

## The Four Empires of the Book of Daniel.

By PROFESSOR A. VAN HOONACKER, D.D., LOUVAIN.

IN the description of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar in chap. 2, and in that of the vision of Daniel in chap. 7, the Book of Daniel speaks of four empires which succeeded one another. The identification of these four empires has greatly exercised the sagacity of commentators. The problem, we think, is to be formulated in other terms to-day than it was in former times. And this because an essential point, which has been the subject of much controversy, may be considered as definitively settled, without, however, the difficulties inherent in this solution having been sufficiently elucidated.

In chap. 2 the first of the four empires is that of Nebuchadnezzar. The author himself declares this in 2<sup>38</sup>: 'Thou art this head of gold.' In the same manner, in chap. 7, the first of the four animals which arise from the sea, namely, the lion with the wings of a vulture, symbolizes Nebuchadnezzar (Driver, *Daniel*, p. 81).

A question which has occasioned much difficulty, is that of the identification of the fourth empire. But, alike from the examination of chaps. 2 and 7 by themselves, and by comparison with the data of other parts of the Book of Daniel, we consider it as absolutely certain that the fourth empire is that of Alexander and his successors. It is possible that there are some who are not convinced of this. We can but refer our readers to the luminous demonstration which Driver has given of the truth of this interpretation in his commentary (p. 94 ff.).

Nevertheless, we do not believe that the problem is completely solved in this manner. The first empire being without doubt that of Nebuchadnezzar, the fourth that of Alexander and his successors; the question is, How are we to identify the second and the third empires? The second, we are told, cannot be any other than that of the Medes, the third that of the Persians, which, according to the Book of Daniel, should be distinguished as two successive empires (Driver, *l.c.* p. 29 and p. 100 f.). This distinction between the Median and the Persian empires may be inferred, it is said, from the passages where Darius the Mede, after the fall of Bel-

shazzar, and before Cyrus, appears and acts as the supreme king (5<sup>13</sup> 6<sup>1</sup> 2. 15. 25. 26). *Darius the Mede* (cf. 9<sup>1</sup> 11<sup>1</sup>) is succeeded by *Cyrus the Persian* (6<sup>28</sup>), or *the king of the Persians* (10<sup>1</sup>). Another argument is taken from the two horns of the ram (8<sup>3</sup>), the higher of which, symbolizing Cyrus and his successors, raises itself after the smaller one, which symbolizes Darius the Mede.—We need not occupy ourselves here with the difficulty which results from these passages in regard to history, a difficulty attaching in any case to the personality and reign of Darius the Mede.

If there were not certain other data to be considered which also essentially concern the question of the identification of the second and the third empires, one could without doubt find in the passages indicated a *sufficient* foundation for their identification with the supposed empires of the Medes and the Persians. But, as we shall see, there are other data which do not seem to be in harmony with this theory. Before bringing them forward, we have to answer an objection and to ask ourselves if the distinction between the Medes and the Persians in the Book of Daniel is not perhaps of such a nature as to amount to a direct and positive demonstration of the interpretation we are about to oppose? Under what conditions does the succession of Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian present itself?

In order to answer this question, we must not lose sight of the various passages in which the domination of the Medes and the Persians is explicitly represented as simultaneous, as one and the same political *régime* in which Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian, or the king of the Persians, precede and succeed each other. Thus in 5<sup>28</sup> the kingdom of Belshazzar is given to the *Medes and Persians*; the last word of the prophetic inscription on the wall (וּפְרָסִים = פרס, 5<sup>25</sup>. 28), already contained, as Driver allows (*l.c.* p. 69), an allusion to the name of the *Persians*, who are accordingly thought of as the immediate heirs, along with the Medes, of the kingdom of Belshazzar. During the very reign of Darius it is understood (6<sup>9</sup>) that the decrees in force are those of *the*

*Medes and the Persians*; see also 6<sup>13</sup>. 16. In chap. 8 it is the empire of the *Medes and Persians* (v.<sup>20</sup>), which is represented by one animal alone, the ram with two horns, as opposed to the he-goat, which represents the empire of Alexander. Without doubt, from the manner in which the author insists on the relation existing between the two horns of the ram, we may conclude that he has in view here a distinction and a succession which are of importance to him. Yet it is not the less evident that for him the Medo-Persian is one and the same empire. We shall have to speak immediately of the distinction signified by the two horns of the ram.

