

THE REMEMBRANCE OF DANIEL'S DARIUS THE MEDE IN BEROSSUS AND HARPOCRATION

Steven D. Anderson and Rodger C. Young

ABSTRACT

Modern commentators on the book of Daniel commonly assert that there is no reference in ancient extrabiblical literature to Daniel's Darius the Mede by the name "Darius," apart from writers such as Josephus who were dependent on Daniel. However, the ancient writers Berossus and Valerius Harpocraton were independent of the book of Daniel and yet referred to a king named Darius who reigned before the king who is currently called Darius I. These references should lead modern writers to reconsider the assertion that Darius the Mede was unknown in extant ancient extrabiblical literature.

MODERN COMMENTATORS ON THE BOOK OF DANIEL largely concur that "Darius the Mede" was unknown in extant ancient literature except in Daniel's text and sources derived from it. In a commentary that generally shows the highest level of scholarship in citing the relevant literature, Andrew Steinmann wrote, "No person mentioned in the book of Daniel is more obscure and controversial than Darius the Mede. No person by this name is known from extrabiblical records as having taken over the rule of Babylon following the fall of Nabonidus and Belshazzar. . . . The person called 'Darius the Mede' in Daniel (6:1 [ET 5:31]; 11:1) is unknown by that name in any other record."¹ Ed-

Steven D. Anderson is lead content creator for BiblePlaces, Santa Clarita, California; and Rodger C. Young is an independent researcher who specializes in biblical chronology and lives in St. Louis, Missouri.

¹ Andrew E. Steinmann, *Daniel*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2008), 290.

ward J. Young noted, “The identification of this king is as yet unknown, since secular historical sources are silent concerning him.”² Mentioning only the monuments, H. C. Leupold wrote, “At this point another major problem crowds into the forefront: ‘Who was Darius the Mede?’ The monuments do not happen to know him by that name, at least the monuments discovered thus far.”³ John Whitcomb, who identified Daniel’s Darius with Gubaru of cuneiform inscriptions, wrote: “Neither the Greek nor the cuneiform records mention anything that can be connected with the name Darius, but uniformly employ Gobryas or Gubaru (Ugbaru).”⁴

The supposed non-mention of Darius the Mede outside of the book of Daniel is generally tied by commentators to the larger issue of the historicity or authenticity of the book of Daniel. John Collins wrote, “No such person as Darius the Mede is known to have existed apart from the narrative of Daniel. . . . Conservative scholars have labored unceasingly to identify Darius the Mede with some figure known to history by another name.”⁵ George Wesley Buchanan stated: “Darius the Mede is reported only here [Daniel] in all extant literature. . . . Darius the Mede never existed. . . . Nothing can be more unfortunate than the attempts of apologists to make these things appear probable.”⁶ In a commentary published in 2014, Carol A. Newsom wrote, “Similar to the case of the Nabonidus traditions that were recast as Nebuchadnezzar stories in chs. 3–4, a faint historical memory of Darius the Persian can be discerned behind the wholly fictitious character of Darius the Mede.”⁷

The intent of the present article is to revive interest in the mention by two ancient extrabiblical sources of a king named Darius who preceded Darius (I) Hystaspes (522–486 BC). According to one of these sources, this Darius ruled at exactly the time that

² Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 131.

³ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Daniel* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg, 1949), 238.

⁴ John C. Whitcomb Jr., *Darius the Mede: A Study in Historical Identification* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 26.

⁵ John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 30.

⁶ George Wesley Buchanan, *The Book of Daniel*, Mellen Bible Commentary: Old Testament Series (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1999), 149, 152. Within the above quotation, Buchanan quotes A. A. Bean, *A Short Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1892), 108.

⁷ Carol A. Newsom with Brennan W. Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 192.

