

**MENE MENE TEKEL  
UPHARSIN: AN HISTORICAL  
STUDY OF THE FIFTH CHAPTER  
OF DANIEL: DISSERTATION**

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**JOHN DYNELEY PRINCE**

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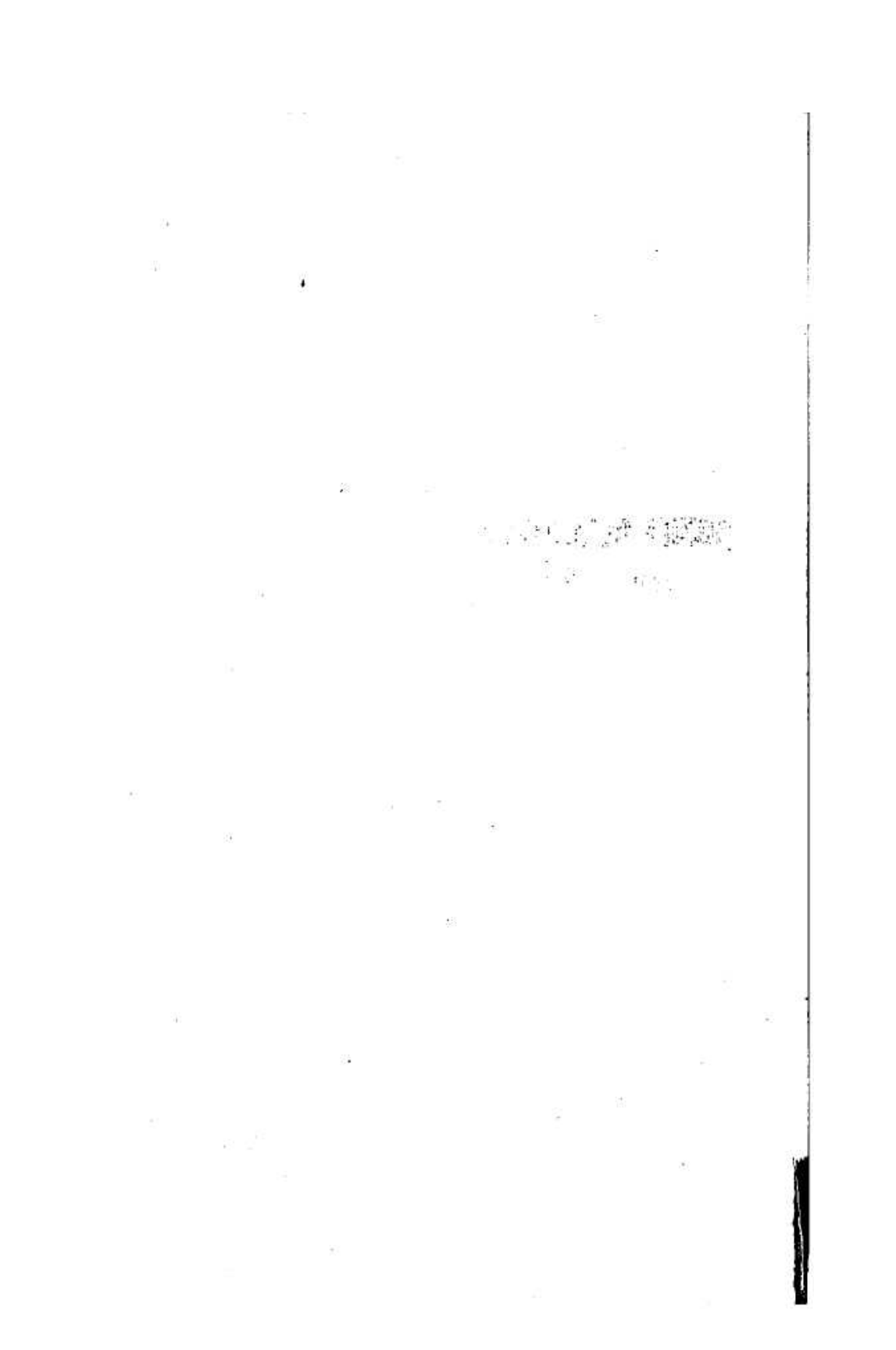
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BY