These remarks, let us repeat, do not tend to demonstrate by themselves that the second empire could not be that of Darius the Mede, and the third that of Cyrus. Nothing, in fact, proves that in the Book of Daniel the empires which succeed one another necessarily represent the successive hegemony of different peoples or political *régimes*. But this is precisely the conclusion which we derive from the observations which we have just made. Whether or not the second empire is that of Darius the Mede, it is supposed, according to the Book of Daniel itself, that already under Darius the Persians as a people enjoyed the hegemony conjointly with the Medes. The succession signified by the two horns of the ram in chap. 8 refers only to the two elements which succeeded each other on the throne under the same monarchy. The ram has a smaller horn and a bigger one, and the latter appeared in the second place; the smaller horn is Darius, who alone was to represent the *Median element* on the throne; the higher horn Cyrus and the series of kings of *Persian* origin who followed him. But the ram is represented with its two horns together, even at the moment of its fight against the he-goat (the Alexandrian empire), because these reigns, first of Darius the Mede, then of Cyrus and his *Persian* successors, are conceived as belonging to the same *Medo-Persian* empire.

We have thus determined, we hope, the conditions under which, according to the Book of Daniel, Cyrus the Persian succeeds Darius the Mede. By this fact alone we consider we have shown that the identification of the second and the third empires with that of Darius the Mede and that of Cyrus, does not impose itself as positively and directly demonstrated, although we

have not as yet established its want of harmony with the data of the Book of Daniel. This identification should not be accepted unless it should prove impossible to propound another, in which the succession presents itself under the same conditions as that of Darius and Cyrus, and which is at the same time more in harmony with the indications which our book furnishes concerning the character of the two empires in question. According to the Book of Daniel, the second and the third empires, which took their place between that of Nebuchadnezzar and that of Alexander, cannot *in any case* be distinguished as belonging to successive monarchies differing in nationality from one another; because, even for the author of our book, there was, between the Babylonian and the Grecian empires, only one empire in the sense indicated, which he knows as that of the Medo-Persians. It is even to be remarked that in 9<sup>1</sup> Darius the Mede is presented as ruling over the kingdom of the Chaldæans!

Is the second empire intended by Daniel in reality that of Darius? Let us consider how Daniel characterizes the second empire. (1) In the interpretation of the different parts of the statue, it is said (2<sup>39</sup>) that after Nebuchadnezzar there will rise another kingdom *inferior to him* (ארע טנך, *Keré*). (2) In chap. 7 the second empire is represented under the image of a bear, which raised itself up on one side, and which had three ribs in its mouth, between its teeth; and they said thus unto it: 'Arise, devour much flesh!'—It seems evident, in a general way, that the second empire has not the sympathies of our author; and this already could only with difficulty be reconciled with his attitude towards Darius the Mede, the benefactor and disinterested protector of Daniel (chap. 6).

But let us consider more attentively the distinctive traits of the second empire, and see if these can be applied to the empire of Darius. The two distinctive traits which we have discovered in chaps. 2 and 7 do not in any way, as it seems to us, apply to Darius the Mede. (1) The empire of Darius was founded on the ruins of the Chaldæan empire. It should be noted here already that in the description of the statue in chap. 2 it is only in view of the contrast between the first and the second empires that the former is symbolized by gold, the latter by silver; for, in any case, the third empire, though symbolized by brass,

