

DARIUS THE MEDE

Aramaic דַּרְיוֹשׁ מֵדֵי

The Median Darius was a 62-year-old man who, as predicted by Daniel, gained control over the Chaldean kingdom immediately following the death of Belshazzar (Dan 5:28–6:2). His first action as king was to set 120 satraps over the kingdom. On the king's behalf, but against his will, Daniel was put in the den of lions (Dan 6:14–17). Following his deliverance, Daniel prospered under both the Median king's rule and that of Cyrus the Persian (Dan 6:29—Eng 6:28). In the first year of this “Darius son of Ahasuerus by birth a Mede,” who “was installed over the kingdom of the Chaldeans,” Daniel had his famous vision of the 70 weeks of years (Daniel 9). The references in Daniel place this Darius between the reign of Belshazzar and that of the Persian emperor Cyrus (Dan 5:30–6:1; cf. 6:29—Eng 6:28; 9:1; cf. 8:1; and 10:1). At no other place in the Bible do we find a Median king named Darius.

A. Historical Difficulty

Both Greek and Babylonian sources clearly demonstrate that the Persian king Cyrus—and not Darius—was the conqueror of Babylon, and the real successor to the last Chaldean king (cf. 2 Chr 36:20). Historically, there was no Median invasion of Babylonia and no Median domination of that area. A Median king Darius is unknown. Consequently, the mysterious reference to Darius in the book of Daniel has posed a severe difficulty for exegetes since early times. Already in the 1st cent. B.C.E. the Greek version of (Proto-) Theodotion had tried to harmonize the biblical and the Greek traditions by substituting an Artaxerxes for Darius in Dan 6:1.

B. Median Rule over Babylonia

From the standpoint of tradition-history, two general conceptions presumably stand behind the Daniel narration. First, and most important for every faithful Israelite, there were the prophetic predictions of the conquest of Babylon by Median troops (Isa 13:17–18; 21:2; Jer 51:1, 27, 28; cf. Graf 1984: 21). For postexilic readers of Daniel these announcements were apparently fulfilled and had to be portrayed as such. Second, there was an extrabiblical pattern of a succession of the four world empires, Assyria, Media, Persia, and Greece, which was widely adhered to in the last centuries B.C.E. (Swain 1940). In order to bring this pattern into conformity with Israelite history, the biblical author simply substituted Babylonia for Assyria. Both of these concepts led the Daniel tradition to the conclusion that at least one Median king must have ruled over Babylonia (and Israel) between the otherwise known Chaldean and Persian kings (i.e., Belshazzar and Cyrus). But why was the name Darius chosen for this Median interregnum?

C. Proposals for Identification

While a number of solutions have been proposed since early times (Rowley 1935), only three of them are worth mentioning:

1. **Nabonidus.** There is a slight possibility that the king in question was really the last ruler on the throne of Babylon prior to the Persian invasion (for earlier representatives of this opinion see Rowley 1935: 9). As far as the indigenous population of Babylonia was concerned, this king was an alien. The Babylonian Dynastic Prophecy (Grayson 1975a: 25, 33) assigns to him an independent dynasty of Harran, ruling between the last legitimate Babylonian kings and the kings of Elam

(Persia). The city of his birthplace, Harran, lies in the N and does not belong to Babylonia, but to Assyria. It may have been dominated by the Medes for some time after 612 B.C.E. (*RLA* 4: 124).

2. The Persian Darius I. Most recent commentators propose a confusion of the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus (539 B.C.E.) (e.g., Rowley 1935: 54–60; Hartmann and DiLella, *Daniel* AB, 36) with the later suppression of two Babylonian rebels, both of whom claimed to be the son of Nabonidus (cf. Behistun inscription; Kent 1953: 120–31). It was this *Persian* Darius who reorganized the state and installed the 20 satrapies (Hdt. 3.89). Darius I is mentioned 16 times in the Bible. In his second year the prophets Haggai and Zechariah were exhorting the people to rebuild the temple, and under the guidance of Zerubbabel and Joshua the work was begun (Hag 1:1, 15; 2:10; Zech 1:1, 7; Ezra 4:24–5:2). The governor of the province Beyond-the-River stopped this activity and wrote a letter to Darius requesting an inquiry. But the king confirmed the decree of Cyrus. So the building activity continued until the house of God was completed in the sixth year of Darius (Ezra 5:3–6:15). However, this identification of Darius I with Darius the Mede is not without its problems.

a. Where Darius I is mentioned in the Bible, his *Persian* provenance is stressed (Ezra 4:5, 24; 6:14; Neh 12:22, also with Darius II). Daniel, however, underlines the *Median* affiliation of the conqueror of Babylon.

b. In the Chronicler's work there is a clear sequence from Cyrus to Darius, king of Persia, who reigns at the time of the dedication of the Second Temple (Ezra 4:5; 5:6–6:14). As the book of Daniel is closely related to the Chronicler's work in many instances (Koch, *Daniel* BKAT, 28–33, 37–40), it is difficult to imagine why the author should have disturbed the chronological sequence of his source.

c. Dan 9:25 mentions a time of 49 years (7 weeks of years), presumably between the beginning of the Exile and the coming of a messiah-*nagîd* (Cyrus or Zerubbabel?) He therefore seems to have reliable knowledge about the end of the exilic period.

d. In his inscriptions Darius I himself indicates his Persian origin: "I am a Persian, son of a Persian" (Kent 1953: 138; cf. 116, 134). His father's name is Vištasp (Gk Hystaspes), whereas the father's name in Dan 9:1 is Ahasuerus.

3. Gaubaruwa (Akk *Gubaru/Ugbaru*, Gk *Gobryas*). This is the only candidate who fits the otherwise documented historical circumstances. Gaubaruwa was a governor of Gutium who, on behalf of Cyrus and as an old man (Xenophon), seized Babylon and was installed (cf. the passive *hamlak* Dan 9:1) as a vice-regent over Mesopotamia, appointing the governors of the country until his death eight months later (Nabonidus Chronicle, *ANET*, 306–7; Grayson 1975b: 104–11; cf. Whitcomb 1959; Shea 1971–72; Cälmeyer 1977; Koch 1983). The name of his father is never mentioned. He "ruled almost as an independent monarch" (Olmstead 1948: 56). As a man of Gutium, Gaubaruwa surely was no Babylonian. In fact, Gutium in the Babylonian omen literature (replacing an earlier Subartu) signifies the NE quadrant of the known world; in the 1st millennium B.C.E. it was compromised primarily of Media (*RLA* 3: 708–20). The historian Berossos (ca. 280 B.C.E.) identified the old dynasty of Gutium in the Babylonian King List with "tyrants of the Medes" (Burstein 1978: 21–23, especially n. 64). The same identification is made by Daniel. Yet the name "Darius" for Gaubaruwa still remains enigmatic. The old Persian word *Daṃrayarahu* 'He who holds firm the good' (Kent 1953: 189) is the name of several kings and princes (*RLA* 2: 121–23). Perhaps it was also the throne name for the vice-king Gaubaruwa in Babylonia, whose name was not otherwise documented because of the short time of his reign. For us Gaubaruwa seems to be an

obscure figure. But his name and fate are not only documented in cuneiform sources, but are also known to Greek historians (*RLA* 3: 671–2). The statement of “a conflation of confused tradition” (Rowley 1935: 54) regarding Darius the Mede in Daniel therefore seems neither necessary nor probable.

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