משגע איש הרוס על רב עונך ורבה משטמה.

39 The destroyer bears different names but fulfils the same function: Belial, the ›Lawless One‹, Satan, Armilus, the ›Son of Perdition‹, and Asmodai; the Antichrist assumes this role later. With divine assistance, a messianic figure of Davidic descent kills the destroyer.

40 Mordechai was the uncle of Esther.

41 YAHALOM, The Transition of Kingdoms in Eretz Israel (Palestine), 19. I also consulted the text, which appears online at <https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx?mishibbur=988001&page=1> (accessed: 1.8.2023). English translation by the author.

The omissions from the biblical lines reveal the poet's intentions. From warning the people of Israel who do not want to listen to the prophet Hosea and even ridicule him, the *paytan* changes the meaning and directs harsh criticism at ›Mahmad‹ (obviously a pun on *mahmad*, that is, ›greedy‹), which could also be vocalized as Mohammed. This eschatological poem about the kingdoms is dedicated to the extended pattern of eight kingdoms, which are here described in pairs according to the four intermediate cardinal directions. The first direction (south-east) is missing in the manuscript and must have dealt with the kingdoms of Chaldea and Babylonia, because one can infer from ›Ish yem-inkha‹ that the second direction is north-east, where the kingdoms Persia and Media are located. Mordechay appears in the Book of Esther, which tells the story of the Jews' being saved from genocide at Susa, the capital of the king of Persia and the Media. The third direction is north-west, which represents the kingdoms Greece and Macedonia, and the fourth and final direction is south-west, which represents the kingdoms of Edom and Ishmael. Edom is represented with iron shanks, and the sons of Qedar (a synonym of Ishmael) form the iron feet.

The *piyyut* ›Kerova for the ›Eighteen‹ at Hanukkah‹ was composed by Pinhas Hakohen of Kafra in the second half of the eighth century and certainly after the big earthquake in Palestine, which did not take place before 748 CE.⁴² Hakohen also relies on an extended eight-kingdom scheme and here offers a prayer to God to destroy the rule of Edom/Boar (Christians) and Qedar (Arabs).⁴³

Pinhas Hakohen of Kafra, ›Kerova for the ›Eighteen‹ at Hanukkah‹

55-56. You hit the lion, the bear, and the leopard,⁴⁴
to break their prowess, to make their end miserable,
it is time to execute the boar's verdict,⁴⁵
[unclear] will sing for you.
Gold, silver, and bronze,⁴⁶
you melted(?), crushed, and disgraced,
Rage against iron and clay with trap and net,
God, we will single you out daily in mouth and gesture.
You have torn the kingdoms of Babel and Chaldea in strife,
you have ejected Media, Persia, Greece, and Macedonia,
it is time that you lay Qedar⁴⁷ and Edom to waste.
Let your voice be heard by all of us.

קרובה י"ח לחנוכה לפינחס הכהן
מכפרא, שורות
55-56. חיבלתה ארי ודוב ונמר,
חילם לשבור קיצם להמר,
חזיר העת דינו ייגמר,
חי כאופנים לך נזמר.
זהב וכסף ונחושת,
זינקתה והידקתה והכלמתה בבושת,
זעום ברזל וחרס בפח וברשת,
זה אלי נייחדך בכל יום בפה ובארשת.
קרעתה מלכות בבל וכשדים במדון,
קילעתה מדי ופרס ויון ומקדון,
קדר ואדום העת תשית לאבדון,
קולך לעין כל תשמיענו אדון.

⁴² YAHALOM, The Transition of Kingdoms in Eretz Israel (Palestine), 10. The critical edition of his *piyyutim* by Shulamit Elitsur was not at my disposal. See SHULAMIT ELITSUR, *Piyyute Rabbi Pinhas ha-Kohen, Jerusalem 2004*. (Hebrew).

⁴³ This means that the *piyyut* was inserted among the first three blessings during the ›Eighteen‹ prayer (Amidah).

⁴⁴ The poet is here inspired by the vision of the beasts in Daniel 7:4-6.
⁴⁵ The boar appears as a synonym for Edom in *piyyutim* of the sixth-eighth centuries. For references to Hazir (חזיר), see <https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMMain.aspx> (accessed: 6.5.2023).

⁴⁶ The poet is here inspired by Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2:31-33.

