

Who was Darius the Mede?

DARIUS THE MEDE da ri' as Medo-Pers. Governor ("king") of Babylonia under Cyrus the Great mentioned esp. in the sixth ch. Of Daniel. Immediately following the death of 'Belshazzar the Chaldean king" in Oct. 539 b.c, Darius the Mede is said to have "received the kingdom" (Dan 5:31), prob. Having been made "king over the realm of the Chaldeans" (9:1) by Cyrus the Great (1:21; 6:28). He is best remembered for the unalterable decree which his officers tricked him into signing, which resulted in Daniel being cast into a den of lions (6:7-18). In contrast to Nebuchadnezzar, this ruler was helpless to reverse his own decree, vividly illustrating the inferiority of the silver kingdom of Medo-Persia to the golden kingdom of Babylon in the matter of royal sovereignty. Compare Daniel 3:29; Esther 1:19; 8:8, and the testimony of Diodorus Siculus (xvii, 30), that Darius III (335-331) wanted to free a man he had condemned, but realized that "it was not possible to undo what was done by royal authority.'

Darius the Mede is not to be confused with the later Pers. Monarch, Darius I Hystaspes (521-486 b.c), for he was of Median extraction ("of the seed of the Medes," Dan 9:1 KJV), and his father's name was Ahasuerus (the Heb. Equivalent of "Xerxes," the name of the son of Darius I. See Esth 1:1). Darius the Mede was born in the year 601/600 b.c, for at the fall of Babylon in 539 b.c. he was sixty-two (Dan 5:31).

A major assumption of negative higher criticism has been that the Book of Daniel was authored by an unknown writer of the Maccabean age (c. 164 b.c.) who mistakenly thought that an independent Median kingdom ruled by that an independent Median kingdom ruled by Darius the Mede followed the fall of Babylon and preceded the rise of Persia under Cyrus. Darius the Mede, however, is not depicted in the book as a universal monarch. His subordinate position (under Cyrus) is clearly implied in the statement that he "*was made king* (Heb. Passive, homlak) over the realm of the Chaldeans" (9:1 KJV). Also, the fact that Belshazzar's kingdom was "given to the Medes and *Persians*" (5:28) and that Darius found himself incapable of altering the "law of the Medes and *Persians*" (6:15) renders the critical view untenable.

The early 20th cent. Publication of additional cuneiform texts from this period has enabled one to understand much better the circumstances surrounding the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. It seems quite probable that Darius the Mede was another name for Gubaru, the governor under Cyrus who appointed sub-governors in Babylonia immediately after its conquest ("Nabonidus Chronicle," ANET, 306; cf. Dan 6:1). This same Gubaru (not to be confused with Ugbaru, governor of Gutium, the general under Cyrus who conquered Babylon and died three weeks later, according to the Nabonidus Chronicle) is frequently mentioned in cuneiform documents during the following fourteen years as "Governor of Babylon and the Region Beyond the River" (i.e., the entire Fertile Crescent). Gubaru thus ruled over the vast and populous territories of Babylonia, Syria, Phoenicia, and Pal., and his name was a final warning to criminals throughout this area (cf. J. C. Whitcomb, *Darius the Mede* [1963], pp. 10-24). The fact that he is called "king" in the sixth ch. of Daniel is not an inaccuracy, even though he was a subordinate of Cyrus. Similarly, Belshazzar was called "king," even though he was second ruler of the kingdom under Nabonidus (5:29).

The Book of Daniel gives more information concerning the personal background of Darius the Mede than of Belshazzar or even of Nebuchadnezzar, for he is the only monarch in the book whose age, parentage, and nationality are book whose age, parentage, and nationality are like Belshazzar, it is evident that he ruled Babylonia with far greater zeal and efficiency than did his profligate predecessor; and even more important, he honored the God of Daniel (6:25-27).

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In my first post to Ian I gave some information from memory based on an article I read 15 years ago. I searched for this article and found it: W.H. Shea, "Darius the Mede, an update", Andrews University Seminary Studies (AUSS), Autumn 1982, pp 229-247. (See also the same author, "An Unrecognized Vassal King of Babylon in the Early Achemenid period", AUSS Jan 1971, 51-67, July 1971, 99-128, Jan 1972, 88-117, July 1972, 147-178) These articles contain a huge amount of original cuneiform data, and the conclusions seem to be reliable. Shea defends the view that Darius the Mede was a

historical person, so it would be interesting to know whether anyone has criticized Shea's conclusions after he wrote his articles.

I will give some high points. There is good evidence to show that the coregency of Cyrus and Cambyses occurred at the end of Cyrus' reign and not at the beginning. During the last four months of Cyrus' accession year and the first 10 months of his first year, the inscriptions show there was another vassal ruler of Babel, and this probably was Gubaru, who was mentioned in the Nabonid Chronicle. It is interesting that Cyrus is referred to by the title "king of lands, king of Babel" a few days after the death of Gubaru, but before that he was only "king of lands".

The following parallels can connect Gubaru with Darius the Mede:

(1) According to the Nabonidus Chronicle Gubaru led the Medo-Persian troops that conquered Babylon (Dan 5:28).

(2) Gubaru installed governors in Babylon according to the Chronicle. (Dan 6:1.2)

(3) Because Gubaru died a year after the fall of Babel, he might have been an old man (Dan 5:31)

(4) His death about a year after the conquest fits well with Dan 9:1,11:1, "the first year of Darius".

