

# THE RECEPTION OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL IN APHRAHAT'S FIFTH DEMONSTRATION, "ON WARS"

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## ABSTRACT

*Aphrahat composed the fifth Demonstration at a time of increasing tension between the Roman and the Sasanian Empires. In anticipation of the Christian Emperor's military campaign against Shapur II, the Persian Sage found in the bellicose language of the Book of Daniel a reassuring message for fourth century Christians living under Sasanian rule. The cryptic style of this biblical book readily lent itself to the exigencies of his historical context in which an equally cryptic style (ܒܪܐܝܬ) was required. This article considers how Aphrahat recast the Book of Daniel so that it might become a window for understanding his own world.*

- [1] Among Daniel's earliest interpreters was Aphrahat, the fourth century Persian Sage, who, in his *V Demonstration*, "On Wars," offered his theological reflection on the turbulent political events and military movements of his day.<sup>1</sup> He took up the book of

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<sup>1</sup> Aphrahat's twenty-three *Demonstrations* offer a unique window into fourth century biblical interpretation beyond the borders of the Roman

Daniel and, drawing on Daniel's interpretation of human history in chapters 2, 7, and 8, developed a reassuring message for his Persian Christian audience.<sup>2</sup> Daniel's understanding of history, Aphrahat trusted, would be realized in his own day.<sup>3</sup>

- [2] Aphrahat wrote this *Demonstration* as Christians in Persia were coming under increasing suspicion from their Sasanian rulers.<sup>4</sup> Before the Christianizing of the Roman Empire, the persecution of Christians in the west under Valerian "led Shapur I to treat the large numbers of Christians...with considerable favour."<sup>5</sup> Once the Roman Emperor adopted Christianity, Sasanian rulers began to look upon Christians as a potential fifth column.<sup>6</sup> The conversion of Armenia to Christianity (314) would further threaten Sasanian hegemony while increasing Rome's influence in the region. T. B. Barnes dates the *V Dem.* to September or October 337,<sup>7</sup> a moment when relations between Persians and their Christian minority had become markedly less friendly. Particularly unhelpful, according to Barnes, was Constantine's declared role as "a divinely ordained

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Empire. For an introduction to his world and his writings, see R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) and S. P. Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature*, Moran Etho Series 9 (St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute: Kottayam, 1991): 19-22. Murray dates his life between 270 and 345 or later (*Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 29).

<sup>2</sup> Parisot (I. Parisot [ed.], *Aphraatis Demonstrationes*, PS 1 [Paris, 1894]: 183-238) identifies just over a hundred biblical citations in the *V Dem.* (only nine are from the NT). About one third of these citations are from Daniel.

<sup>3</sup> References to the *Demonstrations* follow the section and/or column and line number from Parisot, *Aphraatis Demonstrationes*.

<sup>4</sup> The Christians residing beyond the confines of the Roman Empire usually receive little attention when the history of Christianity is recounted. See S. P. Brock, "Christians in the Sasanian Empire: a Case of Divided Loyalties," reprinted in *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (London: Variorum, 1984): chapter VI.

<sup>5</sup> Brock, "Christians in the Sasanian Empire," 7.

<sup>6</sup> For a historical review of events leading up to the Christian persecution under Shapur II, see J. Labourt, *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la Dynastie Sassanide: (224-632)*, (Paris: Lecoffre, 1904): 43-50.

<sup>7</sup> T. D. Barnes, "Constantine and the Christians of Persia," *Journal of Roman Studies* 75 (1985): 126-36.

protector of Christians everywhere.”<sup>8</sup> Aphrahat preached the *V Dem.* in hope that the Roman Emperor would soon bring his protection to the Christians in Persia living under Shapur II. He was unaware that Constantine had died a few months earlier. That protection would never arrive and the first organized persecutions began in 338.

### APHRAHAT AND THE BIBLE

- [3] At the conclusion of the *V Dem.* Aphrahat tells his audience that what he has had to say was “created in the word of God.”<sup>9</sup> His admission is born out by the cascade of biblical citations that inundates his discourse. Sometimes Aphrahat alerts the reader to an upcoming citation but most often the line between citation and allusion is blurred, as he weaves biblical language into his exegesis. The better versed his disciples (both ancient and modern) are in the Bible, the better they can catch the allusions and citations as they fly by.<sup>10</sup> The rhetoric of the *V Dem.*, in particular, seems to presume a detailed knowledge of the book of Daniel. Elements from Daniel, such as the ram in Daniel 8 (§5) and the fourth beast in Daniel 7 (§6), are introduced into the Demonstration without explanation. The reader is expected to know their source.

- [4] Aphrahat’s biblical text is a Peshitta MS. that “falls securely within the P[eshitta] textual tradition.”<sup>11</sup> This is confirmed by several instances in the *V Dem.* where Aphrahat’s citation follows the Peshitta against the Hebrew text. For example, in Jer 50:17 the Peshitta interprets Hebrew *šmm*<sup>12</sup> with *ܫܡܡ* (7a1<sup>13</sup> and the

<sup>8</sup> Barnes, “Constantine,” 131.

<sup>9</sup> 236.27-237.2: *ܫܡܡܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ* “all these things that I have listed for you were created in the word of God.”

<sup>10</sup> Scholars have noted that Aphrahat’s method of biblical interpretation has little in common with the Greek Patristic tradition, see I. Oriz de Urbina, “La controversia di Afraate coi Giudei,” *Studia Missionalia* 3 (1947) 87. Kuriakose Valavanolickal (*Aphrahat Demonstrations I*, Catholic Theological Studies of India 3 [HIRS Publications, 1999]: 12) notes that Aphrahat’s exegesis is primarily concerned with application and less with the method of interpretation: “unlike the later patristic tradition he is not interested in any set of rules governing the method of exegesis.”

