

Northern Caribbean University
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DATE OF WRITING FOR THE BOOK OF DANIEL; LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE

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INTRODUCTION

The constituent languages of the book of Daniel suggest that the book was written in Maccabean times (2nd century B.C.). Some writers claim that the language of the book probably indicates a date of writing later than the Babylonian exile. There are a number of language problems with the view of a Maccabean date for Daniel. Linguistic evidence that the book was written during that period of time opposes this view, and the suggestions that propose a Maccabean date lack literary evidence.

It would appear that most writers on the subject have ignored linguistic polemics to the contrary and have conjured arguments to fit the established belief of a Maccabean date for the book. Although some scholars advocate a 2nd century date for the writing of the book of Daniel, linguistic evidence indicates that the 6th century is the more likely date for the book.

HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

OBJECTIONS

Linguistic Character

According to Samuel Driver, the use of fifteen Persian words to describe government officials under the Babylonians before the conquest of Cyrus shows that Daniel was written in a period after the Persian Empire had been well established.¹ It has also been asserted by Driver that the Hebrew of Daniel resembles the Hebrew of a later date.² In addition, Driver believed that the Aramaic of Daniel was a Western dialect spoken around Palestine from the 3rd century B.C. to the second century A.D.³

Driver summarized that the Persian words presuppose a period after the Persian Empire had been well established; the Greek words demand, the Hebrew supports, and the Aramaic permits, a date after the conquest of Palestine by Alexander the Great (332 B.C.).⁴

¹Samuel Rolles Driver, **An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament** (New York: Meridian, 1956), 501.

²Ibid., 505.

³Ibid., 502.

⁴Ibid., 508.

ARGUMENTS FOR 6TH CENTURY AUTHORSHIP

Language Difficulties

Albert Barnes reckoned that it is not probable that one who lived so late as the Maccabean times could have written the book in two languages (Hebrew and Aramaic). It is an uncommon thing for authors to write in two different languages in the same work, and it is never done without some special design. A design for which there would not have been likely to be occasion if they were writing in the Maccabean times. It was perfectly natural that Daniel should write in this manner, and perfectly unnatural that any one should do it in a later age, and in different circumstances.

If the book had been forged by a Hebrew in the Maccabean times, he would have been careful to write it in pure Hebrew (canonical language). He would not have intermingled so much of a foreign language.⁵ Metzger cites Delitzsche as saying that the Hebrew of Daniel is closely related to that of Ezekiel which was written about 570 B.C.⁶

⁵Albert Barnes, **Notes on the Old Testament** (New York: Baker Book House, 1953), 17.

⁶Bruce M. Metzger, "The Book of Daniel," **Christian Faith and Life** 3 (1934): 218-220.

Greek

The books of Maccabees are heavily influenced by Greek culture and customs; yet this influence is absent in Daniel.⁷ Baldwin alludes to the fact that no more than three Greek words occur in the Aramaic of Daniel.⁸ It should be noted that these three Greek words are all musical instruments. If the book of Daniel was written in Palestine after a period of 160 years of influence and control by the Greeks then the writer would have used more Greek terms.

Aramaic

In terms of the Aramaic of the text it has been concluded that the book could not have been written later than 300 B.C. Stefanovic studied Old Aramaic inscriptions from the ninth to the seventh centuries B.C. and found significant similarity to the Aramaic used in Daniel. Koch points out that the vocalization of the Aramaic of Daniel appears to be of Eastern type and the general context and royal figures point to the east.⁹ A Western origin would be required if the Maccabean

⁷Edwin M. Yamauchi, **Greece and Babylon** (New York: Baker Book House, 1967), 94

⁸Joyce G. Baldwin, **Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary**, vol 4, **Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries** (London: Inter Varsity Press, 1978), 34.

⁹Klaus Koch, "Is Daniel Also Among the Prophets?" **Journal of Bible**

thesis were correct.

Hebrew

If Daniel originated in Palestine in the 2nd century B.C., then the language of the book should reflect the Hebrew that was common at that time, such as that reflected in the Qumran scrolls. It has been shown that the Qumran documents have none of the distinct characteristics of the Hebrew chapters in Daniel. Archer concludes that in the areas of syntax, word order, morphology, vocabulary, spelling, and word-usage, there is absolutely no possibility of regarding Daniel as contemporary to other second century documents and that centuries have intervened between them.¹⁰

Persian (Aryan)

It is claimed that the presence of Aryan words in Daniel is proof of the late date of the book.¹¹ However, Pusey makes reference to the fact that the meaning of many of these words was forgotten in Maccabean times. The knowledge of Aryan names was natural to one living near to Aryan nations, but unnatural to a Jew, living nearly four centuries

Interpretation 39 (1985): 47.

¹⁰Gleason Archer, "Modern Rationalism and the Book of Daniel," **Bibliotheca Sacra** 136 (1979): 129-47.

¹¹Otto Eissfeldt, **The Old Testament** (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 522.

afterward in Palestine.¹² All of the 19 Persian loan words found in Daniel have been shown to be of Old Persian origin. None of these words were in use later than 300 B.C. The presence of Persian loan words also tells us that those sections weren't written till, or were edited in, the 1st year of Cyrus (about 539/8 B.C.) when Persian influence became strong.

If Daniel had been composed in second century then there should have been no difficulty in rendering any of the terms into Greek. The LXX translators were unable to translate some of the Persian words accurately. The meaning of these terms could have been so completely forgotten by the Alexandrian Jews who composed the LXX that they did not know how to translate them."¹³

¹²E. B. Pusey, **Daniel the Prophet** (London: Klock & Klock, 1978), 56.

¹³Gleason L. Archer, **Daniel**, vol. 7, **Expositor's** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press, 1985), 22.

CONCLUSION

The cumulative effect of all of the language components of the book of Daniel alone does not allow it to be a 2nd century B.C. Palestine creation. Claims that the language of the book probably indicates a date of composition later than the Babylonian exile, are unfounded. It appears that the book was written by someone who was conversant with both Hebrew and Aramaic (this favours Daniel) as indicated by the use of both languages to record the accounts. The fact that only three Greek words appear in the book supports a pre-Maccabean date for the writing of the book. The characteristics of the form of Aramaic and Hebrew used in the book indicate that they pre-dated the Hebrew of the Maccabean era. It also appears that the Aryan words found in Daniel must have been used in or near Babylon at a time not long after the founding of the Persian empire. Thus, after examining some of the linguistic indicators, it seems more likely that the book of Daniel was written in the 6th century B.C. rather than the 2nd century B.C..

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