JOHN DYNELEY PRINCE

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1893



## INTRODUCTION.

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The following dissertation is an attempt to bring forward and emphasize whatever germs of historical truth there may lurk in the fifth chapter of the much disputed Book of Daniel. The keen knife of modern criticism, in the demonstration of the untenable character of the old orthodox position regarding the book, has so dissected and torn the work asunder, that whatever of truth there might be in it is now liable to be overlooked in the search for and exposition of the many unquestionable historical errors.

It seems therefore that the time has come, without denying the undoubted late origin of the Book of Daniel, to lay stress on the few grains of true history which the Maccabæan author has succeeded in gathering from the erring traditions of his time.

The writer of this dissertation, accordingly, offers a suggestion towards the elucidation of the mysterious sentence Ch. v. 25, and has endeavoured to show that it is not absolutely necessary to consider this part of Daniel a pure invention of the author, but that it is possible to detect even here an echo of real history. Abstracts of this dissertation have been published in the *Johns Hopkins Univ. Circulars*, No. 98, p. 94; and in the *Proceedings of the American Oriental Society*, April, 1892, pp. clxxxii-clxxxix.

The writer takes this opportunity to express his gratitude to Professor Paul Haupt for many kindnesses and especially for the constant guidance and personal attention which have been given him in his work at the Johns Hopkins University.

BALTIMORE, February, 1893.

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## CHAPTER FIRST

### THE MYSTERIOUS WRITING.

Every reader of the Bible is familiar with the story of the feast of Belshazzar and the mysterious writing which appeared as a warning to the last king of Babylon. The enigmatical sentence has always been considered one of the most obscure of the many difficult scriptural passages which have awakened the interest and baffled the ingenuity of scholars. Indeed, up to the present decade no really satisfactory explanation of the phrase has been attained. Even if it be admitted that the events described in the fifth chapter of Daniel actually occurred, there are still two difficulties presented by the Biblical record; first, the true meaning of the sentence, and second, the reason why the writing was unintelligible to the hierogrammatists.

The ancient writers evidently regarded the three words *Mene*, *Tekel* and *Peres*<sup>1</sup> of verses 26, 27 and 28 as substantives. Josephus (*Antt.*, x. 11, 3) *e. g.*, translates them by ἀριθμός, σταθμός, κλάσμα, and Jerome by 'numerus, appensio, divisio.'

Among the more modern scholars the opinion has been advanced that מְנָא and תִּקֵּל are preterites of the verbs מָנָא 'to count' and תִּקַּל 'to weigh,' respectively, and that פָּרְסִין the last word of the phrase, is a plural participle of פָּרַס 'to divide.' The translation for verse 25 was accordingly suggested, 'numeravit, numeravit, appendit et dividunt.'

J. D. Michaelis, 'Daniel' p. 51, suggested reading מְנָא מְנָא "Der Zählende (God) hat gezählt," while Dereser and Bertholdt, ('Daniel' p. 389) following Theodotion and the Vulgate rejected one מְנָא as an error of the copyist, who, according to their idea, may have written the word twice. Bertholdt

<sup>1</sup> Both the Greek and Latin translations have only the three words 'Mene, Tekel, Phares' in verse 25. See below, Appendix II, note 1, to verse 25.

<sup>2</sup> See Buxtorf, 'Lexicon Chaldaicum Talmudicum et Rabbinicum,' col. 2623.

regarded the three words as participles, translating "Gezählt ist es, gewogen ist es, getheilt ist es." This opinion which was followed with certain modifications by almost all the subsequent critics<sup>3</sup> was never a satisfactory explanation, because, while it may be possible to regard מָנָא as a passive participle, the form of the other words תִּקֵּל and פֶּרֶס has always presented a difficulty.