⁴⁷ *Qedar* (קדר) serves as synonym for the Ishmaelite kingdom from the seventh century onwards. It often appears together with, and in contrast to, Edom.

Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer

Another apocalyptic text is included in the *Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer* (›Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer‹), which Reeves suggests dates between the final decades of seventh/opening decades of the eighth centuries.⁴⁸ Besides the frequently quoted chapter 30, there is allegorical exegesis in Chapter 28 that uses the established pattern of Four Kingdoms.⁴⁹

*Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer, 28:3*⁵⁰

Rabbi Eliezer said: The Holy One, blessed be He, showed to our father Abraham (at the covenant) the four kingdoms, their dominion, and their downfall, as it is said, ›And he said unto him, Take me a three-year-old heifer, and a three-year-old she-goat‹ [Gen. 15:9]. ›A three-year-old heifer‹ [ibid.] refers to the **kingdom of Edom**, which is like the heifer of a sheep. ›And a three-year-old she-goat‹ [ibid.] refers to the **kingdom of Greece**, as it is said, ›And the he-goat magnified himself exceedingly‹ [Dan. 8:8]. ›And a three-year-old ram‹ [Gen. 15:9]; this is the **kingdom of Media and Persia**, as it is said, ›And the ram which you saw that had the two horns, they are the kings of Media and Persia‹ [Dan. 8:20]. ›And a turtledove‹ [Gen. 15:9]; this refers to the **sons of Ishmael**. This expression is not to be understood in the literal meaning of *tôr* (turtledove), but in the Aramaic language, in which *tôr* means ox, for when the ox is harnessed to the female, they will open and break all the valleys, as it says (about) ›the fourth beast‹ [Dan. 7:19]. ›And a young pigeon‹ [Gen. 15:9]; this refers to the Israelites, who are compared to a young pigeon, as it is said, ›O my dove, thou art in the clefts of the rock‹ [Cant. 2:14]. For thy voice is pleasant in prayer, and thy appearance is beautiful in honourable deeds. ›And a young pigeon‹ [Gen. 15:9]; this refers to the Israelites, who are compared to a young pigeon: ›My dove, my perfect (one), is (but) one‹ [Cant. 6:9].

פרקי דרבי אליעזר, פרק כ"ח, ג' שורות י"ט-כ"ט

ר' אליעזר אומר, הראה הב"ה לאברהם אבינו בין הבתרים ארבע מלכויות מושלן ואבדן שנאמר ויאמר אליו קחה לי עגלה משולשת וכו' (בראשית ט"ו). שהיא כעגלה דשא. עז עגלה משולשת זו מלכות אדום שנאמר וצפיר העזים הגדיל עד משולשת זו מלכות יון שנאמר האיל מאד. ואיל משולש זו מלכות מדי ופרס בעל הקרנים אשר ראיתי מלכי מדי ופרס. ותור אלו בני אין הלשון הזה לשון תור אלא בלשון ארמית ישמעאל. תור זה השור אין לארץ כשיצמד שור זכר עם נקבה יפתחו ויפררו וישדדו את כל העמקים כדן אמר (דניאל ח', יט) חיותא רביעתא. וגוזל אלו ישראל שנמשלו כגוזל שנאמר (שיר השירים ב', יד) יונתי בחגוי הסלע כי קולך ערב בתפלה ומראך נאוה במעשים טובים. וגוזל אלו ישראל שנמשלו בגוזל שנאמר (שיר השירים ו', ט) אחת היא יונתי תמתי.

⁴⁸ REEVES, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic*, 69.

⁴⁹ HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam*, 313-316.

The sequence of kingdoms in Chapter 28 of the *Pirkei* corresponds with the clockwise cardinal directions, from the west (Edom) to the north (Greece), to the east (Media and Persia), and finally to the south (the sons of Ishmael). This and the *piyyut* ›Ish yeminkha‹ are exceptional, because Hebrew texts of the Classical age usually rely on a chronological sequence. Contrary to what Jacob Elbaum avers, it seems less crucial that Ishmael was not mentioned by name as a kingdom;⁵¹ what matters is that Ishmael is mentioned in the *Pirkei* as an ox, which stands for the Fourth Beast.⁵² According to Daniel 7:23, this Fourth Beast will be the last kingdom, which will devour the entire world before the redemption of the Jews. Elbaum observes that the author of the *Pirkei* changed the meaning of this passage by translating *tôr* from Aramaic so that Ishmael is represented as an ox, whereas in an earlier homily, *Genesis (Bereshit) Rabbah* (at 44:15), *tôr* represents the kingdom of Edom as a thieving bird.⁵³ It should be underlined that being the Fourth Kingdom is not necessarily a blessing for improving living conditions in Israel. In Chapter 48 of the *Pirkei*, God will annihilate both the sons of Edom and of Ishmael towards the End.⁵⁴ In apocalyptic dialectics, the last kingdom, is a pre-condition for the pangs before the arrival of Messiah.