Daniel assigned to Darius the Mede. Neither source derived its information from the Bible or from any text that depends on the Bible. These sources and their importance relative to Daniel's Darius were noted in the nineteenth century by C. F. Keil.⁸ They were also noted by Otto Zöckler.⁹ These eminent German Protestant commentaries are still in print, so it is curious that, with few exceptions, modern commentaries on the book of Daniel repeat the misconception that there is no mention of a ruler named Darius who was a contemporary of Cyrus the Great in any ancient work except the book of Daniel and works that rely on it, such as Josephus.¹⁰

KING DARIUS IN BEROSSUS

The Babylonian historian Berossus wrote during the reign of the Seleucid king Antiochus I (281–261 BC) a three-volume history of Babylon called the *Babyloniaca*. Scholars believe that Berossus derived his information primarily from Babylonian sources, such as cuneiform records stored in the Esagila.¹¹ According to van der Spek, "Not only the content, but also the structure and focus of Berossus' work, remind us of the Babylonian chronographic texts."¹² The *Babyloniaca* survives only in fragments preserved in quotations by later writers such as Josephus and Eusebius of Caesarea, who themselves were quoting abridgements of Berossus

⁸ C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, trans. M. G. Easton, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1877; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 199–200. The material that Keil attributed to Abydenus and Eusebius is considered by more recent scholarship to have ultimately been derived from Berossus.

⁹ Otto Zöckler, *The Book of the Prophet Daniel: Theologically and Homiletically Expounded*, trans. and ed. by James Strong, vol. 13 of *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal and Homiletical, with Special Reference to Ministers and Students*, ed. John Peter Lange and Philip Schaff (New York: Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1876), 36. Like Keil, Zöckler referenced Eusebius rather than Berossus for the text discussed below. Unlike Keil, he wrote that the remark "need not be applied to the Darius of this book."

¹⁰ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 10.248/10.11.4.

¹¹ Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon 556–539 B.C.*, Yale Near Eastern Researches (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 88; Gerald P. Verbrugge and John M. Wickersham, eds., *Berossos and Manetho, Introduced and Translated: Native Traditions in Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 15–24.

¹² R. J. van der Spek, "Berossus as a Babylonian Chronicler and Greek Historian," *Studies in Ancient Near Eastern World View and Society: Presented to Marten Stol on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. R. J. van der Spek et al. (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2008), 293.

by Alexander Polyhistor and Abydenus. A fragment of the *Babyloniaca* describing the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus is preserved in Josephus's *Against Apion* (1.150–53/1.20). In it, Berossus dated the conquest of Babylon to the seventeenth year of Nabonidus. This date agrees with Babylonian contract texts, indicating that Berossus drew his information from a reliable historical source. Berossus proceeded to state that after Cyrus captured Babylon, he gave Nabonidus the province of Carmania.

This section of the *Babyloniaca* is also cited in the first volume of the *Chronicle* of Eusebius, a work that survives only in an Armenian translation. Eusebius's citation of Berossus agrees with Josephus, but it adds further information as follows: "Cyrus at first treated him [Nabonidus] kindly, and, giving a residence to him in Carmania, sent him out of Babylonia. *(But) Darius the king took away some of his province for himself.*"¹³ The additional information supplied from Berossus via Abydenus is in italics.

Marquart said of the statement concerning King Darius that it "ist rätselhaft" (is enigmatic).¹⁴ Beaulieu wondered whether the statement may be a gloss, but suggested that the Darius in question could be Darius Hystaspes.¹⁵ By his own admission, however, Nabonidus was between sixty-five and seventy years old when he became king in 556 BC,¹⁶ which means that he would have been between 99 and 104 years old when Darius Hystaspes ascended to the throne in 522 BC, if he were still alive (possible, but unlikely). In addition, the mention of King Darius is in the context of the fall of Babylon and before Berossus concluded his account of the reign of Cyrus, or even of the career of Nabonidus. Thus, Berossus seems to have believed that there was a King Darius who reigned concur-

¹³ Josef Karst, ed., *Die Chronik aus dem Armenischen übersetzt mit textkritischem Commentar*, vol. 5 of *Eusebius Werke*, Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte, vol. 20 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1911), 246. Karst gives an alternative translation of the final clause that emends the base text to read "(But) Darius the king kept him out of that province." If this alternative reading was the original, it would still preserve the idea that Darius was a king and that he could override an order given by Cyrus.