<sup>11</sup> R. J. Owens, *The Genesis and Exodus Citations of Aphrahat the Persian Sage*, MPIL 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1983): 247.

<sup>12</sup> MT: *šmm* “gnawed at his bones.”

London *Polyglotta*) and Aphrahat follows the Peshitta (213:20).<sup>14</sup> The more important question is how Aphrahat handles citations from the Bible. Goshen-Gottstein noted that early Syriac writers “often quoted from memory, omitted parts of verses, and, of course, changed verses to fit their homiletic needs.”<sup>15</sup> After a thorough study of the Genesis and Exodus citations in the *Demonstrations*, Owens concluded that the Sage cited the biblical text from memory: “The looseness of so many of the citations suggests indeed a general pattern of *memoriter* rather than transcriptional quotation.”<sup>16</sup> However, there are indications in the *V Dem.* that suggest that Aphrahat is citing directly from a Peshitta MS. In §14, he cites Dan 2:44 (209.25-212.1) and then directs the reader to an earlier verse (Dan 2:34) with the indication “and above it said” (212.3: ܐܡܪ ܠܝ ܐܡܪ). He then points the reader to the verse that follows (Dan 2:35) with the phrase: “the text that follows it reads” (212.11: ܕܡܬܠܝܗ ܕܬܝܬܝܗ ܕܡܬܠܝܗ ܕܬܝܬܝܗ). His notations regarding the location of the citations in relation to one another within the biblical text suggest that he has a Peshitta MS under his eyes as he writes. If so, the fact that his citation of Dan 2:44 does not follow the Peshitta (discussed later) suggests that, as Goshen-Gottstein proposed, Aphrahat’s homiletic interests prevailed over accuracy when citing the biblical text.

[5]

The question of Jewish influence on Aphrahat is under debate. It was generally accepted that Aphrahat was influenced by a form of rabbinic Judaism until J. Neusner’s work *Aphrahat and Judaism*.<sup>17</sup> Neusner argues that when all the data on biblical interpretations shared between Aphrahat and the rabbis is taken into account, the number of parallel interpretations is dwarfed by the significant number of instances where Aphrahat and the rabbis do not share a

<sup>13</sup> The Leiden Peshitta edition sigla are used to indicate Peshitta MSS.

<sup>14</sup> Targum Jonathan (A. Sperber [ed.], *The Bible In Aramaic*, 4 vols. [Leiden: Brill, 1992]) reads:

זה האחרון עצמו נבוכדראצר ודין בתראה אסיפניו נבוכדנצר

<sup>15</sup> M. H. Goshen-Gottstein, “Prolegomena to a Critical Edition of the Peshitta,” in *Text and Language in Bible and Qumran* (Jerusalem-Tel Aviv: Orient, 1960): 197.

<sup>16</sup> Owens, *The Genesis and Exodus Citations*, 241.

<sup>17</sup> J. Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism: the Christian-Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 1971). See his review of the literature on this question (pp. 10-13).

common interpretation. Neusner concludes: "Aphrahat and the rabbis had practically nothing in common, other than they lived in a single continuum and believed in the same revelation."<sup>18</sup> Others have disagreed. M.-J. Pierre notices the similarity between Aphrahat's exegesis and that of the Palestinian Targum<sup>19</sup> and suggests that Aphrahat may have been influenced by oral transmissions of biblical stories or that his Syriac biblical text was at variance from the Peshitta.<sup>20</sup> Recently, Henze has argued that Aphrahat's presentation of Nebuchadnezzar reveals traces of Jewish traditions. In the *V Dem.*, in particular, Nebuchadnezzar's metamorphosis (from a king, to a lion, to a bird, and finally to a person) "demonstrates again his [Aphrahat's] intimate familiarity with the Jewish exegetical tradition: the idea that the king was subject to perpetual change while in exile."<sup>21</sup> Aphrahat's OT citations may have been influenced by the OT citations in the NT

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<sup>18</sup> Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism*, 187.

<sup>19</sup> See also A. Guillaumont, "Un midrash d'Exode 4,24-6 chez Aphraate et Ephrem de Nisibe," in *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus: Studies in Early Christian Literature and Its Environment, Primarily in the Syrian East*, ed. R. H. Fischer (Chicago: The Lutheran School of Theology, 1977): 89-95.

<sup>20</sup> M.-J. Pierre, *Aphraate le sage persan. Les Exposés I: Exposés I-X*, Sources chrétiennes 349 (Paris: Cerf, 1988): 137-8. Pierre believes that Aphrahat was influenced by the Jewish milieu of his time, especially by Rav (Abba ben-Aivu) the rabbi of the Babylonian Amoraim (p. 127). J. Ouellette ("Sens et portée de l'argument scripturaire chez Aphraate," in *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus: Studies in Early Christian Literature and Its Environment, Primarily in the Syrian East*, ed. R. H. Fischer [Chicago: The Lutheran School of Theology, 1977]: 194) argues that Aphrahat knew Mesopotamian Jews who had little contact with the Babylonian rabbis.

<sup>21</sup> M. Henze, *The Madness of King Nebuchadnezzar: The Ancient Near Eastern Origins and Early History of Interpretation of Daniel 4* (Leiden: Brill, 1999): 152. Against Neusner, Henze ("Nebuchadnezzar's Madness (Daniel 4) in Syriac Literature," in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, ed. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint, VTSup 83/2 [Leiden: Brill, 2001]: 556.) writes: "It is particularly those instances in which Aphrahat's interpretation of a biblical pericope represents a minority position in early Christian exegesis but has close parallels in contemporary Jewish sources which indicate the extent to which Aphrahat's reading of the Hebrew Bible was informed by the exegetical traditions of rabbinic Judaism."

or in early Christian literature as his citation of Ps 37:35 (treated below) indicates.