Joint Rule by Edom and Ishmael as a Precondition for Jewish Redemption

Bernard Lewis refers to the Jewish apocalyptic belief that before the coming of the Messiah the land of Israel must be conquered by Edom, which assumes the role of the Fourth Kingdom before the End. Yet this is not the prevailing belief I have found in texts that respond to the emergence of Islam in the seventh and eighth centuries. Lewis's witness is R. Hai Ga'on (d.1038), who is not earlier than the end of the tenth century. In his response to the question as to when the Messiah will arrive, Hai Ga'on replies: ›Therefore, if we see Edom ruling the Land of Israel, we believe that our redemption has begun.‹⁵⁵ But he is not the only one who believed that the land of Israel must be under the rule of Edom before redemption: Hai Ga'on relies on the Jewish philosopher R. Sa'adia Ga'on, who completed his major work *Emunot Vehade'ot* (*The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*) in 933. Sa'adia interpreted a biblical verse as meaning that redemption will arrive once Edom conquers the temple.⁵⁶

Emunot Vehade'ot, eighth essay, on redemption, chapter 5

(And the days of redemption) will begin with the conquest of the temple by Edom as is said [Obad. 1:21]: ›For liberators shall march up on Mount Zion to wreak judgement on Mount Esau and dominion [kingdom] shall be the Lord's.‹

אמונות והדעות, מאמר שמיני בגאולה האחרונה, פרק ה

ותחלתם שאדום יכבשו בית המקדש בעת הגאולה, ועלו מושיעים בהר ציון יאמר בו (עובדיה' א' כ"א) לשפוט את הר עשו והיתה ליהודה המלוכה

⁵⁰ GERALD FRIEDLANDER, *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer*, London 1916, 198f. There is no *Urtext*, so the verses are counted differently in different versions.

⁵¹ JACOB ELBAUM, *Messianism in Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer: Apocalypse and Midrash*, in: MORDECHAI AKIVA FRIEDMAN/MERON BIALIK LERNER (eds.), *Studies in Aggadic Midrashim*

in Memory of Zvi Meir Rabinowitz, *Te'uda* 11, Tel Aviv 1996, 245-266. (Hebrew).

⁵² Pseudo-Sebeos also regarded Muslim power as the Fourth Beast; see *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, chap. 44, 105f. There, the Four Kingdoms are not described in chronological sequence, but according to the four cardinal directions;

the *Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer* do the same, though in reverse order. The possibility of Christian impact on motifs that appear in the *Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer* has been suggested by HELEN SPURLING and EMMA-NOUELA GRYPEOU in *Pirke de-Rabbi and Eastern Christian Exegesis*, in: *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia*, 4 (2007) 217-243.

Sa'adia Ga'on remained faithful to the Danielic scheme of Four Kingdoms. In his comment on Daniel 7:17-18, written in Judeo-Arabic, Sa'adia offered an allegorical explanation for the number of kingdoms by referring to the four fathers of all the nations:⁵⁷ »We have already explained in the Commentary of the Book of Esther that the fathers of nations are four: Shem, Ham, and Yefet, as he said »Those are the three sons of Noah, from them the people spread out on earth« [Gen 9:19]. Plus, Abraham, following his expression »Because I made you the father of many nations« [Gen 17:5]. The royal family of the first one who enslaved us belongs to Ham, and that is Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon. He said about Nimrod, son of Kush, son of Ham: »The beginning of his kingship was Babylon« [Gen 10:10]. The royal family of the second was in the country of Elam, son of Shem. They are the Persians as he said: »As if I was in Susa the fortress in the country of Elam« [Dan 8:2]. The third are the Greek that the text explains clearly, saying: The sons of Yefet, Gomer, Magog, Maday, and Yavan [Gen 10:2]. The fourth are Edom and Ishmael who are sons of Abraham. He started by Edom [i.e., a synonym for Esau] because he is the son of Abraham [*sic*] and Isaac together. We should not imagine that there will be another kingdom that enslaves us, because there is no other father of the nations.«