¹⁴ J. Marquart, "Untersuchung zur Geschichte von Eran (II)," *Philologus: Zeitschrift für das classische Altertum: Supplementband X 1* (1905): 145.

¹⁵ Beaulieu, *Reign of Nabonidus*, 231. H. H. Rowley also maintained that the Darius mentioned by Berossus "might just as well have been Darius Hystaspis, so far as the fragment goes" (*Darius the Mede and the Four World Empires in the Book of Daniel: A Historical Study of Contemporary Theories* [Cardiff: University of Wales Press Board, 1935], 46).

¹⁶ Beaulieu, *Reign of Nabonidus*, 77, 83.

rently with Cyrus and who had greater authority than Cyrus within the Medo-Persian Empire.

If the authenticity of this text in Eusebius/Abydenus/Berossus is acknowledged, several points may be inferred:¹⁷ 1) there was another king who was contemporaneous with Cyrus and Nabonidus; 2) he was associated with these two kings when Babylon was conquered, thus also making him a contemporary of Belshazzar, son and coregent of Nabonidus, who was ruling in Babylon at the time; 3) this king was named Darius; 4) he somehow had authority over Cyrus, since he was able to overrule Cyrus's disposition of part of Carmania. The first three points were used by Keil to argue that the Darius of the book of Daniel was attested in an ancient source that was independent of Daniel's writing.

KING DARIUS IN HARPOCRATION

Valerius Harpocration was a lexicographer who wrote in the latter half of the second century AD and who was a tutor of the emperor Verus (reigned AD 161–169). He was associated with the great library at Alexandria and consequently had access to many ancient books that later were lost when the library was destroyed. His only surviving work is *Lexicon of the Ten Orators*, a glossary to terminology used by Greek orators.

The portion of Harpocration's work that is significant for the issue of Darius the Mede is his entry for the word "daric" (δαρεικός). Herodotus claimed that Darius Hystaspes invented the daric coin as a memorial to himself (*Histories* 4.166). By contrast, in Harpocration's entry for "daric," he wrote, "But darics are not named, as most suppose, after Darius the father of Xerxes, but after a certain other more ancient king."¹⁸ This is the second reference that Keil cited as evidence, outside of the book of Daniel, for the existence of Daniel's "Darius the Mede" as a historical figure.¹⁹ Har-

¹⁷ For a much more detailed discussion of the text critical issues in Berossus and in the *Chronicle* of Eusebius, including an analysis of this important disputed line, see Steven D. Anderson, *Darius the Mede: A Reappraisal* (Amazon/CreateSpace, 2014), 105–111. This book is a self-publication of the author's PhD dissertation, "Darius the Mede: A Reappraisal" (Dallas Theological Seminary, 2014).

¹⁸ Harpocration, *Lexeis of the Ten Orators* Δ 5, Δαρεικός. The Greek text given by Keaney is ἐκλήθησαν δὲ Δαρεικοὶ οὐχ ὡς οἱ πλείστοι νομίζουσιν, ἀπὸ Δαρείου τοῦ Ξέρξου πατρὸς, ἀλλ' ὅφ' ἑτέρου τινὸς παλαιότερου βασιλέως (John J. Keaney, ed., *Harpocration: Lexeis of the Ten Orators* [Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1991], 66).

¹⁹ Keil, *Daniel*, 200. An earlier commentator who connected the reference in Harpocration with Darius the Mede is E. W. Hengstenberg, *Dissertations on the*

pocraton nowhere in his work refers to the Bible or to any biblical subject, which makes it highly unlikely that he took his information from the book of Daniel; besides, the book of Daniel says nothing about coins, daric or otherwise. Harpocraton's reference is independent of, but supports, the book of Daniel in describing a Darius who preceded Darius Hystaspes.