## THE BOOK OF DANIEL IN THE V DEMONSTRATION: AN OVERVIEW

[6] Aphrahat opens his discourse, acknowledging the turbulent (ܐܬܪܐ) times in which he and his listeners live, but assuring his audience that God directs human history (184.3-4 and 185.1: ܐܬܪܐ ܕܥܡ ܡܚܕܝܬܐ ܐܬܪܐ ܕܥܡ ܡܚܕܝܬܐ; “the times are set beforehand by God”). Trust in divine Providence, a key theme in Daniel, underpins Aphrahat’s discourse. He proceeds (§2) with a catena of five biblical citations that serve to introduce his theme—“God humbles the arrogant.” Because these citations are strung together without explanation, the reader is left wondering: “What do these biblical verses have to do with the question at hand—on Wars”? This paragraph also forms an inclusion with his closing remarks in §25 (237.13-14) where Aphrahat reiterates his theme: “rather, listen to the words at the beginning of the letter, everyone who is haughty will be humbled.” In §3 “arrogant” biblical characters are brought forth in procession (Cain, Esau, Jacob’s sons, Pharaoh, and so on) to demonstrate that throughout biblical history the divine imperative—the humbling of the arrogant—is always observed.<sup>22</sup> Aphrahat then illustrates his theme with two secular leaders, Nebuchadnezzar and Sennacherib, giving most of his attention to the latter (§4). The biblical text (Isaiah and 2 Kings) witnesses to Sennacherib’s haughtiness and his subsequent humiliation. Forgetting that all human history is under divine guidance brings his downfall.

[7] In §5 Aphrahat offers a summary of Daniel 8, identifying the ram with Darius I, the Persian king, and the goat with Alexander the Great (as does Peshitta MS 7a1). The goat’s defeat of the ram allegorizes Alexander’s defeat of Darius. This allegory becomes a veiled warning to the current Persian king, Shapur II. In §6 Aphrahat addresses the ram directly: “Keep quiet” (196.6: ܐܬܪܐ ܕܥܡ ܡܚܕܝܬܐ), he orders it, as if speaking to Shapur II. He asks how the ram (Shapur II), with its smashed horns, can contend against the fourth

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<sup>22</sup> See R. Murray, “Some Rhetorical Patterns in Early Syriac Literature,” in *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus: Studies in Early Christian Literature and Its Environment, Primarily in the Syrian East*, ed. R. H. Fischer (Chicago: The Lutheran School of Theology, 1977): 109-131.

[illegible]

[9] In §15 Aphrahat offers a *précis* of Dan 7:4-7 (the four beasts), the biblical passage he intends to exegete for the remainder of his treatment of Daniel. He proceeds with a verse by verse study of the beasts in Daniel (§16-§19), linking each beast with its historical counterpart. In §20 he reviews the history of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, reading Daniel and the books of Maccabees together. As his discourse draws to a conclusion, he raises the question: “Who are the holy ones of the Most High” mentioned in Daniel 7 (§21)? He focuses on Isa 5:1-10 and Matt 21:33-43 and, as expected, the Christians turn out to be the “holy ones.” It is within this discussion that Aphrahat repeats that Christ has entrusted his

<sup>23</sup> Esau is associated with Rome in rabbinic literature, see *Gen. Rab.* 65:21.





חבלי ים מלא ומוסר וזר חל חתום מוסר  
אחרי שמו

לפי מה שכתבתי לך

በጋራ ማህበራዊ ጥራት ላይ ለሚገኙ ለውጦች ምላሽ ማስገኘት ይቻላል።

ገጽ ፩ ላይ ስለሚገኝ ጽሑፍ ምላሽ ማቅረብ

අ මුසා ජාලයට මාගේ මුහුණ දෙසා  
මිනිසා බිහි විය

two cases.

Jeremiah says as well: “Let the mighty not boast in their strength, nor the rich in their riches.”

Peshitta (MS 7a1)

ܐܡܪܝܢ ܠܐ ܡܠܝܚܝܬܗ ܕܝܠܗ ܐܡܪܝܢ ܠܐ  
ܡܠܝܚܝܬܗ ܕܝܠܗ

Let not the mighty boast in their strength and let not  
the rich boast in their riches.

There are minor differences in lexical choices: ܡܠܝܬ for ܡܠܝܬܗ and ܡܠܝܬܗ for ܡܠܝܬܗ. In this citation the term ‘boasting’ (ܐܡܪܝܢ) appears, and it appears again in the next citation, a fairly precise citation of 2 Cor 10:17:<sup>31</sup>

Aphrahat (185.11-12)

ܠܝܬܐ ܐܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ  
ܐܡܪܝܢܐ

So also the blessed apostle said: “Whoever boasts, let  
him boast in the Lord.”

Peshitta

ܐܡܪܝܢܐ ܠܝܬܐ ܐܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ

Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.

His final citation, from Ps 37:35-36, is the most complex of the five, since the Hebrew itself is so difficult to interpret. Adding to the complexity is the fact that Aphrahat agrees with the LXX!

Aphrahat (185.12-15)

ܐܝܬܐ ܕܠܥܒܐ ܕܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܝܬܐ  
ܠܐ ܡܠܝܬܐ, ܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܝܬܐ  
ܡܠܝܬܐ

David said: “I saw a wicked one who was arrogant and  
haughty like a Lebanon cedar, but when I passed by he  
was no longer. I looked for him, but did not find him.”

Peshitta Ps 37:35-36

ܐܝܬܐ ܕܠܥܒܐ ܕܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܝܬܐ  
ܠܐ ܡܠܝܬܐ, ܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܝܬܐ  
ܡܠܝܬܐ

Because I saw the wicked who were boasting and  
arrogant like the trees of the forest. But when I passed

<sup>31</sup> Ὁ δὲ καυχώμενος ἐν κυρίῳ καυχάσθω.

by, he was no longer. When I looked for him, I did not find him.