The Fourth Kingdom, the last, however, was that of Edom and Ishmael together, which became the precondition of Jewish redemption by default. This is reminiscent of *Eikha* (Lamentations) *Rabbah*, which brought Edom and Ishmael together as the last kingdom. (The term Edom did not change its meaning, only its territorial scope, referring to either the Western Roman or Eastern Roman empire.) Two hundred years later, Abraham Ibn Ezra (1092-1167) was puzzled in his Commentary on Daniel as to why Sa'adia Ga'on did not consider the kingdom of Ishmael in his scheme, and why he was not ready to enlarge the number of kingdoms to five. It was said in the Commentary that Ishmael would establish rule over extensive and distant territories, united by a single religion.⁵⁸

Ibn Ezra differed from Sa'adia, who represented the conservative mainstream of the Babylonian Ga'onite period (900-1100 CE). In his comment on Daniel 2:39, Ibn Ezra claimed that the Third Kingdom (of bronze) was Greece (i.e., Byzantium) and that the Fourth Kingdom (of iron) was Ishmael.⁵⁹ Although they fought each other, no kingdom could gain a decisive victory. In his comment on Daniel 7:16, Ibn Ezra wrote that the last Ishmaelite king will have a devastating impact on Israel. This might be a summary of his personal experience in Muslim Spain: his son underwent a forced conversion to Islam, and he himself fled to France. However, the truth is, even an unconventional thinker like him shared Sa'adia Ga'on's vision in his Commentary on Daniel, namely that these two kingdoms, either Greece or Ishmael, would rule until the End, thus avoiding the need for a Fifth Kingdom.

53 *Bereshit* (Genesis) *Rabbah*, 44:15: נתר וגו'ל, זו מלכות אדום, תור הוא אלקא שגזלן היא.

54 REEVES, Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic, 69.

55 LEWIS, An Apocalyptic Vision, 333.

56 SA'ADIA GA'ON, *Emunot Vehade'ot*, eighth essay, on redemption, chap. 5. Text taken from https://www.sefaria.org/HaEmunot_veHaDeot%2C_%5BTreatise_VIII%5D_Messianic_Redemption.5.1?lang=en&with=all&lang2=en (accessed 7.5.2023).

57 JOSEF ALOBAIDI, *The Book of Daniel. The Commentary of Sa'adia Ga'on*, Berlin 2006, 552f.

58 ABRAHAM IBN EZRA, Commentary on Daniel, 2:39: יש לתמוה איך לא הזכיר דניאל מלכות ישמעאל, ולמה לא היו חמש מלכיות? https://www.sefaria.org/lbn_Ezra_on_Daniel.2.39.3?lang=en (accessed: 7.5.2023).

59 https://www.sefaria.org/lbn_Ezra_on_Daniel.2.39.3?lang=en (accessed 7.5.2023).

**Cumulative Table of Jewish Eschatological Texts
Relating to the Scheme of Four Kingdoms***

No.	Date	Name of work	No. of kingdoms
1	164 BCE	Book of Daniel	4
2	after 79 CE	Sibylline Oracles, Book 4	5
3	c.200-450	Jerusalem Talmud, Ta'anit	4
4	c.500	Midrash Leviticus Rabbah	4
5	c.500	First recension of Midrash Lamentations Rabbah	4 x 2
6	c.550	Yannai, ›Reap your harvest in the field‹	4 x 2
7	before 628	Sefer Eliyahu	4
8	before 629	(Pseudo-)Qillir, ›Time to rebuke‹ (silluq for the Ninth of Av)	◆
9	before 629	Sefer Zerubbabel. The piyyut ›In those days at that period‹ adopted motifs from the Sefer Zerubbabel with no bearing on the Four Kingdoms.	◆
10	629-636	›Oto hayom‹ (›That very day‹)	◆
11	c.634	Doctrina Jacobi	◆
12	7th century	Second recension of Midrash Lamentations Rabbah	4 x 2
13	before 640 –death of Heraclius	Jochanan Hakohen ›Kedushata for shabbat shim'u‹	◆
14	after 636	Perek Eliyahu	4
15	after 636	Secrets of Rashbi	◆
16	after the Secrets of Rashbi	Prayer of Rashbi	4
17	end of the seventh – beginning of the eighth century	Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer	4
18	752(?)	Silluq ›Ish yeminkha‹	4 x 2
19	after the earthquake of 748	Pinhas Hakohen of Kafra, ›Kerova for the ›Eighteen‹ at Hanukkah‹	4 x 2
20	892-942	R. Sa'adia Ga'on	4
21	before 1038	R. Hai Ga'on, in his Responsa	◆
22	1092-1167	Abraham Ibn Ezra, in his Commentary on the Book of Daniel	4

