EXCERPTS FROM ABRAHAM BAR HIYYA'S INTERPRETATION OF DANIEL 11
PRELIMINARY TRANSLATION[1] BY Hannu Töyrylä / 17 Aug 2010

At this time the Greek Kingdom ruled over kingdoms of Medea and Persia and most other kingdoms in the days of Alexander, but his kingdom only lasted for 12 years, and after his death it was divided. All his commanders rebelled against his mother and his son Nicanor, and each of them ruled in his own area, as it is written "when he rises, his kingdom shall be broken, and shall be divided to the four winds of heaven" (Dan. 11:4). As it says that "when he rises" we see that his days will not be long, but his kingdom will be shattered immediately when he rises. As it says "not to his posterity, no according to his dominion" (ibid.) we see that those that rule after him will not be comparable to his power. (MM 93:16 – 22)[2]

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King of the South [in Dan. 11:5] is the king of Alexandria, which is located to the south of Macedonia, Alexander's birthplace. After him, there ruled in Alexandria 8 kings, all named Ptolemy [בטלמיוס] which is Talmi [תלמי] in the Holy Language, like the man whom Alexander appointed as he went to war with the king of Babel.

And the one of [Alexander's] commanders that is called the king of the north in the second verse, that is the prince of the army appointed over Macedonia and Rome, together with [Alexander's] mother and son, rebelled against them and took the kingdom from them. (MM 93:25 – 94:4)

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The kingdom of Ptolemys lasted in Alexandria for 280 years, and after them ruled a woman called Cleopatra [קליאופטרה]. In those days there ruled many kings in Rome and in Macedonia until the kingdom of Julius [יוליוש] who is called Caesar [קיסר]. In the days of Augustus [אגושטוש] and Cleopatra, the two kingdoms were united as it is written "at the end of years they shall join themselves together; and the daughter of the king of the south shall come to the king of the north to make an agreement" (Dan. 11:6). (MM 94:7 - 11)

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1 This translation is preliminary and presented merely to allow the reader of the main article to get a general picture of how historical information is presented and used in *Megillat ha-Megalleh.* The footnotes cover mainly aspects that are necessary to the understanding of the text. Comments to the historical information itself will be given in my thesis.

2 References to Megillat ha-Megalleh (MM) are to the Berlin edition, eds. Guttmann and Posnanski, Mekize Nirdamim. References are to a page and a row.

It says “to make an agreement” as Cleopatra expected to be married to the Caesar, but he betrayed her, and killed her and all her escort, as it is written “she shall be given up, and they that brought her, and he that begot her, and he that obtained her in those times” (Dan. 11:6). After her death there were wars between the Caesar of Rome and the people of the land of Egypt and Alexandria, for years and days, and finally the land ended under the rule of the king of Rome which is the king of North. (MM 94:13 - 17).

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All these verses [Dan. 11:8-10] talk about the wars between the Greeks and the Romans in those days, that when Rome was ruled by the kings each of which was called Caesar. All these wars flooded over the Land of Israel, causing harm to it, and therefore it is proper to mention them, as it is written “the king of the south will be embittered, and go to war with him against the king of the north, who will raise a great multitude, and it will be given to him” (Dan. 11:11). The king of the north is surely the king of Rome, and the king of the South is the king of Babel, which too is south from the land of Edom, and the subsequent verses in this prophecy call the king of Babel king of south.

Because it is said here “go to war with him against the king of the north”,[3] we have said that the king of the south is the king of Babel that went to help the troops of Egypt, which is also called king of south, and they allied themselves against the king of the north. Therefore it is said “go to war with him against the king of the north.” And they prevailed against him and had a victory over him, as it is written “the multitude shall be carried away, his heart lifted up, and he will cast down myriads, but he shall not prevail” (Dan. 11:12).

These are the wars between Caesar the king of Rome and Shapur the king of Babel towards the end of the Hasmonean kingdom and at the time of Herodes, and at the end Caesar prevailed in these wars, as it is written “the king of the north shall again raise a multitude, greater than the previous one” (Dan. 11:13) and “in those days many shall stand up against the king of the south” (Dan. 11:14). As if to say that the troops of the king of the north stood up strong against the king of the south. And it is said “the impudent among your people shall lift themselves up to establish a vision, but they will stumble” (Dan. 11:14), these are the disciples of Jeshu, *Hatalui*,[4] the impudent ones who lifted hand on high to establish a false vision and a prophecy of lies, but they all fell and were killed by the sword or hanging.

Immediately after their [i.e. Jesus' disciples] death the evil Vespasian and Titus rose against Jerusalem and conquered it, as it is written “the king of the north shall come, cast up a mound, and conquer the well-fortified city” (Dan. 11:15). The well-fortified city is Jerusalem, the holy city. The verse says “the arms of the south will not stand” (ibid.) on the troops of Babel which had no power to help the Land of

3 Bar Hiyya is making use of the fact that the Hebrew text has the word עם 'with' twice in “נלחם עמו עם מלך הצפון” as if to say “fought with him with [i.e. against] the king of the north.