(5) The reference of Cyrus (Dan 10:1) as "king of Persia" fits the title "king of lands" of the tablets. Darius is said to have ruled over the "realm of the Chaldeans" which fits the title "king of Babel"

(6) Gubaru's position as vassal harmonizes with the statement that Darius was "made king".

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Daniel's date of writing:

As for the historical arguments, there are four main contentions. The first has to do with the reference to Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 1 :1 . Critics using this argument see a conflict between this verse and Jeremiah 25:1, where he refers to "the fourth year of Jehoiakim," whereas Daniel 1:1 refers to the same event occurring in the "third year of the reign of Jehoiakim." This apparent error is actually a cultural difference of dating systems. Jeremiah, a Palestinian, naturally uses the Palestinian dating system, which would place Jehoiakim's fourth year in 605 BC. Daniel, using the Babylonian system, places Jehoiakim's third year in 605 BC (Harrison, pg. 1112).

The second main historical argument concerns Belshazzar. The mention of him as the last king of Babylon in Daniel 5:30 seemed to be an unreconcilable error to historians and critics. Secular sources have, since ancient times, stated that Nabonidus was the last king of Babylon (p. 328). Then, with the discovery of the Nabonidus Chronicle, Daniel was proven correct. In the verse account of Nabonidus, it is said that Nabonidus "entrusted the 'camp' to his eldest son ['Belshazzar] ...entrusted the kingship to him (Hasel, pg. 155) and himself ...he turned towards Tema in the West." This is fairly strong evidence that Belshazzar was indeed the coregent of Babylon in his father's absence, and was there when Babylon fell in 539 BC. The mystery here, if one accepts the second century date of writing, is how the author knew of Nabonidus' leaving Belshazzar in charge, when all knowledge of Belshazzar was lost by at least 450 BC (Archer, pg. 289), until the discovery of the Nabonidus Chronicle. The only conclusion that one can reach, other than some other information which has been lost to us today, is that the author was indeed alive during the events, in 539 BC (Waltke, pg. 328).

The third main historical argument concerns the identity of Darius the Mede, mentioned in chapters five, six, nine, and eleven. The question is who this name refers to, not whether or not he really existed. Again, the Nabonidus Chronicle aids us in that it makes it clear that there was another ruler under Cyrus, over Babylon. It also refers to Ugbaru, the general who conquered Babylon, but who died shortly after his victory (Shea, pg. 246). Whether Ugbaru was Darius the Mede is debatable, and other theories have been set forth by many distinguished scholars. The two other, major theories identify him as Cyrus himself (DJ Wiseman, JG Baldwin), or as Gubaru (JC Whitcomb, RK Harrison, and G. Archer).

The fourth and final historical argument is based on whether or not Daniel 11:21-45, and/or the book as a whole are about Antiochus Epiphanes. While most people do indeed believe that at least a part of chapter eleven deals with Antiochus Epiphanes, there are many who don't think that any part of Daniel refers to Antiochus.

This brings us to the second type of evidence, that of the literary styles and qualities, and the actual words used. The three main defenses/arguments focus on the Qumran data, Daniel's canonicity, its genre, and vocabulary.

As for the recent Qumran findings, many manuscripts of Daniel were found, in three different caves at Qumran (Baldwin, pg. 73-74). To determine an "earliest date" for those manuscripts, we need to compare them with manuscripts with dates that are known. Takamitsu Muraoka did a study on the Aramaic of 11QtJob mss, and of 1QapGen, and found that the 11QtJob mss is closer to the Aramaic of the Old Testament than the 1QapGen. His conclusion is that the 11QtJob should be dated between 250-150 BC (Muraoka, pg. 425-443). Next, Robert Vasholz determined that the mss of Daniel are older than the 11QtJob. How much older he can't be certain, but older none-the-less (Vasholz, pg. 320), which probably pushes the date of writing before the date deemed necessary by most Maccabean Theorists (167-165 BC; Baldwin, pg. 35).

As for canonicity, Daniel is currently placed in the Kethubhim, the latest of the Jewish canonical parts, rather than in the Prophets, where many critics feel Daniel should have been placed if it were truly written in the sixth century. For one thing, there are very old books placed in the Kethubhim, such as Job, the Psalms, and the writings of Solomon (Archer, pg. 380). A second point is that as for being a prophet, Daniel wasn't a prophet in the strict Hebraic sense of the word. Their sense was "a spiritual mediator between God and a theocratic community," as Isaiah, Amos, or Jeremiah (Harrison, pg. 1123), but Daniel was a statesman for various pagan governments. So assuming that Daniel was written in the sixth century BC, before the Prophet' canon was closed, it seems highly likely that Daniel probably wouldn't have been placed in it anyway. Another point about where Daniel is placed in the canon, Josephus placed Daniel in among the thirteen prophets/historians including most of the books from Joshua to the book of the twelve prophets in Against Apion 1:40 (Bartlett, pg. 176-178). Daniel wasn't placed in the Kethubhim until the fourth century AD (as opposed to the Prophet canon; Whitcomb, pg. 263).

RK Harrison, of the Maccabean dating theory: "Such a period of composition is in any event absolutely precluded by the evidence from Qumran partly because there are no indications whatever that the sectaries compiled any of the Biblical manuscripts recovered..., and partly because there would, in the latter event, have been insufficient time for Maccabean composition to be circulated, venerated, and accepted as canonical Scripture by a Maccabean sect" (Harrison, pg. 1126-1127)

<http://www.jeramy.org/papers/daniel.html>