MT Ps 37:35

ראיתי רשע עריץ ומתערה באזרח רענן

I saw the wicked acting violently, exposed<sup>32</sup> like a luxuriant native tree.

LXX Ps 36:35

εἶδον ἄσεβῃ ὑπερψούμενον καὶ ἐπαιρόμενον  
ὥς τὰς κέδρους τοῦ Λιβάνου

I saw the impious exalted and lifted up like the cedars of Lebanon.

Since Aphrahat normally cites the Peshitta, this agreement with the LXX is unexpected. Moreover, the phrase, “was arrogant and haughty” (ܐܬܝܬܐ ܡܬܥܪܐ, against the Peshitta ܐܬܝܬܐ ܡܬܥܪܐ), is at the heart of Aphrahat’s argument and he will appeal to it three more times: in 192.24: ܐܬܝܬܐ ܡܬܥܪܐ; in 204.20: ܐܬܝܬܐ ܡܬܥܪܐ; and in 196.1-2, where the two words are reversed: ܐܬܝܬܐ ܡܬܥܪܐ. The agreement with the LXX does not allow Aphrahat’s departure from the Peshitta to be explained on internal grounds, namely, that the Sage shaped this citation to his subsequent argument. Burkitt suggested that Aphrahat may have acquired the LXX form of Ps 37:35 from a patristic source that had been translated into Syriac, such as Clement of Rome<sup>33</sup> who cites Ps 37:35 (LXX: 36:35) according to the LXX.<sup>34</sup> This seems the most likely explanation for this anomalous agreement. In this case, then, Aphrahat’s departure from the Peshitta can be accounted for on external grounds.

## APHRAHAT’S INTERPRETATION OF DANIEL 8

- [12] Aphrahat begins his consideration of Daniel with chapter 8 (§5). Without warning, he introduces the ram (Dan 8:4; 192.24), focusing on the contest between the ram and the goat. The details

<sup>32</sup> Some commentators would correct the MT. See, for example, H-J. Kraus, *Psalmen* I, BKAT 15/1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1978): 439 and A. Fitzgerald, “The Interchange of L, N, and R in Biblical Hebrew,” *JBL* 97 (1978): 486.

<sup>33</sup> 1 *Clem.* 14.5.

<sup>34</sup> F. C. Burkitt, “The Syriac Psalter,” *JTS* 6 (1905): 289.



ܐܢܝܢ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܝܠܐ ܕܝܠܐ ܕܝܠܐ ܕܝܠܐ ܕܝܠܐ ܕܝܠܐ  
ܕܝܠܐ

I, Daniel, saw in my dream that I was in Susa, the fortress, which is in the province of Elam. I saw in my dream that I was standing along the river<sup>35</sup> Ulai. I raised my eyes and looked and there was a ram standing in front of the river. It had horns; its horns were long. One was longer than the other. The longer one sprouted up later. I saw the ram charging to the west, to the north and to the south and no living creature was standing up to it. Now I was reflecting when a goat came out of the west on the surface of the land without harming the land. As for the goat, a horn was seen between his eyes. It came and reached the ram, which had the horns that I had seen, and which was standing in front of the river. It ran headlong against him. It reached the ram, provoked it, and struck the ram and smashed its two horns.

- [13] Aphrahat begins by describing the ram using the language of his citation of Ps 38:35 in §2: ܐܢܝܢ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܝܠܐ ܕܝܠܐ ܕܝܠܐ ܕܝܠܐ ܕܝܠܐ ܕܝܠܐ (the closest expression similar to this in Peshitta Daniel appears in Dan 8:4: ܐܢܝܢ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܝܠܐ ܕܝܠܐ ܕܝܠܐ ܕܝܠܐ ܕܝܠܐ ܕܝܠܐ “he did whatever he wanted and was exalted”).<sup>36</sup> He then describes the goat as “humbling” the ram (193.2): ܐܢܝܢ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܝܠܐ ܕܝܠܐ ܕܝܠܐ ܕܝܠܐ ܕܝܠܐ ܕܝܠܐ. This term ܐܢܝܢ does not appear in Daniel 8.<sup>37</sup> Aphrahat, in fact, retells Daniel 8 using his language of exalting and humbling (ܐܢܝܢ, ܐܢܝܢ and ܐܢܝܢ) in order to bring his theme into sharp relief. He ignores other details in Dan 8:2-7, such as the different heights of the horns, the movement of the goat over the land, and the horn on the goat’s head. He makes no mention of Daniel’s dreams (ܐܢܝܢ) when he cites Dan 8:2.<sup>38</sup> The elimination of unnecessary detail helps focus the reader’s attention on two items: (1) the directions from which the attacks occur: the ram was

<sup>35</sup> The Peshitta translator may not have recognized the meaning of the Hebrew word *ʾuhl*.

<sup>36</sup> MT: עָשָׂה כְּרָצוֹנוֹ וְהִגְדִּיל

<sup>37</sup> The root ܐܢܝܢ appears in Dan 4:37 (Peshitta 4:34) when Nebuchadnezzar confesses that it is God who humbles (ܐܢܝܢ).

<sup>38</sup> References to Daniel’s dreams appear four times in Peshitta Daniel (Dan 1:17; 7:1; 8:2 [twice]), but never in Aphrahat. The term ܐܢܝܢ appears only once in the *V Dem.* (204.8) where it refers to Nebuchadnezzar’s dream.

charging west, north and south, while the goat comes out of the west, and (2) the subsequent defeat of the ram. Aphrahat's Persian audience would have recognized that the directions of attack and the destruction of the ram aptly suited their historical situation.