4 Literally, the hanged one. See E. ben Yehuda, Dictionary and Thesaurus of the Hebrew Language, vol. VIII p. 7764 on examples of this codename for Jesus. From these examples it appears that this usage is medieval.

Israel. And the verse “the one who comes shall do as he pleases, none shall stand before him, and the beauteous land will be destroyed by his hand” (Dan. 11:16). The beauteous land is Jerusalem, which he destroyed, and whose all inhabitants he sent to exile. It is said “he shall set his face to come with the strength of whole his kingdom, and the upright with him” (Dan. 11: 17), these are the remainder of the sages and the Sanhedrin, and the whole exile of the second temple, the upright who were dispersed by his hand to all the lands.

And these two nations, the northern and the southern, were idolatrous.

Around 220 years after the destruction [of the Temple] the Roman king Constantine [קוסטנטין] increased error upon error and came to believe in the blemished words of disciples of the evil Jesus, after that his kingdom had become strong and he had built the city called Constantina [קוסטנטינה] in his name. [This city] is amongst lakes and rivers as it is said “he shall set his face upon isles and take many” (Dan. 11:18). The construction of Constantina is similar to isles.

The scriptures continue with “a captain shall cause the his shame to cease, [yet] his shame shall return to him” (Dan 11:18) [5]. This captain is Constantine, who exchanged a shame to another. And from that time onwards the kingdom of Edom was divided into two kingdoms, the kingdom of Rome and the kingdom of Constantine: A kingdom for the Romans and a kingdom for the Greeks. Afterwards it was further divided to some kingdoms. The scriptures allude to all these matters, because of the harsh decrees placed on Israel in the time of this evil Caesar, his mother and all his people in their entry into the error of *Hatalui*.

Approximately 340 years after that these evil people adopted this error, the wicked M*eshugga*[6] rebelled in the lands of Ishmael, conducted himself in this evil manner, and exchanged error with an error, shame with a shame. On him it is written “in his place shall stand a despised person, upon whom the glory of royalty had not been given. He shall come in peace, and take the kingdom by slipperiness.” (Dan. 11:21) The scriptures mention his deeds because of the many evils that fell upon Israel in his days. This *despised* is the *Meshugga* that was despised by his own people and called in their language Muhammad, which has meanings of 'desirable' and 'praise' in the language of Ishmael.[7] The verse changed his name to be more appropriate by calling him *despised*, as it had done with the Pharaoh by

5 Note the problematic text in the original (see BDB sv, etc). TODO: Check later!!!!

6 Literally, the madman. On the use of this word for Muhammad, see Goshen-Gottstein, Syntax and Vocabulary of Medieval Hebrew, Jerusalem 2006, p. 416 - 417. It appears, that the Jews have picked up an Arabic word, meaning 'the brave', making use of the different meaning of the word in Hebrew. According to Goshen-Gottstein, the first to use the word for Muhammad was Sherira Gaon, and probably the most famous was Maimonides, in his Letter to Yemen.
See also J. Kafih in his edition of Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon, Iggerot, Jerusalem 5744, p. 22. Kafih says in a footnote that משוגע is a common epithet in the East for Muhammad, and argues that this is not an allusion to epilepsy, as had been claimed by 'the one who wrote *words of old women*', but used for anyone inclined to prophecy. In support for this Kafih presents evidence from the Hebrew Bible. The reference to old wives' tales could be to al-Farabi, who is known to have used this expression, but this is just a guess.

7 TODO: Where is the logic here? Despised versus praise. Is bar Hiyya thinking of some special meanings of hamud and shevah. Covetuous? Gain? NOTE: he then says that the scriptures changed the name to be more appropriate

calling him Hofra (Jer. 44:30) … [Here] it says 'despised and to whom the glory of royalty had not been given", as he was not from the nobility of his country, not eligible for a royal position, and he obtained the kingdom by slipperiness, by much fraud and by word-splitting.[8]

And "the arms of the flood" (Dan. 11:22) are the Arabic and Hagaric troops which gathered against him, fought with him, flooded against him and were victorious against him, until they broke his teeth, beat his jaws and wounded him. [But] finally he prevailed over them, flooded them, and the were shattered before him, as it is written "the arms of the flood shall be swept away before him, and broken" (Dan. 11:22).

It also says "prince of the covenant" regarding the Jews who lived in the surroundings of his city. Many people of the Hagarites gathered (against Muhammad's people?) and converted to Judaism, and they ruled in those days in many villages and towns, that is in more than 12 towns in the surroundings of the town of the despised. When the Ishmaelite troops went to war against the despised *Meshuggeh*, all the Jews of this province together with the proselytes accompanied them, besieging and holding the gates of the city for many days. But at the end he prevailed and conquered their land and devastated it, as it is written "shall be swept away before him, and broken" (Dan. 11:22). These are the troops of Ishmael and prince of the covenant are the Israelites accompanying them.

After that he had prevailed over the troops that had besieged him, many of his people joined him, and from that time his power increased greatly as it is written "after the joining together with him, he will make fraud, and rise and become great with a little nation" (Dan. 11:23). It says "make fraud" because of the degradation, as he built his religion with fraud and falsehood. It further says "become great with a small nation" because the Arabs and the Ishmaelites were very few in those days, as compared to the nations that were their enemies.