* The chronological span of the texts in the table can be periodized as follows.

Texts 1-6 belong to the Roman-Byzantine period in Palestine. **Texts 7-11** belong to the Sassanian-Persian period in Palestine. **Texts 12-16** belong to the Arab-Umayyad period in Palestine. **Texts 17-21** belong to the Arab-Abbasid period in Palestine. **Text 22** belongs to the Arab-Almoravid period in Spain.

Last kingdom (where single)	Last kingdoms (in tandem)	Emergence of Islam
Fourth Beast	Iron/clay	◆
Rome (return of Nero?)	◆	◆
Edom	◆	◆
Edom	◆	◆
◆	Edom/Seir	◆
Edom	East/West Rome	◆
Sassanid Khosow II	◆	◆
Sassanid destruction of Edom	◆	◆
◆	◆	The enigmatic kings of Qedar and sons of Qedem fight Armilus(?) in the valley of Arbel
◆	Tripartite war between Edom (Byzantium), Assyria (Sassanid Persia), and Yoktan (Arabia)	Kingdom of Yoktan
Blessed Saracen prophet sent by God	◆	Saracen prophet
◆	Edom/Ishmael	Ishmael
◆	Prayer for Ishmael (and Sassanids?) to crush Edom	Kingdom of the wild ass
King of Ishmael	◆	Messiah fights Ishmaelites
Kingdom of a rider on an ass as a divine instrument	◆	Ishmael brings redemption to Israel
Kingdom of a rider on a camel	◆	Prophet is mad
Ishmael as the Fourth Beast	◆	Ishmael
◆	Edom/Ishmael	Ishmael
◆	Edom/Qedar (synonym for Ishmael)	Prayer to destroy all kingdoms
Edom (in his Emunot Vehade'ot)	Edom / Ishmael (in his Com- mentary on the Book of Daniel)	Ishmael
Edom	◆	◆
Ishmael	Greece (Byzantines?) / Ishmael	Ishmael

Conclusion

If we take the texts written after the Sassanid and Ishmaelite victories over the Byzantine empire, we can infer that out of fourteen texts, six regarded the Ishmaelites as the last kingdom, two the Sassanids, and only one the Byzantines; five texts regarded the Muslim/Byzantine powers in conjunction as the last kingdom; and three were structured with a scheme of four double kingdoms.

The selection of twenty-two eschatological texts presented here offers evidence of a flexibility regarding the composition of the Four Kingdoms. The apocryphal fourth book of the Sibylline Oracles extended the scheme of four kingdoms (Assyria, Media, Persia, and Macedonia) to five, with Rome later becoming the last and eternal kingdom. Rome thus became the substitute of the Jewish eternal divine kingdom. The fact that the Oracles included Assyria and not Babylonia may be an additional hint that it was not only the Danielic tradition that was at work here. Under Roman rule in Palestine, Rabbinic Judaism (second-sixth centuries) stabilized the scheme of Four Kingdoms (Jerusalem Talmud, Ta'anit, 2:4, 3) and kept Edom as the fourth and everlasting final kingdom before redemption (*Midrash Leviticus Rabbah*, 29:2). Yannai's splitting of the Fourth Kingdom into two entities (Edom and Esau) in his *piyyut* ›When you reap the harvest in your field‹, together with first recension of *Midrash Lamentations Rabbah* reflect the division of the Roman empire. Splitting the Fourth Kingdom to two powers in tandem, and still refraining from reckoning with a Fifth Kingdom, indicates the respect in which the canonical Danielic tradition of Four Kingdoms was held. The earlier and later recensions of *Midrash Lamentations Rabbah* (11:1, 14) signal a substantive shift: prior to the Muslim conquests, the last kingdom was named Edom and Se'ir (a synonym of Esau); in the later version, Edom and Ishmael constituted the last pair of kingdoms.