- [14] Aphrahat diverges from the text of Daniel 8 by placing the ram in the east, at the gate of Susa, whereas, in Daniel 8, it is Daniel who is in the fortress at Susa while the ram is by the river. This deviation places the attacking ram in a well-known Persian city and is thus more easily associated with the Sasanian rulers.<sup>39</sup> Aphrahat also departs from Dan 8:20-21 when he interprets the goat as Alexander the Great. In Dan 8:21 the horn on the goat's head is a symbol for Alexander, but, because Aphrahat consistently ignores the horn, Alexander is represented by the goat itself in the *V Dem*. Distinguishing between the goat and its horn would only complicate matters and would hardly further his argument that focuses on a leader coming from the west to defeat an aggressive power in the east.

#### APHRAHAT'S INTERPRETATION OF DANIEL 7

- [15] In §6 Aphrahat has the ram of Daniel 8 charge into Daniel 7 to combat with the fourth beast (196.1-2): "With his horns smashed, look, [the ram] exalted itself and acted arrogantly against the fourth beast." Aphrahat recalls the fierce aspect of the fourth beast in a near exact citation of Dan 7:19 and then poses the question (196.7-9): "The ram was not able to stand before the goat, then how will it stand before the powerful beast?" This question is not posed in the book of Daniel—the ram and fourth beast never meet. But the issue is central to Aphrahat's application of this biblical text to his historical moment: how can the ram—now, no longer Darius, but Shapur II—stand against the fourth beast—Rome! (Aphrahat has not yet revealed to his audience that the fourth beast represents Rome; he will gradually do so.) He addresses the ram directly, as if speaking to the Persian shah, enjoining it to quiet down before the might of the fourth beast (196.6 *ܥܠܝܗ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܪܘܡܐ*). Then, focusing on the fourth beast, Aphrahat declares that it will persist until the

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<sup>39</sup> Susa was a rebellious city under Shapur II who would destroy it and then rebuild it, see R. N. Frye, *History of Ancient Iran*, Handbuch der Altertums-wissenschaft 3/7 (München: Beck, 1984): 312.

“Ancient of Days” comes to sit on the throne and the “Son of Man” approaches. He offers a précis of Dan 7:9-14 (196.14-20):

ܐܠܗܝܐ ܕܝܡܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ  
 ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ  
 ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ  
 ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ  
 ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ

For the beast will not be killed until the Ancient of Days sits on the throne. The “Son of Man” will approach him and authority will be given to him. Then that beast will be killed and its carcass will perish, but the kingdom of the “Son of Man” is an eternal kingdom and his rule is forever and ever.

This interpretation of history serves to reassure the audience that the Persian shah is no threat to them since Rome, the fourth beast, will rule until Christ’s return. This Christian interpretation conflates Dan 3:33; 4:31 and 7:14.<sup>40</sup> It is the first of three occasions in which Aphrahat borrows some of Daniel’s apocalyptic language to underscore that, at the end of history, Christ’s kingdom prevails. At the same time, he tempers much of the fantastic imagery in Daniel. The flaming throne with wheels of burning fire (Dan 7:9), upon which the “Ancient of Days” arrives, is ignored entirely; he restricts himself to the arrival of the Son of Man and the destruction of the beast.

[16]

Aphrahat returns to Daniel 7 in §10 and to the question posed in §6: How can the ram (Shapur II) attack the fourth beast (Rome)? “O arrogant and inflated one, let not the boastfulness of your heart lead you astray to say: ‘I will go up against a prosperous land’” (204.20-22). “The goat,” Aphrahat informs his reader, “has now become a powerful beast,” namely, Daniel’s fourth beast (204.25-26). He reviews the four beasts and the kingdoms they represent, adding, this time, that the fourth beast represents the “children of Esau.” Those listeners who recognize this reference to the Romans

<sup>40</sup> Dan 3:33 ܐܠܗܝܐ ܕܝܡܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ His kingdom is an eternal Kingdom. His dominion is forever.

Dan 4:31 ܐܠܗܝܐ ܕܝܡܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ His dominion is an eternal dominion and his kingdom is forever.

Dan 7:14 ܐܠܗܝܐ ܕܝܡܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ His [the “Son of Man’s”] rule is an eternal rule, it does not pass away. His kingdom will never be destroyed.

begin to grasp how Aphrahat intends to apply Daniel 7 to their historical moment. For the unaware, Aphrahat will make this association explicit later in §22. He concludes this treatment of Daniel 7 in §10 (205.16-18) with another apocalyptic scenario similar to that of §6: the kingdom of the children of Esau (=Rome) lasts “forever,” until a leader comes out of the house of Judah (a reference to the second coming of Christ).

[17] In §20 Aphrahat briefly revisits Daniel 7, paraphrasing Dan 7:8, 24 (220.20-25):

For Daniel said: “I was considering the ten horns on the head of the beast, for the ten horns are the ten kings that existed in that period up to Antiochus.” And he said: “A little horn arose from among these ten and three fell before it.”

Aphrahat identifies the smaller horn that uproots the other three with Antiochus IV Epiphanes (as do most Peshitta MSS). Again he avoids the apocalyptic imagery of Daniel by omitting from his citation of Dan 7:8 the last phrase of this verse: “and eyes, like human eyes, were in this horn, and its mouth was speaking arrogantly.”

[18] Aphrahat then details Antiochus’ crimes by reading the books of Maccabees and Daniel together. In graphic detail (224.13: “worms were creeping in and out of him”) he describes Antiochus’ death, borrowing material from 2 Macc 9:1-29. Aphrahat makes explicit the purpose of this gruesome historical summary (224.9-11):

ܠܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ

For judgment came to Antiochus, a judgement from heaven.

This is an allusion to 2 Macc 9:5:<sup>41</sup>

ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ  
ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ

But immediately the Lord God, the Almighty of Israel, anticipated his judgement and struck him.

Thus, Aphrahat illustrates how Antiochus too fell under the maxim of the *V Dem.*—the arrogant are humbled.