Is Harpocraton's reference also independent of the reference to Darius in Berossus? Certainly Berossus, who was widely quoted in antiquity, would have been included in the great library at Alexandria. Since most of Berossus's *Babyloniaca* is no longer extant, it could be speculated that Berossus somewhere stated that the daric was named after the early "Darius" who is mentioned only in the citation of Berossus in Eusebius's *Chronicle*. But even if Harpocraton derived his information from some now-lost portion of Berossus, this would still be a valuable testimony to the validity of Berossus's affirmation that there was an earlier king named "Darius." If, on the other hand, Harpocraton's information was not derived from Berossus but from some other source, then it has significant weight because of its independence not only of Daniel, but also of Berossus.

According to Harpocraton, the Darius after whom the daric coin was named lived before Darius (I) Hystaspes. Although Bivar claimed that the daric was first minted in 515 BC, Rogers argued that Herodotus's reference to millions of darics in existence at the time of Xerxes's invasion of Greece in 480 BC shows that darics must have begun to be minted well before the time of Darius Hystaspes.²⁰ Certainly coinage itself was invented well before the time of Darius Hystaspes; Greek authors attributed the invention of coinage to the Lydians. Kagan advocates dating this invention as early as 700 BC, based on a thorough study of archaeological, literary, and numismatic evidence.²¹

Genuineness of Daniel and the Integrity of Zechariah, trans. B. P. Pratten (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1847), 43.

²⁰ Benjamin Bickley Rogers, ed., *The Ecclesiastusae of Aristophanes* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1917), 90; A. D. H. Bivar, "Achaemenid Coins, Weights and Measures," in *The Median and Achaemenian Periods*, ed. Ilya Gershevitch, vol. 2 of *The Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 617. See Herodotus 7.27–30.

²¹ Donald Kagan, "The Dates of the Earliest Coins," *American Journal of Archaeology* 86 (1982): 343–60. Xenophanes, from the sixth century BC, is the earliest known authority for the Lydian invention of coinage (James H. Leshner, *Xenophanes of Colophon: Fragments: A Text and Translation with a Commentary*, Phoenix Supplementary Volume [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992], 17, 65). Herodotus also stated that the Lydians were the first people he knew of who minted and used

Both Herodotus (1.76–1.86) and Xenophon (*Cyropaedia* 2.1.5–4.2.33) relate that the Medo-Persian army subjugated the Lydian kingdom and its king, Croesus, early in the career of Cyrus the Great. Both authors recount that after he lost his kingdom, Croesus became an advisor to Cyrus, who therefore would have learned about the advantage of coinage at this time, if not well before. Since all sources describe Cyrus as an astute statesman and empire-builder, the advantages of a common currency and coinage for conducting the business of the realm, as learned from the Lydians, would not have been lost on him. Thus it is logical to expect that the Medes and Persians would have emulated the Lydians by introducing coinage in the lifetime of Cyrus, if not earlier.

The origin of the daric is, however, a matter of secondary importance for the issue of Darius the Mede. What is significant is that a secular Greek writer and researcher affirmed the existence of a poorly known king named Darius who preceded Darius Hystaspes. The conventional history of Media and Persia, which is based largely on the Greek historian Herodotus, does not know of any such king.

THE USE OF “DARIUS” AS A THRONE NAME

Berossus and Harpocraton refer to Darius only as “Darius,” and not as “Darius the Mede,” as in two of the eight instances where Daniel names Darius (Dan. 5:31[Eng.] / 6:1[MT]; 11:1). However, “the Mede” was not part of Darius’s name any more than “the Persian” was part of Cyrus’s name. It is regrettable that the fragments from Berossus and Harpocraton do not state the ethnicity of the Darius whom they mention. However, the name “Darius” (Old Persian *Dārayavauš*) is a word formed from the Median and/or Persian language. It means “holder of the good” (from *dar-* “to hold” and *vahu* “the good”).²² Since the name Darius comes from the Median or Persian language, the first king to have held this name must have been a Mede or a Persian. Further, it is not unlikely that “Darius” was a throne name, since it was a standard practice for kings of the Persian Empire to take throne names in addition to their

coins (1.94). A few examples of early Lydian coins survive to the present day.

