

MA'ASEH DANIEL

Ma'aseh Daniel, or 'The Story of Daniel,' is a Judaeo-Persian work of uncertain historical provenance that is extant only in Ms. Bibliothèque Nationale Hébr. 128/9, ff.72a-96b. The Hebrew rendering of this work that was published by Adolph Jellinek¹ does not represent an independent version, but was translated directly from the 1869 German translation of Hermann Zotenberg.²

The present rendering is paragraphed and englished from the Hebrew translation of the Judaeo-Persian text published by Dan Shapira, "Qīṣṣa-ye Dāniyāl – 'o Ma'aseh Danī'el – be-farsit-yehudit: Ha-ḥibbur we-targumo," *Sefunot* n.s. 7 (1999): 337-66, at 353-66.

1. 'I am Daniel, one of the descendants of King Jeconiah of the family of David.' I am Daniel, one of the descendants of King Jeconiah of the family of David. When I was in Jerusalem; i.e., Bayt al-Maqdis, there was with us [a certain man] whose name was Jeremiah b. Hilqayah who constantly conducted himself in obedience to the Lord. There were (also) among us a number of people who broke off the yoke of the Lord from themselves. They were unable to bear the Name of the Lord, and they no longer proffered obedience (to Him). They were occupied day and night with unworthy activities, and they engaged themselves in the worship of idols, in frequenting whores, and in corruption.

2. Then the Lord, may His Name be blessed, sent Jeremiah to them in order to reprove them and turn them back to His rule. At that time Zedekiah was the king. And Jeremiah was saying to them: 'The Lord commands, Return to My rule! If not, I will strengthen the power of your enemy Nebuchadnezzar, and I will send him to destroy both Jerusalem and yourselves, thereby effecting desolation!'

3. And when Jeremiah had prophesied this way before King Zedekiah, the king said: 'Go (and) do to Jeremiah anything that you want!' At that time then they took Jeremiah and threw him into a pit. While there was no water in that pit, the pit was very cramped, and so they left Jeremiah amidst that cramped space without access to water. Then the Lord's anger increased against them, and He sent Nebuchadnezzar and his army to lay siege against the gates of Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar himself stayed in Baghdad, and he dispatched Nebūzarādan with his army to Jerusalem.

4. Now they (i.e., Israel) possessed two commandments, which while they were observing them, no enemy could achieve victory against them. One of them was sacrifice, and the other circumcision, and they did not maintain (the observance) of any other commandment. Every day they would put a *dirham* for this sacrifice in a basket and lower it from the wall with a rope into the camp of Nebuchadnezzar in order to purchase a lamb for this sacrifice. Now one day an Israelite youth was on the wall of Jerusalem, and so they asked him: 'This lamb which you have been purchasing from us – what do you do with it?' The youth answered [them]: 'We offer it as an offering.' Then they stopped selling them any more lambs and devised a stratagem: instead of a lamb they placed a pig in the basket and sent it to the wall. As soon as [the basket] had reached the top of the wall, they shot arrows at the pig, the blood spewed onto the wall, and the wall cracked open.³ That day was the ninth of the month Av. Nebūzarādan realized that the Lord was handing them over into his control.

He entered Jerusalem and proceeded directly to the Temple. Zedekiah, the king of Judah, fled and the officers of Nebuchadnezzar chased after him (and captured him). When they saw King Zedekiah, they said: 'These eyes of yours are handsome!' Then the order was given to kill two of his sons before his eyes, and afterwards they blinded his eyes. Then Nebūzarādan slaughtered a pig within the Temple of the Lord. Nebuchadnezzar himself did not come to Jerusalem – he remained in Riblah – but he had dispatched Nebūzarādan to Jerusalem in order to gain profit through these deeds.

5. After this, blood frothed on the threshold of the Temple of the Lord. Nebūzarādan summoned all the nobles, elders, and Jeremiah, and he asked them: 'What is this frothing blood?' They responded: 'It is the blood of the cattle and the sheep which they offered as an offering to the Lord, but now they are not

¹ Adolph Jellinek, ed., *Bet ha-Midrash: Sammlung kleiner Midraschim und vermischter Abhandlungen aus der jüdischen Literatur* (6 vols.; Leipzig, 1853-77; repr., Jerusalem: Bamberger & Wahrmann, 1938), 5:xxxvi-xxxvii, 117-30.

² Hermann Zotenberg, "Geschichte Daniels: Ein Apokryph," *Archiv für wissenschaftliche Erforschung des Alten Testaments* 1 (1867-69): 385-427.

³ This story is modeled upon the Hasmonean legend that is recounted in *b. Baba Qamma* 82b (correct Shapira, 353 n.5 accordingly).

offering.’ Nebūzarādan commanded for a quantity of cattle and sheep to be brought, and they slaughtered them over that blood. However, the blood did not cease from frothing: it frothed even more violently (than before). Nebūzarādan said: ‘This blood is not that of cattle or sheep! If you do not tell me the truth, I will kill all of you!’

6. Then Gedaliah b. Aḥiqam responded: ‘What can I say, O commander? We were ashamed of what we have done! There was a man, a prophet of God, whose name was Zechariah. He was a priest, and the day on which they murdered him was the Day of Atonement. He was reproving us, and they killed him, and his blood now lodges complaint before you!’ Then Nebūzarādan grew angry, and he commanded that three thousand Sages be brought, and they slaughtered them over the blood. However, its frothing persisted (and) did not cease. They next killed three thousand priests, but the blood did not calm. Next they brought two thousand Levites and killed them, but the blood did not calm. They brought next two thousand bridegrooms and brides, and they also killed them, but its frothing persisted (and) did not cease. Next they took two thousand children away from their teacher(s), wrapped them up in Torah scrolls, and threw them into a fire – even then [the blood] did not calm. At that moment the sympathies of the enemy were aroused, and they said: ‘O Zechariah! Is it your wish that all Israelites should be removed from the world?!?’ The blood still did not calm.

7. Now I Daniel was in a room teaching small children, and a soldier entered in order to kill us. But the Holy One, blessed be He, gave us favor in his eyes, and they did not kill me, or Hananiah, Mishael, or Azariah; instead, they took (us) into captivity. They took still more Israelites, women, children, the Temple vessels, the throne of the lordly Solomon (upon whom be peace!), and the priestly vestments to Baghdad and dispatched (them) to their treasuries.