is represented as superior to the second. If Nebuchadnezzar is taken as the personification of the Chaldæan empire, it is not intelligible why the empire which succeeded the latter, and which was that of the conquerors of Babylon, should have been characterized as *inferior to Nebuchadnezzar*. Besides, in chap. 6, the kingdom of Darius is described as very vast and perfectly organized (vv.<sup>2f.</sup> 25). In chap. 8 the ram which represents the Medo-Persian empire appears endowed with a power which nothing can resist (v.<sup>4</sup>). It is true that the ram has two horns, and that the smaller one symbolizes the reign of Darius; but it is not in comparison with the Chaldæan empire, it is in comparison with the series of Persian kings, that the first horn of the ram appears as the smaller; and this circumstance does not signify an inferior power or a lesser extension of the kingdom of Darius, but the dynastic inferiority of the Medan element relatively to the Persian element in the series of kings who reigned over the Medo-Persian empire. Any other interpretation would be contrary to the data of the Book of Daniel: Cyrus is here represented (6<sup>28</sup>) simply as a successor of Darius, whose power extended itself over all people, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth (6<sup>25</sup>). (2) The other trait, which serves to characterize the second empire in chap. 7, does not apply any better to Darius the Mede. Driver states that what is intended by the image of the bear, half standing, cannot be said to be altogether clear. Perhaps, he says, on the whole, the most probable view is that the trait is intended to indicate the animal's aggressiveness. This seems to us to be hardly in accordance with the context, since we hear people exciting the animal by saying unto it: 'Arise! . . .'; a bear holding itself in the attitude of aggressiveness would have had no need of being aroused to devour much flesh. We infer from this detail that in presenting the bear to us as 'standing upon one side,' the author meant us to understand that it was *lying on the other*; in other words, that it was standing *only* on one side. It is therefore an attitude of sloth which is attributed to the bear which represents the second empire. And this attitude corresponds to another element of the description; the bear *holds in its mouth three ribs*; they tell it to arise in order to *devour much flesh*: it is an animal which knows nothing except how to satisfy its voracious appetite. These

traits, however, it is needless to say, do not appear at all to suit Darius the Mede and the empire founded by him. The Medes and the Persians combined, are, according to Daniel, the conquerors of Babylon; it could not, therefore, be a bear standing on one side in the attitude of indolence, which was the symbol best suited to the empire under Darius the Mede. Nor is it evident why voracity should have been a mark of this empire rather than of the others which come under consideration in the Book of Daniel.

It is time to come to the interpretation which seems to us to suit best all the data of the problem. We think that *the first empire* must be understood, not as the Chaldæan empire in its whole line of history, but in a more restricted manner, as standing for *the reign of Nebuchadnezzar*. The words employed in the text to designate the first empire are not in any way opposed to this view, rather the contrary: 'Thou art the head of gold,' says Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar; 'after thee shall rise up another kingdom inferior to thee' (2<sup>38f.</sup>). Again, in 7<sup>4</sup>, in the description of the first animal, several authors, whose opinion Driver shows himself disposed to accept, recognize an allusion to certain *personal* traits of the life of Nebuchadnezzar, namely, to the famous story of his mental derangement and of his cure in chap. 4. The wings of the animal are plucked off (7<sup>4</sup>); this is Nebuchadnezzar deprived of his reason; when he regained it and gave glory to God (4<sup>31ff.</sup>), he was delivered from the heart of a beast by which he had been afflicted (5<sup>21</sup>) and he received a heart of man (7<sup>4</sup>). The lion with the wings of a vulture as an emblem, not of the empire of Babylon in general, but of Nebuchadnezzar in particular, recalls the figures under which this same prince had been designed, as the lion (Jer 49<sup>19</sup>), as the vulture (Jer 49<sup>22</sup>, Ezk 17<sup>8, 12</sup>).