²² See R. G. Kent, *Old Persian Grammar, Texts, Lexicon*, American Oriental Series (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1953), 189; Chul-Hyun Bae, “Comparative Studies of King Darius’s Bisitun Inscription” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2001), 255. Our thanks also to John Makujina for his help in analyzing this name through personal correspondence.

given names.²³ It is reasonable to consider that the Darius remembered by Daniel, Berossus, and Harpocration may be remembered by a different name in other ancient sources.

The first undisputed king to be named “Darius” was a usurper who overthrew the dynasty of Cyrus and who therefore had no legitimate right of succession. This fact “was intended to be concealed or glossed over by taking another name.”²⁴ In such a situation it is unlikely that Darius would have invented a throne name that had never been used before, and it is logical that he would have called himself by the name of a king from the Median dynasty that Cyrus superseded.

The idea that Darius (I) Hystaspes took the throne name “Darius” from a Median king is supported by the use of the throne name Xerxes (= Ahasuerus) by Darius’s son and heir. Schmitt regards it as “obvious” that Darius Hystaspes and Xerxes are known by their throne names, even though their birth names are not attested in any extant texts.²⁵ It is logical that when Xerxes was made crown prince, his father would have given him the throne name of an earlier king from the same Median dynasty from which he took his own throne name. The name Xerxes (OP *Xšayāršan-*) includes the Median consonant cluster *-xš-* (compare such Median names as *Uvaxštra-* and *Xšathrita-*).²⁶ The presence of uniquely Median features in the name Xerxes indicates that it was indeed originally the throne name of a Median king. It can hardly be coincidental that Daniel identified the father of Darius the Mede as Ahasuerus, the Hebrew equivalent of Xerxes (Dan. 9:1).

CONCLUSION

In summary, the Babylonian historian Berossus described, according to Eusebius, a certain King Darius who had authority to over-

²³ Rüdiger Schmitt, “Achaemenid Throne-Names,” *Annali dell’ Istituto Orientale di Napoli* 42 (1982): 83–90. According to Schmitt, the original name of Artaxerxes I (465–425/4 BC) was Cyrus; that of Darius II (424–405/4) was Ochus; that of Artaxerxes II (405/4–359/8) was Arsēs; and that of Artaxerxes III (359/8–338/7) was Ochus. The next king, Arsēs (338/7–336/5), may have taken a throne name during his brief reign, but if so it is not known. The last king of Persia, Darius III (336/5–330), was originally named Artaxšat. Most of these name changes are attested by both Greco-Roman writers and late Babylonian astronomical texts, which refer, for example, to “Aršu called Artakšatsu the king.”

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 93–94.

²⁶ Kent, *Old Persian Grammar*, 182.

ride the command of Cyrus regarding the disposition of Nabonidus, the defeated king of Babylon. In addition, the Greek lexicographer Harpocration affirmed that there was a king named Darius who preceded the king who is today known as Darius I. This king, according to Berossus, reigned concurrently with Cyrus and Nabonidus, and hence also Belshazzar, at the time of Babylon's fall. The combined testimony of Harpocration and Berossus therefore witnesses to the existence of a Median king whose role, timing, and authority correspond exactly to the role, timing, and authority of Daniel's Darius. It bears repeating that the testimony regarding this Darius of Berossus and Harpocration is independent of anything written about Darius the Mede in the book of Daniel, even though both Berossus and Harpocration supply the same name to this individual as that given by Daniel. The existence of these two references should lead writers to reconsider the common assertion that Darius the Mede is not recognized by any ancient source outside of the book of Daniel and works that depend on it.²⁷

²⁷ The various sources mentioned here are all examined and discussed in greater detail in Anderson, *Darius the Mede: A Reappraisal*. Although the present authors hold to the thesis that Daniel's Darius the Mede is to be identified with the Cyaxares II of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, the attempt here has been simply to focus attention on what seem to be independent ancient traditions of Daniel's Darius and to revive scholarly interest in what this means to all views on the identification and existence of Darius the Mede.