[19] Thus, on the basis of Daniel 7, Aphrahat warns the ram, already defeated once by Alexander, to quiet down and not attempt

<sup>41</sup> The Peshitta text is from Walton’s *Polyglotta* and 7a1.



a confrontation with the dreaded fourth beast. But if the ram ignores this instruction and attacks, it will be humbled, just as Antiochus Epiphanes was humbled. Daniel's vision of "the coming of the 'Ancient of Days,'" according to Aphrahat, assures Persian Christians that Rome will endure until the second coming of Christ. They need not fear their Persian rulers.

## APHRAHAT'S INTERPRETATION OF DANIEL 2

- [20] In §11 Aphrahat takes up Daniel 2. The various elements that comprise the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (205.21-24) represent four kingdoms: the Babylonians, the Medes (Darius), the Greeks (Alexander) and, finally (§13), the Romans. He begins his interpretation by noting that Dan 2:38 fulfills Jeremiah's prophecy (205.24-208.3).

ܕܢܒܚܕܢܥܙܐܪ ܕܠܥܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ  
ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ  
ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ  
ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ

Daniel said to Nebuchadnezzar: "You are the head of gold." Why was it called a head of gold if not because the word of Jeremiah was fulfilled with regard to him. For Jeremiah said: "The cup of gold in the hand of the Lord is Babylon. The Lord waters all the earth with its wine."

Aphrahat illustrates how Daniel's reference to Nebuchadnezzar as the "head of gold" fulfills Jeremiah's prophecy referring to the Babylonian king as "the cup of gold" (Jer 51:7). His working assumption is that Daniel's visions fulfill older biblical texts. Aphrahat perceives two more instances where Daniel fulfills OT passages: in §16 he points out how Dan 7:4 fulfills Jer 50:17 (treated below) and in §20 he illustrates how Dan 7:8, 24-25 fulfills (221.8: ܕܡܕܝܢܐ) Ps 79:1-3. This "fulfillment" theme in the *V Dem.* guarantees the veracity of the book of Daniel in that just as Daniel fulfilled earlier biblical texts, so the events announced in the book of Daniel would be fulfilled in Aphrahat's time.

- [21] Of the four kingdoms that Daniel sees, Aphrahat is primarily interested in the fourth, since it represents Rome. In Daniel, the legs and feet of the statue, made of iron and clay, represent the fourth kingdom. Aphrahat begins by referring to Dan 2:33:

Aphrahat (208.25)

ܡܥܡܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ

The legs and the feet of the statue were of iron

Dan 2:33

ܡܥܡܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ  
ܕܐܬܐ

Its legs were of iron, its feet were partly of iron and partly of clay

Initially, Aphrahat ignores the clay portion of the statue. He continues with a partial citation of Dan 2:40 that again focuses on the iron (208.26-209.1):

ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ  
ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ  
ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ

who are the children of Esau, who are strong like iron. It [Dan 2:40] says: “Like iron that shatters and pulverizes everything, so also the fourth kingdom will shatter and crush everything.

Dan 2:40

ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ  
ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ  
ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ

The fourth kingdom will be strong like iron. And like iron that smashes and pulverizes everything, it too will crush and smash everything.

Aphrahat ensures that his audience associates the fourth kingdom with the children of Esau, who represent Rome. By rendering Peshitta ܕܐܬܐ with ܕܐܬܐ, Aphrahat brings the two clauses, ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ and ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܐܬܐ, into closer relationship (harmonization).<sup>42</sup>

[22]

Having established that the fourth kingdom is the iron element in the statue, Aphrahat must tackle the question of the clay toes and feet. According to Daniel, the clay and iron symbolize a divided kingdom (Dan 2:41): one part strong, the other part weak (Dan 2:42: ܕܐܬܐ). But how can Rome, the kingdom that endures until the end of time, have a weak component? Aphrahat will not

<sup>42</sup> It is also possible that the harmonization was already present in his Peshitta exemplar, since harmonization is a common phenomenon in the Peshitta.

allow it! But he must explain the clay. He focuses on Dan 2:43 (209.5-7):

גמחא דמלכא דאדא דאדא דאדא דאדא דאדא  
למא דאדא דאדא דאדא דאדא דאדא

Thus they will be mixed with human seed but they will not cling to one another just as iron does not mix with clay.

While Aphrahat's interpretation here is difficult to follow, what can be deciphered is that the Roman king, because he was elected, *did not* mix himself with "clay," namely, the human seed that derives from a hereditary line of kings. This elected king mixed himself with iron alone. One has the feeling that Aphrahat knows he is on shaky ground so he concludes by trying to clarify, and perhaps insist on, his interpretation (209.21-24):

כזר גמ דאדא דאדא דאדא דאדא דאדא  
דאדא דאדא דאדא דאדא דאדא דאדא  
דאדא דאדא דאדא דאדא דאדא דאדא

Nevertheless, regarding the human seed that is compared to clay, the meaning is thus: when a king was chosen for the kingdom [of Rome], he mixed himself with the root of the kingdom of iron.

Thus, Aphrahat preserves the fourth kingdom, Rome, from the brittleness of clay. To do so, however, he diverges significantly from the apparent meaning of Daniel 2.

[23]

Before leaving Daniel 2, Aphrahat repeats the apocalyptic scenario with which he concluded his interpretation of the four beasts/kingdoms in §6 and §10: at the end of history, the kingdom of the messiah will rule and even the fourth kingdom will yield to it. Aphrahat turns to Dan 2:44:

Aphrahat 209.25-212.3

ממא דאדא דאדא דאדא דאדא דאדא  
דאדא דאדא דאדא דאדא דאדא דאדא  
דאדא דאדא דאדא דאדא דאדא דאדא  
דאדא דאדא דאדא דאדא דאדא דאדא

It [the Bible] declared: "In the days of those kings who are in the kingdom, the God of heaven will establish a kingdom that will never be destroyed and will not pass away." This is the kingdom of Christ the King that will bring the fourth kingdom to an end.