Jewish eschatological hopes in the first half of the seventh century had two defining characteristics: firstly, any power (Sassanian or Muslim) was welcome if it could defeat Edom (the Byzantine empire), the oppressor of Israel; secondly, Muslim rule in Palestine would promote Jewish redemption. Similar attitudes are detectable among Armenian chronists such as Pseudo-Sebeus. The ground common to both was their deep distaste for the oppressive rule of Byzantium. During the final stage of the Byzantine-Sassanid struggle for domination of the Middle East, three eschatological texts, the apocalyptic *Sefer Eliyahu*, the *Perek Eliyahu*, and probably also the *piyyut* ›Time to rebuke‹, expressed hope of redemption once a Sassanid victory over the Byzantines had been achieved. The appearance of Arab-Islamic power and its conquest of Pales-

60 MEHDY SHADDEL, *Doctrina Iacobi and the Rise of Islam*, in: https://www.academia.edu/44462006/Doctrina_Iacobi_and_the_Rise_of_Islam_forthcoming_in_Nadine_Viermann_and_Johannes_Wienand_Reading_the_Late_Roman_Monarchy,¹¹ (accessed 14.7.2024). Shaddel dates the text to the later Umayyad period owing to some similarities with the *Secrets of Rashbi*.

61 HAROLD HENRY ROWLEY, *Darius the Mede and the Four World Empires in the Book of Daniel*, Cardiff 1935, repr. 1959, 184.

tine caused a shift in Jewish messianic hopes in favour of Islam during Umayyad rule; the *Doctrina Jacobi*, which seems to have been written by a converted Jew reflecting Jewish eschatological yearnings,⁶⁰ the *piyyut* ›Kedushata for shabbat shim'u‹, and the apocalyptic *Secrets of Rashbi* expressed these hopes for redemption. In the later stages of Umayyad rule and certainly after the Abbasid takeover of the khalifate, we find Jewish disillusionment with Muslim rule expressed in the *Prayer of Rashbi* (perhaps a later amendment), in the *Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer*, and in the *piyyut* ›Ish yeminkha‹ by the poet Pinhas Hakohen of Kafra; these texts prayed for the destruction of both Edom and Qedar at once.

Since the doubling of the Four Kingdoms in Yannai's *piyyut* to eight, the question then became whether Jewish texts opt for a single or joint last kingdom. Three texts opted for the joint configuration: the second recension of *Midrash Lamentations Rabbah*, the *silluq* ›Ish yeminkha‹, and the ›Kerova for the »Eighteen« at Hanukkah‹; all of these were composed in the seventh century.

In his major theological summa *Emunot Vehade'ot*, the eminent representative from the Babylonian diaspora of the Ga'onite period R. Sa'adia Ga'on opted for Edom as the last kingdom; Rav Hai Ga'on joined him in his famous *responsa*. In his Commentary on the Book of Daniel, Sa'adia moderated his view and conceded that Ishmael had a certain role to play in the last kingdom. The Sephardic polymath Ibn Ezra, though impressed by Almohadic expansion and prowess, spoke in his comment on Daniel of Greece (as a third kingdom) and Ishmael (as a fourth) conducting a conflict that would be unfinished at the End of the Days.

What becomes clear from this study is that belief in the eschatological configuration of Four Kingdoms was expressed in all surviving literary genres: *piyyutim*, apocalypses, *midrashim*, and biblical exegesis. Jewish sages, authors, and poets did not want to break away from the canonical scheme in their apocalyptical imagination. The fourth book of the Sibylline Oracles, with its extended construction of five kingdoms, remained alien to Rabbinic Judaism. Doubling the four kingdoms paved the way for new constellations without changing the canonical status of the scheme. The period in which the final throes of the Byzantine-Sassanian conflict took place resulted in a victory for emergent Islam. It was one of the rare episodes in which Islam and to a smaller extent the Sassanians assumed a dominant and somehow more positive role than was dialectically justified in Jewish eschatological thought. Rowley⁶¹ could have described the Jewish attitude towards the Fourth Kingdom before the End more accurately if he had considered in his summary table the Hebrew *piyyutim* and *midrashim* of the Classical age. ♦