The remark of Abr. Geiger in an explanation of a Mishnic passage in the *Ztschr. der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, xxi. (1867) p. 467 f. that the Tosephta regarded פֶּרֶס in the phrase מָנָא מָנָא וּפֶרֶס, as 'a half-mina,' should have given a clue to the true meaning of the mysterious sentence. No one however seems to have had a similar idea until of late years, when an entirely new light was thrown on the interpretation of the passage by the distinguished French archaeologist M. Clermont-Ganneau, who, in 1886, published in the *Journal Asiatique* (*Série* viii. vol. I. pp. 36 ff.) an article entitled 'Mane, Thecel, Phares et le festin de Balthasar,' which appeared in an English translation in *Hebraica*, iii. pp. 87-102. Ganneau calls attention to the fact that the interpretation attributed to Daniel does not agree rigorously with the prophet's decipherment of the inscription, *i. e.*, that the interpretation given by the author in *vv.* 26, 27, 28, is based only on the three words *Mene, Tekel* and *Peres*, the plural form of the latter פֶּרֶסִין, which appears in *v.* 25 preceded by the conjunc-

<sup>3</sup> Compare among others, Hävernick, 'Daniel,' 1832, p. 195, who explained the form תִּקֵּל as being caused by analogy with מָנָא; Lengerke, 'Daniel,' 1835, pp. 261, 262, who explains the three words as participles analogous in form to the fictitious form אִדָּר (אִדָּר) in chap. ii. 5, 8; and Hitzig, 'Daniel,' 1850, p. 84, who regarded תִּקֵּל as a middle pronunciation between תִּקְוִיל and תִּקֵּל (from קָלִיל) containing the double meaning 'thou art weighed' and 'found too light,' a rather fanciful supposition which was objected to by Kranichfeld, 'Daniel,' 1868, p. 226. The latter considered תִּקֵּל not as a pure passive participle, but as a sort of passive preterite which passed to an intransitive, תִּקְוִיל becoming תִּקֵּל by assonance with מָנָא. (Cf. also Keil, 'Daniel,' p. 158, who translated verse 25 "Gezählt, gezählt, gewogen und in Stücke.")

tion  $\lambda$  being disregarded. This difference between the text as read and the explanation, he thought could only be explained by the supposition that the Biblical author had to do with a set traditional phrase, from which it was necessary to bring out a certain interpretation adapted to the circumstances of the case.

Ganneau then proceeds to explain his important discovery which gives a new key to the meaning of the mysterious words. During an epigraphic mission to the British Museum in 1878, he found that the three letters on certain half mina-weights, which had previously been read קרש were in reality פריש = paras = half. As the weight bearing the inscription was equal to that of half of a light mina, he concluded that פריש must mean 'half-mina.' This discovery led him to decide that on the set of Ninevitic weights, engraved with letters approaching in form to the Aramæan characters, the three words, מנה = 'mina,' תקל = 'shekel' and פריש = 'half mina,' were to be found, and that these three names might correspond to the three chief words of the sentence in the fifth chapter of Daniel. Concluding then that the mysterious sentence may contain names of weights, he proceeds to apply this theory to the interpretation of the phrase, suggesting a number of conjectural translations for the entire sentence, no one of which throws any satisfactory light on the meaning. Reading פרסין as a dual form (פרסין), he proposes, *e. g.*, to transfer the  $\lambda$  from ופרסין to תקל, reading תקלי, imperative of תקל 'to weigh,' and to translate 'for every mina weigh two paras' or 'a mina is a mina, weigh two paras'; or, regarding the verb as a preterite, 'they have weighed two paras,' etc., (see *Hebraica*, iii. No. 2, pp. 96 ff.) The general conclusion at which he arrived was that 'the two extreme and essential terms of the phrase in Daniel are two names of weights, of which one is double the other, placed in relation by a third middle term, which is either a third name of weight (that of shekel) or the verb 'to weigh,' from which the name of shekel is derived.

This attempt of Ganneau was followed by an admirable paper published in the *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, i. pp. 414-418, by Theodor Nöldeke. Nöldeke accepted Ganneau's discovery that the phrase in Dan. v. contains names of weights,