Dan 2:44

ܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ  
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ  
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ  
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ

In the days of those kings, the God of heaven will establish a kingdom that will never be destroyed. The kingdom will not be left for another people, rather, it [the eternal kingdom] will crush and bring to an end all these kingdoms. It will endure forever.

The phrase ܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ (“it will not pass away”) is not in Dan 2:44. But it is precisely this word that Aphrahat needs for his subsequent interpretation that the messiah brings to an end (ܡܠܟܐ) the fourth kingdom. In view of his interpretation, the Sage makes a minor addition to the biblical citation.

[24]

Aphrahat now turns to the destruction of the statue. He cites Dan 2:34 regarding the rock that strikes the statue and pulverizes it. All kingdoms, including Rome, are humbled (212.14) by this rock. He cites part of Dan 2:35 (212.20-23):

ܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ  
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ  
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ

And the rock, which struck the statue and shattered it and with which the whole world was filled, is the kingdom of Christ the King, who brings to an end the kingdom of this world and who reigns forever and ever.

Dan 2:35

ܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ  
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ

The rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and the whole earth was filled with it.

Aphrahat eliminates the description of the rock becoming a huge mountain in keeping with his tendency to temper fantastic imagery in Daniel. Instead, the rock becomes an allegory for the eschatological coming of Christ. He introduces the term “this world” (212.22-23: ܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ) to describe the four kingdoms considered together (212.15-16: ܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܕܐ; “for

## THE CLIMAX OF THE V DEMONSTRATION

- [illegible]

<sup>43</sup> J. Collins, *Daniel*, Hermeneia, ed. F. M. Cross (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993): 297; J. E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC (Dallas, TX, 1989): 161; W. S. Towner, *Daniel*, Interpretation (Atlanta, GA: Knox Press, 1984): 93.

וְהָיָה כִּי יִרְאוּ אֶת הַמַּלְאָכִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהָיָה כִּי יִרְאוּ אֶת הַמַּלְאָכִים הָאֵלֶּה  
 וְהָיָה כִּי יִרְאוּ אֶת הַמַּלְאָכִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהָיָה כִּי יִרְאוּ אֶת הַמַּלְאָכִים הָאֵלֶּה  
 וְהָיָה כִּי יִרְאוּ אֶת הַמַּלְאָכִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהָיָה כִּי יִרְאוּ אֶת הַמַּלְאָכִים הָאֵלֶּה  
 וְהָיָה כִּי יִרְאוּ אֶת הַמַּלְאָכִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהָיָה כִּי יִרְאוּ אֶת הַמַּלְאָכִים הָאֵלֶּה  
 וְהָיָה כִּי יִרְאוּ אֶת הַמַּלְאָכִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהָיָה כִּי יִרְאוּ אֶת הַמַּלְאָכִים הָאֵלֶּה  
 וְהָיָה כִּי יִרְאוּ אֶת הַמַּלְאָכִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהָיָה כִּי יִרְאוּ אֶת הַמַּלְאָכִים הָאֵלֶּה  
 וְהָיָה כִּי יִרְאוּ אֶת הַמַּלְאָכִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהָיָה כִּי יִרְאוּ אֶת הַמַּלְאָכִים הָאֵלֶּה  
 וְהָיָה כִּי יִרְאוּ אֶת הַמַּלְאָכִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהָיָה כִּי יִרְאוּ אֶת הַמַּלְאָכִים הָאֵלֶּה

First of all, in the vision of the statue he [Nebuchadrezzar] was compared to gold, which is better than any other serviceable thing in the world. In the vision of the beasts he was compared to a lion, which, by its strength, is superior over all beasts. Then he was compared to an eagle, which is more splendid than all birds. Then that which was written about him was fulfilled in him. For about him the Lord said: "It is I who put an iron yoke on the neck of all peoples. They will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Now the beasts of the field and the birds of heaven I have given to him to serve him." For when the king was similar to the head of gold, people served him just as [they serve] a king. When he went out into the desert, beasts served him just as [they serve] a lion. When his hair grew long like an eagle, the birds of heaven served him, just as [they serve] an eagle.

But when he became arrogant, and he failed to recognize that the power had been given to him from heaven, the iron yoke was smashed off the people's neck. Then he went out with the beasts and instead of the heart of a king, the heart of a lion was given to him. When he acted arrogantly toward the beasts, the heart of a lion was removed from him and the heart of a bird was given to him. And after he sprouted wings like an eagle, he acted arrogantly toward the birds. Then even his wings were plucked off and a lowly heart was given to him. But when he recognized that the Almighty is powerful in the human kingdom and that the Almighty gives it [authority] to whomever he wishes, then he praised God as a person.

The Sage reviews the images in Daniel that are applied to Nebuchadrezzar. He returns to Dan 2:28 where Nebuchadrezzar is

symbolized by the head of gold and to Dan 7:4 where he is symbolized by the lion and eagle. (For this reason Aphrahat needed to demonstrate that the first beast represents Nebuchadrezzar.) He underscores the fact that each image dominates over the other members of its class: gold over all useful things on earth, the lion over other wild animals, and the eagle over other birds. He then offers a biblical citation (closest to Jer 28:14) that he declares fulfilled (ܐܬܬܬܝܠܡܕ) in Daniel's visions. As a "head of gold," people served Nebuchadrezzar. As a lion, he "went out to the desert" and beasts served him. When "his hair grew long like an eagle," birds served him. Aphrahat interprets each metamorphosis as an illustration of the authority that God gave Nebuchadrezzar on earth.