In the beginning of their kingdom, directly after the death of the despised one, the evil person who was his deputy, rose against the land of Israel and conquered it from Edom, as it is written "in the security and fatness of the city, he will come and do what his ancestors have not done: spoil and plunder" (Dan. 11:24). After taking the land of Israel, his armies moved to the land of Babel in the days of his evil companions that ruled after him, and fought great wars against the king of Persia. The Persian king met them with a very powerful army, consisting according to their words of four thousand elephants, and on each of the elephants forty men were riding wearing a military outfit, aside of the horses, mules and the chariots without counting. He fought against the Ishmaelites that came against him, but was beaten and fleed to the land of Ashur and died there. The Ishmalite troops conquered all the lands he had ruled.

8 The verse says that the kingdom was taken by חלקלקות (*halaklakot)* , the meaning of which is not very clear. Bar Hiyya seems here to connect this expression to the word חליקה which is not complete clear to me either. Perhaps some vernacular expression lies behind his interpretation here?
Millas-Vallicrosa translates bar Hiyya here 'amb afalcs, amb moltes mentides' i.e. through flattery and many lies. Saadia had translated חלקלקות to Arabic as אלחילה 'stratagem', implying malice (Alobaidi p. 641), Yefet ben Eli as flattery or trickery (Angels and Fire, p. 188.) I have not seen the Arabic text of Yefet ben Eli.

(MM 94:21 – 97:3)

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The whole prophecy talks about two wicked kingdoms, Edom and Ishmael, that have dominated in the land of Israel in turns. When one kingdom has vanished from this land, the other has dominated it instead. It is on them that [the scripture] says "both kings have their hearts set on evil" (Dan. 11:27), they bring evil to Israel and oppress them. "They shall speak lies at one table" (ibid.) because both of them are inclined towards false messengers, an unjust law and futile words. "They will not succeed", as the Holy One, blessed be He, will not let them succeed but will destroy them and their names shall be lost. "There remains still time for the appointed period (*moed)*" (ibid.). This means the end of the first *moed* out of the two and a half, that are mentioned at the end of the prophecy. This [first] *moed* began from the destruction of the Second Temple and ended when the land of Israel went from the hands of Edom to the hands of Ishmael. This is [the meaning of] "both kings have their hearts set on evil", both the king that had the land in his hands and the king that took the land to his hands.

The beginning of the second *moed* is the beginning of the kingdom of Ishmael. Therefore [the scripture] returns to describe the manner of the kingdom of Ishmael from its beginning, as it is written "he shall return to his land with great riches, his heart on the holy covenant, and he will do and return to his country" (Dan. 11:28). These are the kings of Ishmael, that returned to their lands after conquering the lands of Israel and Babel, and established their royal throne in their countries which are Mesha and Mekhoza.[9] "Their hearts[10] on the holy covenant", could refer to the evil of their expelling the Israelites from the land of the Hagarites and not letting any Jews to dwell there. It could also refer to the better, when during a short period they established their royal throne in Damascus, and all that time that their kingdom was in Damascus, they were not so wicked towards Israel.

The verse says "at the appointed time (*moed*) he shall return and come to the south" (Dan. 11:29) to the royal throne that they later established in Babel, transferring it from Damascus and Mesha, during the rule of the sons of Abbas, after 130 years of the kingdom of the despised. And the scripture says "the first times are not like the latter times" (ibid.), as the kingdom in Babel does not act in the manner of the earlier time when they conquered Babel from the Persians, or in the later times when it will be taken from them at the end of the second *moed*.[11]

And it says "the nomads[12] of Kittim shall come against him and he shall be stricken", this refers to remote people living in the desert that had adopted this error. From this time on their kingdom

9 מישא ומחוזה Mecca and Hejaz? Millas Vallicrosa in his translation p. 159. See also Tsurat ha-Aretz, ed. Münster, p. 40 where bar Hiyya places Mesha in the second *aqlim* together with the desert of Paran, the Sea of Reeds, and the Nile.

10 Bar Hiyya himself uses plural here.

11 At this point bar Hiyya is extending his discourse from purely historical into a speculation of the future based on the prophecy.

12 See Millas-Vallicrosa, Llibre Revelador p. 160, see also BDB p. 850

diminished and lost power. We have seen that from the time of the kingdom of the sons of Abbas, relatives of the despised *Meshugga,* the kingdom of Ishmael was split in two and later into several kingdoms. At the same time, their hatred towards Israel increased. As it is written "he shall be stricken and return and be angry towards the hole covenant" (Dan. 11:30), from the time that they were weakened, they have crushed and oppressed Israel and stirred up hatred towards it. (MM 97:11 – 98:9)

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"Arms shall stand" (Dan. 11:31), arms of those who have forsaken the holy covenant will rise and "profane the temple" (ibid.). These are the armies of the evil Edom, that conquered the land of Israel from the kings of Ishmael, like it is in their hands today. (MM 98:12 - 15)