Assuming that the first empire is in a special manner that of Nebuchadnezzar, would there be any serious difficulty in admitting that *the second* is that of *Belshazzar*? No doubt Belshazzar succeeds Nebuchadnezzar, whose son he is even called, as the sovereign of the same Chaldæan empire. But we have already said that upon any hypothesis we meet with a difficulty, or rather with a case, of the same nature. According to the Book of Daniel, Cyrus himself succeeds Darius (who rules over the kingdom of the Chaldæans! 9<sup>1</sup>) as sovereign over the same empire. On the

other hand, the characteristic traits of the second empire, which could scarcely be applied to Darius, are perfectly suitable to Belshazzar. (1) The second empire is *inferior to Nebuchadnezzar*; it was, indeed, under Belshazzar that the Medo-Persians destroyed the Chaldæan empire and attained to the hegemony. We call special attention to 5<sup>18ff.</sup>, where Belshazzar is explicitly put in contrast with Nebuchadnezzar. (2) The emblem of the bear, *standing half upright*, indolent, satisfying its voracious appetite, applies very well to the Belshazzar of the Book of Daniel. Just as in the description of the first animal allusion is made to personal facts of the life of Nebuchadnezzar, so also could the image of the indolent and voracious bear be interpreted as an allusion to the story of the banquet which marked the end of the reign of Belshazzar (chap. 5).

The *third empire* represented in chap. 7 by the leopard with four wings and four heads (v.<sup>6</sup>), would be that of the *Medo-Persians*, over which reigned, in the first place, Darius the Mede, then Cyrus and his Persian successors. This identification is commended afresh by an attentive examination of the text. Already in 2<sup>39</sup> the author had contented himself with mentioning the second empire of silver, without speaking of its power, setting forth only its inferiority as compared with Nebuchadnezzar; then passing to the third empire *he had insisted upon its power extending itself over all the world* (v.<sup>39b</sup>). Now, in 7<sup>5, 6</sup>, we notice the same fact: of the power of the second empire there is no question; but for the third the author adds that *dominion was given to it*. This parallel shows us that it is with intention that the author abstains from mentioning the power of the second empire, and that he mentions it for the third. But the judgment implied in such an attitude cannot be understood on his part, unless we suppose that for him the second empire was that of Belshazzar which ended in an orgie, and *the third that which was founded by Darius the Mede*. For it is evident from chap. 6 that the author considered the empire which the conquerors of Babylon founded as very powerful, as extending itself

over all the earth. What reason could he have had to pass over in silence, in chap. 2, as well as in chap. 7, the power of the empire of Darius the Mede, while attributing great power and dominion to the subsequent empire? And this in view of the fact that in chap. 6 he shows manifest sympathy for Darius the Mede.

A consideration which further recommends the interpretation which we have just proposed, is that the succession of the four empires identified in conformity with our explanation, furnishes exactly the framework of the whole Book of Daniel. It is true, Cyrus is named in the book as the successor of Darius the Mede (6<sup>28</sup>), or in order to furnish the date of a vision of Daniel (10<sup>1</sup>). But we do not learn anything in particular about the relations in which Daniel found himself with him, or anything about the events occurring during his reign. The reigns which are distinctly placed before our view are, in the narrative part, those of *Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius*; in the part devoted to the visions, those of *Alexander and his successors* (7<sup>19ff.</sup> 8, etc.).

Let us note, in conclusion, that there reigns in the book of Daniel a certain elasticity in the symbolic value of the figures by means of which the author describes the kings and the kingdoms which he has in view. Symbols of the same nature do not always strictly represent objects of the same extension. The two *horns* of the ram in chap. 8 are the two dynastic elements, Median and Persian, of the series of kings who reigned over the third empire; the horns of the he-goat in the same chapter are in the first place Alexander himself, then the four kingdoms (or dynasties?) that issued from the empire of Alexander, and finally Antiochus Epiphanes.—In chap. 8 the two *animals* represent the two empires, Medo-Persian and Grecian; in chap. 7 the first animal represents, with a rather personal meaning, the Babylonian empire as ruled by Nebuchadnezzar; the second the same empire as ruled by Belshazzar; the third the Medo-Persian empire; and the fourth the Grecian.