[27] The course of events changes dramatically when Nebuchadnezzar becomes arrogant and fails to recognize divine authority. The phrase ܠܐ ܕܡܝܬܐܪܐܝܬܐ ("he became arrogant") is borrowed from Daniel's speech to King Belshazzar where Daniel recalls Nebuchadrezzar's arrogance (Dan 5:20: ܠܐ ܕܡܝܬܐܪܐܝܬܐ ܡܕܢܐ) and then launches the same charge at Belshazzar (Dan 5:23: ܠܐ ܕܡܝܬܐܪܐܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ; "you have acted arrogantly against the Lord of heaven"). Here Aphrahat illustrates how the Bible turned the arrogant Nebuchadnezzar into an example for arrogant leaders everywhere. The iron yoke on the neck of the people is smashed. His kingly heart is exchanged for a lion's heart, but, because he acts arrogantly against the beasts, he loses his lion's heart and receives a bird's heart. He even sprouts wings, only to have them torn off for acting arrogantly. Finally, Nebuchadnezzar is given a lowly heart. The language of Daniel 4 now dominates the remainder of this section. Dan 7:4 mentions that the first beast received a human heart. The "lowliness" of this heart is an allusion to the refrain in Peshitta Dan 4:14, 22, 29, that God can appoint over the world even the lowest of mortals (ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ).<sup>44</sup> Now Nebuchadnezzar recognizes the truth of Dan 4:29: "that God Almighty is sovereign in the realm of mortals and that to

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<sup>44</sup> This phrase appears only once in the MT (Dan 4:17). Peshitta Dan 4:22.29 has an addition that can be explained as a harmonization. See R. A. Taylor, *The Peshitta of Daniel*, MPIL 7 (Leiden, 1994): 138.





“beasts of the field” are often combined with the “birds of heaven,” especially in Jeremiah (see Jer 12:9; 15:3; 16:4; 19:7 and so on). Aphrahat’s conflation of Jer 28:14 with these other instances is practically unnoticeable and once again illustrates how he shapes the biblical citation to his homiletic needs.

- [29] Aphrahat saw in the book of Daniel a view of history that confirmed his hope that God would grant success to the recently converted Roman emperor in a campaign against Shapur II. The succession of kingdoms in Daniel enjoyed divine sanction and the fourth kingdom, Rome, would endure until Christ’s second coming. A corollary to this view of history was Aphrahat’s conviction that arrogant leaders who humbly came to recognize this divine plan for history, such as Nebuchadnezzar, would live to praise God, while those who did not, such as Antiochus IV Epiphanes, would become food for worms. The truth of Daniel’s visions was guaranteed by the fact that they fulfilled several passages from the Prophets and Psalms. Thus Aphrahat’s audience could expect that Daniel’s interpretation of history would be realized in their own days. His Christian audience had nothing to fear from their Persian rulers.

## CONCLUSION

- [30] Specific aspects of Aphrahat’s exegesis have come into sharp relief. The Sage recasts Daniel into the thematic terminology of his discourse (arrogance, boasting, and humbling) with the result that the biblical text better illustrates his themes. He avoids the fantastic imagery of Daniel’s apocalypticism. Human leaders are not afforded the apocalyptic powers ascribed to them in Daniel. They are mortals who pass away at the second coming of Christ. Even the apocalyptic description of the arrival of the “Ancient of Days” and the “Son of Man” is attenuated.

- [31] When citing the Bible, Aphrahat can adapt the citation to the argument he intends to develop. These adjustments to the biblical text do not witness to a memory lapse, but rather to his genius. Particularly instructive here is his citation of Dan 2:44. Because he notes the locations of his citations of Daniel 2 in relation to one another within the biblical text, it seems probable that he was, in fact, looking at a Peshitta MS as he wrote this Demonstration. But the availability of an accurate Peshitta reading did not prevent him



from adjusting a particular citation to better illustrate his interpretation.

[32] Aphrahat concludes his discourse with a reflection on the nature of biblical exegesis in which he observes the limits of the human mind to interpret the word of God. The Bible always retains its surplus of meaning (§25) and Aphrahat, the exegete, knows that he is dealing with a “classic” (borrowing David Tracy’s term<sup>47</sup>):

These things that I have written to you, my friend (that which is written in Daniel), I have not brought [ܡܠܝܬܐ] to a conclusion [ܡܠܝܬܐ], but rather to this point from a conclusion [ܡܠܝܬܐ]. If someone wants to quarrel with them, speak to him thus: These words are not ended [ܡܠܝܬܐ ܡܠܝܬܐ; i.e., this is not the final word] because the word of God is limitless [ܡܠܝܬܐ ܡܠܝܬܐ] and, indeed, without end [ܡܠܝܬܐ ܡܠܝܬܐ]. For the foolish one says: “To this point the words [i.e. scripture] arrive [ܡܠܝܬܐ], there is nothing more to be added to it or subtracted from it.” But the wealth of God cannot be reckoned or comprehended [ܡܠܝܬܐ ܡܠܝܬܐ]. If you take some water from the sea, its loss goes unnoticed. If you lift out sand from the seashore, its quantity is not diminished. If you try to count the stars of heaven, you will not live to the end of it [ܡܠܝܬܐ]. If, from a blaze, you set a fire, the blaze is not lessened. If you take part of Christ’s spirit, Christ does not come to lack something. Even though Christ dwells in you, Christ is not fully in you. Even though the sun enters in the windows of your house, the entire sun does not come [ܡܠܝܬܐ] inside. These things that I have recounted to you are created in the word of God. Because of this, you should know that no one has arrived [ܡܠܝܬܐ] at the word of God, no one arrives [ܡܠܝܬܐ] at its end [ܡܠܝܬܐ]. Therefore have no quarrel concerning this by saying, “this is it,” or “it is sufficient.”

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<sup>47</sup> D. Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981): 99-299.

The final words of the *V Dem.* offer a play on two Syriac roots— and —that underscores the Sage's understanding of exegesis: though he has arrived at the conclusion of his discourse, which is finite, no one arrives at a final conclusion on the infinite word of God. No interpretation is ever "sufficient." Biblical exegesis is just a bit of sunlight that gleams through our windows to illuminate daily life. The word of God remains a vast ocean of sand and mortals can handle but a few pebbles at a time.

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